DECEIT AND DESTRUCTION
BEHIND FAO'S FOREST DEFINITION

Compilation of WRM Bulletin articles on the occasion of March 21st – UN International Day of Forests

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WRM

WORLD RAINFOREST MOVEMENT

Deceit and destruction behind FAO's forest definition

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For decades, the WRM has demanded that the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) **urgently reviews its forest definition**, which mainly benefits the interests of industrial monoculture tree plantations companies. FAO's definition reduces a forest to any area covered by trees. In doing so, the FAO definition discards other life-forms as well as the biological, cyclical and cultural diversity that define a forest in its continuous interconnection with forest-dependent communities. FAO's reductionist definition also allows the companies behind tens of millions of industrial fast-growing plantations to claim their monocultures are "planted forests". Countries' forest statistics thus count these fast-growing industrial monocultures as "forests", in spite of the well-documented social and environmental impacts such plantations have caused around the world. The United Nations (UN) declared March 21st as the International Day of Forests in 2013. At the WRM, we are taking this day as another opportunity to expose FAO's misleading forest definition.

Already in 2009, the WRM denounced in its Bulletin 141 that: *"the definition of forests is not an academic or linguistic discussion: **it is a political issue having serious social and environmental consequences at the ground level**. Defining plantations as forests empowers the corporate sector - particularly plantation companies - and disempowers local communities opposing them to protect their livelihoods. The FAO continues playing this role by refusing to change its definition."*

FAO's definition remains the most widely used forest definition today. It serves as a guide for national forest definitions worldwide – as we denounced in an Open Letter in 2017. It's also the reference in international forums, such as the UN climate negotiations. Albeit speaking of forests, the 2016 UN Paris Agreement promotes the expansion of monoculture tree plantations in various ways. Tree plantations are promoted as so-called carbon sinks, dubious reforestation or restoration programmes are launched and wood is advertised as an energy source to replace fossil fuels. Because the Paris Agreement adopts FAO's forest definition, its promotion of industrial tree monocultures is taking place under the guise of the positive image of forests.

As the WRM, together with *La Via Campesina*, Friends of the Earth International and Focus on the Global South, stated in an Open Letter to FAO in 2014, *"The definition fails the at least 300 million women and men worldwide who, according to FAO, directly depend on forests for their livelihoods."* **The FAO should take full responsibility for the strong influence its forest definition has over global economic, ecological and social policies.**

Here we present a compilation of WRM Bulletin articles from 2015 until 2018 and further information that addresses the different impacts and consequences of FAO's forest definition. We hope this compilation serves to underscore once again the importance for a change of the FAO's definition.

Plantations are not forests!

Open Letter to FAO 2017

How does the FAO Forest definition harm people and forests? An open letter to the FAO

On March 21st 2017, hundreds of organizations called on the FAO one more time to revise its forest definition, insisting that "by defining 'forests' as only being a minimum area of land covered by a minimum number of trees of a minimum height and canopy percentage, FAO has actively promoted the establishment of many millions of hectares of industrial tree plantations, of mainly alien species, especially in the global South. As a consequence, only one particular sector has benefitted: the tree plantation industry. Industrial tree plantations have been the direct cause of many negative impacts on local communities and their forests."

Compilation of WRM Bulletin articles

The Paris Agreement: International Endorsement for Tree Plantation Companies to Start a New Cycle of Expansion

Bulletin 228 - January 2017

With the 2016 UN Paris Climate Agreement, large-scale tree plantations are emerging as supposedly the most reliable and effective option to "store" carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, opening up opportunities for them to reap huge profits. As the FAO's definition of forests, which is accepted by the Paris Agreement, includes monoculture tree plantations, from now on, it is valid to solve the serious climate problem by "planting more forests"–READ: tree plantations!

Industrial oil palm plantations: A model that violates forest-dependent peoples and their territories

Bulletin 218 - September 2015

Industrial oil palm plantations have been the type of monoculture that has been expanding fastest in the last few decades. Governments of palm oil producing countries, together with the industry's transnational companies, have been active in appealing for the re-categorization of oil palm plantations as 'forests' instead of agricultural crops! This absurdity is made possible because according to the prevailing FAO definition, a forest is basically any area with tree cover.

Main initiatives to expand tree plantations in Latin America, Africa and Asia

Bulletin 228 - January 2017

The erroneously titled "reforestation" or "restauration" plans, internationally promoted as an alleged solution to the climate crisis, reveal the need for communities in countries where these plans have been announced to be on high alert. This article looks into the 2011 Bonn Challenge, which aims to "restore" 150 million hectares of the world's deforested and degraded land by 2020 in the Global South. Monoculture tree plantations count as "restoration" under the Bonn Challenge.

“New forests for Africa”: A nice slogan for promoting industrial tree plantations?
Bulletin 222 - March 2016
A conference called “Forests for the Future: New Forests for Africa” took place on March 2016 in Ghana. But, considering that industrial tree plantations are called “planted forests” by FAO, the institution that defines what forests are at the international level, what are the implications of the “new forests” promoted by the Conference? And what is meant with the term “reforestation”?

World Forestry Congress in Africa 2015: More tree monocultures or more forest conservation for Africa?
Bulletin 212 - March 2015
What sorts of “forests” are been talked about during the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)’s World Forestry Congress? What does the Congress pretend to achieve, and what impacts could it have on the African continent, especially thinking on the communities and peoples who depend on the forests?

While FAO celebrates the International Day of Forests, artificial trees advance: genetically engineered “forests”
Bulletin 212 - March 2015
Supposed solutions to reduce deforestation of tropical rainforests put forward in the last decades by FAO, have been characterized by narrow visions, impositions and benefits for only a few. FAO promotes tree monocultures, even one including transgenic trees, as “planted forests”.

Stora Enso and GM trees: Intensifying destruction of forests and peoples
Bulletin 212 - March 2015
Stora-Enso, a giant Swedish-Finnish industrial tree plantation company and one of the largest producers of pulp and paper in the world, is anxious to forge ahead with research into genetically modified (GM) trees. But, how can a company having such serious negative impacts on forests and local communities claim to be “saving the rainforest”?

Tree plantations - silently stealing us dry
Bulletin 214 - May 2015
Water theft is seldom viewed as a priority crime. Yet, ‘silent’ thieves that operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, are misappropriating vast volumes of water. Corporations setting up monoculture plantations are the culprits, but how can planted trees behave so differently from forests? Most people assume that they are the same. This fallacy however has led to a water crisis wherever tree plantations are established on land once covered by forests, or biodiverse grassland and scrublands.

Greenwashing continues: FSC certifies industrial tree plantations as forests and RSPO oil palm plantations as sustainable

Bulletin 233 - September 2017

For over 20 year now, certification schemes such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) have helped plantation companies secure their profits and protect their reputation. How do they do that, when the impacts of large-scale industrial plantations are so obvious? Worthy a note that the FSC defines forests as "a tract of land dominated by trees", including industrial plantations in statistics as FSC certified "forests".

FSC: Certifying accumulation markets

Bulletin 213 - April 2015

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification defines monoculture plantations as "forest areas", which allows the possibility of certifying monoculture tree plantations. Despite countless criticism and strong resistance in the affected territories, millions of hectares of monoculture tree plantations are considered by the FSC as "certified forests". In practice, however, the FSC approves and certifies land grabbing worldwide for the economic benefit of few forestry companies.

Chile: Discredited FSC label continues to legitimize industrial tree plantations

Bulletin 210 – January 2015

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is contributing to the expansion of industrial monoculture tree plantations around the world. While certification is voluntary, it is practically a requirement for export. Numerous communities and organizations have insistently denounced the many impacts of such certification, which is complicit in the violations of human rights and destructive social and environmental impacts generated by industrial tree plantations.

The Green Invasion: Promoting Plantations in India

Bulletin 233 - September 2017

According to the Forest Survey of India, India's forest cover has been showing a consistent increase for the last several years. But, how does one explain this, given the apparent scale of deforestation, including large-scale illegal logging as well as diversion of forests for other uses that results in forest destruction?

Argentina: New law promotes tree plantations in Cordoba Province

Bulletin 233 - September 2017

The Provincial Agroforestry Plan of Cordoba, Argentina, aims to reforest 150,000 hectares of industrial tree plantations over the next ten years. Although farmers must plant trees on at least two per cent of their land, the Plan gives them the choice of not planting the trees on their property and, instead, buying a share of a plantation in what will be called "aggregated forests."

These "aggregated forests" are plantations that will pool the mandatory area percentages that producers in the same region must meet.

Further Reading

Open letters to the FAO

How does the FAO forest definition harm people and forests?
Open letter to FAO, 2017 >> http://bit.ly/2FO7QdU

Tell the United Nations: Plantations are NOT Forests!
Open letter to FAO, 2015 >> http://bit.ly/2GMozeX

Defining Forests by their true meaning!
Open letter to FAO, 2014 >> http://bit.ly/2GHVpxl

An appeal to urgently halt forest destruction, addressing the underlying causes
21 March 2013. The first International Day of Forests >> http://bit.ly/2pnhLg9

Books and briefings

Forest definition
When we talk about "the forest definition", what is perhaps most striking is the fact that, although there are many definitions of the word "forest" in different parts of the world, there is one definition viewed as more official and international, to which many national governments, institutions and other bodies and organizations adhere. This is the definition of forest developed by FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
Download document in English >> http://bit.ly/2FUWQqY

UN 2015 International Day of Forests. Theme: "Forests / Climate / Change". What change?
The aim of this document is to respond to 2015's campaign for March 21 carried out by the FAO. In a very short video, FAO highlights forests' capacity to trap CO2 and suggests: "Sustainably managed forests are the frontline against climate change." We argue that the supposed solutions that FAO has supported and promoted over the past 20 to 30 years **have not reduced deforestation; far less have they effectively contained the climate crisis.** *Download the document in English >> http://bit.ly/2DElASy Download the document in Bahasa >> http://bit.ly/2FUDoeb*

Plantations are NOT forests
This book gathers a selection of articles published in the electronic bulletin of the World Rainforest Movement (WRM), addressing the issues of plantations and the struggles developed at the local and global levels against them. *Download the book >> http://bit.ly/2pnWFOR*

Videos

Short animation: Let's define forests by their true meaning
Also available in: Spanish, French, Portuguese, Afrikaans, Aymara, Catala, Chinese, Dutch, Finish, German, Bosnian, Italian, Maori, Mapuche, Maya Kaqchikel, Maya Popti, Maya Tseltal, Maya Tsotsil, Swedish, Vietnamese and Zulu >> http://bit.ly/2G5qTjb

Forests. Much more than a lot of trees >> http://bit.ly/2pkl5ZB

This is not sustainable. This two-minutes video is a rebuttal of the one-minute video produced by FAO for International Day of Forests 2015 >> http://bit.ly/2prs9Ui

But, where is the water?
On the 21st of March, 2016, the FAO has launched another nice video. This year the video is about forests and water. Did you notice the video does not include any monoculture tree plantations, even though FAO considers them as forests? How would look such a video if coherent with FAO´s forest definition? >> https://wrm.org.uy/videos/but-where-is-the-water/

Deceit and destruction behind FAO's forest definition

Open letter to the FAO

How does the FAO Forest definition harm people and forests? An open letter to the FAO

In September 2015, during the XIV World Forestry Congress, thousands of people took to the streets in Durban, South Africa, to protest against the problematic way in which the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), insists on defining forests (1). The FAO definition considers forests to be basically just "a bunch of trees", while ignoring other fundamental aspects of forests, including their many other life-forms such as other types of plants, as well as animals, and forest-dependent human communities. Equally, it ignores the vital contribution of forests to natural processes that provide soil, water and oxygen. Besides, by defining 'forests' as only being a minimum area of land covered by a minimum number of trees of a minimum height and canopy percentage, FAO has actively promoted the establishment of many millions of hectares of industrial tree plantations, of mainly alien species, especially in the global South. As a consequence, only one particular sector has benefitted: the tree plantation industry. Industrial tree plantations have been the direct cause of many negative impacts on local communities and their forests; which have been well-documented (2).

The protest march that took place in Durban in 2015 had people holding up banners saying *Plantations are not Forests!*, and ended in front of the venue of the World Forestry Congress, which was organised by the FAO. In response to a call from civil society leaders at the march, a WFC official left the Congress building to receive a petition that had been signed by over 100,000 individuals and groups from around the world. The petition called on the FAO to urgently change its forest definition and to define forests by their true meaning. But once again, the FAO did not change its definition.

Nevertheless, something new did happen: Unlike the silence in response to previous demands for the FAO to change its flawed forest definition, this time FAO reacted to the protest, and sent a letter in response. One point in the FAO letter is particularly interesting. It stated: "*There are, in fact, over 200 national definitions of forests that reflect a variety of stakeholders in this matter....*", and goes on to say, "*...to facilitate the reporting of data..., a globally valid, simple and operational categorization of forests is required" in order that it can "enable consistent comparisons over longer periods of time on global forest development and change*". In writing this, the FAO attempts to convince us that its role is merely one of harmonizing the 200-plus different definitions of forests that different countries have.

But is it really true that the existing FAO forest definition did not influence the way the 200 national definitions of forests were formulated in the first place? And is the FAO correct when it claims that the many different national forest definitions are a result of the reflections of a variety of stakeholders in these countries, again playing down its own influence?

We believe the opposite to be true. First of all, FAO´s forest definition was adopted a long time ago, in 1948. According to a recent joint analysis by different authors of forest concepts and definitions, "*FAO´s definition, agreed on by all its [UN] members, is the first to be used by all countries for harmonized reporting; the definition adopted by FAO remains the most widely used forest definition today*" (3).

A good country to use as an example to see if the FAO definition is being used, is Brazil, the country with the highest forest cover in the global South, and according to official sources, almost 8 million hectares of industrial tree plantations, mostly eucalyptus monocultures. In its 2010 (4) publication "*Forests of Brazil*" the Brazilian Forest Service (SBF), under the national government Ministry of Environment and responsible for forest-related issues "*… considers as a forest the woody vegetation types that come closest to the forest definition of the Organization of the United Nations for Food and Agriculture (FAO).*" As a logical progression from basing its definition on what FAO already defined, it states that "*Brazil is a country… of natural and planted forests*", where "*planted forests*" refers to the 8 million hectares of mostly eucalyptus monocultures. How the Brazilian government defines a forest is therefore not the result of a process that "*… reflects a variety of stakeholders in this matter*". On the contrary, it is rather a result of what the FAO had already determined.

But the influence of the FAO´s forest definition goes beyond just determining national forest definitions. In these times of climate change, the FAO´s definition has been the main point of reference to define what a forest is under the UN climate change convention (UNFCCC). By adopting the FAO´s narrow wood-based definition, the UNFCCC has also promoted a view of forests being an area of land containing only trees. For the UNFCCC, it's mainly the trees in a forest that matter because of their capacity to store carbon as they grow, and not forest-dependent communities. Such affected communities are most negatively impacted by restrictions placed on their use of forest resources by "*forest carbon offset projects*", also often referred to as REDD+ projects (5). A forest definition only focused on trees opens the door to including "*planted forests*" – read: industrial tree plantations – a completely false way of "reducing deforestation and forest degradation", as an option under the climate change convention through which carbon can supposedly be sequestered from the atmosphere and permanently stored. In practice this is just another money-making opportunity for the tree plantation industry, and a major threat to communities affected by the trend of expanding "*carbon sink*" tree plantations.

Following the latest UNFCCC negotiations, countries have recently been revising their forest legislation, in the hope of attracting so-called 'climate finance'. Unsurprisingly, the definitions used are largely based on the FAO´s forest definition. In Mozambique, for example, at a workshop on REDD+, a consultant proposed a new forest definition for the country. Just like the FAO´s definition, it is also based on the presence of trees saying that a forest is an area with "… Trees with the potential to reach a height of 5 metres at maturity..". Also in Indonesia, the Ministry of Environment and Forests submission to the UN Climate Conference in 2015, stated that it had "…adjusted the FAO forest definition…" in order to define its forests. Once again a definition that defines and values a forest only through its trees, and that divides "forests" into a number of different categories including "natural forest" and something called "plantation forests" (6).

The FAO´s forest definition also influences the actions of the financial and development institutions promoting wood-based activities such as the industrial logging of forests, industrial tree plantations, and REDD+ carbon offsets. The main example is the World Bank (WB) which as part of the United Nations conglomerate has been partnering with the FAO for decades in a number of forest-related initiatives. They again joined forces in one of the most ambitious plans launched during UNFCCC COP 21 in Paris, the so-called African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100) (7). AFR100 aims to cover 100 million hectares of deforested and so-called "degraded" lands in different African countries with trees. The World Bank will make US$ 1 billion available for this plan. But to understand what the World Bank views as "reforestation", it is crucial to see how the Bank itself defines a forest. Unsurprisingly, its definition is also borrowed from that of the FAO, describing a forest as *"An area of land…with tree crown cover of more than 10% that have trees..*." (8) . By defining forests in this way, the World Bank opens the door wide for tree plantation companies expanding their large-scale monoculture tree plantations over community territories in Africa to be part of the ambitious "restoration" plan it is promoting together with the FAO and other partners. The AFR100 proposal strongly resembles the failed Tropical Forestry Action Plan (TFAP) from the 1980's, which was also dreamed up by the World Bank in collaboration with the FAO.

Final remarks

There is an urgent need for the FAO to stop misrepresenting industrial tree plantations as "planted forests" or "forestry", because national governments, other UN institutions, and financial institutions, as well as the mainstream media will then follow its inappropriate example. This deliberate confusion of tree plantations with forests is misleading people, because forests in general are viewed as something positive and beneficial. After all, who could be opposed to "forests"?

Above all, the FAO should take full responsibility for the strong influence its "forest" definition has over global economic, ecological and social policies. The 2015 petition that was presented

to the FAO in Durban states that it portrays itself in its founding principles as being a "neutral forum where all nations meet as equals". To live up to this claim requires, among other things, that the FAO must urgently revise its forest definition from one that reflects the preferences and perspectives of timber, pulp/paper, rubber, and carbon trading companies, to one that reflects ecological realities as well as the views of forest-dependent peoples. In contrast to the existing dominant influence of wood-based industries over the FAO, a transparent and open process to establish new and appropriate definitions for forests and tree plantations must also engage effectively with those women and men who directly depend on and therefore protect forests.

Signatures as of March 16, 2017

Notes:

1. "Land with tree crown cover (or equivalent stocking level) of more than 10 percent and area of more than 0.5 hectares (ha). The trees should be able to reach a minimum height of 5 meters (m) at maturity in situ."
2. See more in http://wrm.org.uy/browse-by-subject/tree-plantations/
3. Chazdon, R.L., Brancalion, P.H.S., Laestadius, L. et al. Ambio (2016). doi:10.1007/s13280-016-0772-y. When is a forest a forest? Forest concepts and definitions in the era of forest and landscape restoration http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13280-016-0772-y
4. http://www.mma.gov.br/estruturas/sfb/_arquivos/livro_portugus_95.pdf
5. See more in http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/redd-a-collection-of-conflicts-contradictions-and-lies
6. http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/seasia/Indonesia/pdf/FREL_Report.pdf
7. http://www.wri.org/our-work/project/AFR100/about-afr100
8. http://tinyurl.com/hsb6cwy

Compilation of WRM Bulletin articles on the occasion of March 21st UN International Day of Forests

The Paris Agreement: International Endorsement for Tree Plantation Companies to Start a New Cycle of Expansion

Bulletin 228 - January 2017

Many communities in countries in the Global South are fighting invasion of their lands by large-scale tree plantations. WRM has learned a lot from them. One thing we have learned is that no plantation of this kind can exist without considerable subsidies and/or incentives from public or private institutions. In the current scenario of economic and climate structural crises, plantation companies have identified a new stimulus: to implement one of the main actions that emerged from the 2016 Paris Climate Agreement and on a territorial scale never seen before. That is, to remove "excess" carbon from the atmosphere that causes global warming and store it in trees.

In the last two decades, the area occupied by large-scale monoculture tree plantations in the Global South has expanded no less than four times, reaching 60 million hectares in 2012. (1) These eucalyptus, pine, acacia, oil palm and rubber trees are mostly for (respectively): pulp, palm oil-based products, and car tires. Major contributors driving this dramatic expansion, as compared to the North, include the cheaper land and manual labor, a more favorable climate for rapid growth and greater productivity of timber, strong media support, and political support by governments of Southern countries, including a repressive State apparatus which—instead of supporting them—have criminalized local communities' struggles to defend their territories.

But the prolonged economic crisis has slowed the pace of this expansion, and consequently corporate profits. From the standpoint of communities, companies in search of alternatives have seen the climate crisis as a new array of opportunities for years—for example, the opportunity to charge for the "service" trees provide by removing CO2 from the atmosphere. Indeed, trees absorb atmospheric CO2 through photosynthesis as they grow, and some of that carbon is "stored" in the wood. Companies argue that their trees provide this "service" increasingly better, because the trees are growing faster than before, and the introduction of transgenic trees promises even greater productivity. Companies also believe they could receive incentives to plant trees for biomass (by transforming wood into "wood pellets"). Burning these "pellets" instead of oil or coal would be "renewable" and "green" energy. In addition, large oil palm plantation companies, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia, offer palm oil as a "biofuel" option.

Increasingly, companies are betting on a "flexible" use of their plantations, seeing opportunities to get multiple and even simultaneous uses out of their crops: on the one hand carbon "sinks," and on the other hand raw material for pulp (eucalyptus, pine, acacia), for tires (rubber tree), or for vegetable oil (oil palm). But with the obvious need to cut down the tree at some point to produce short-lived products—such as paper, tires or oil—the stored carbon is quickly emitted, long before new trees could recapture it, in the event the company chooses to replant. For this reason, in order for reforestation to be more effective at "removing" atmospheric carbon, the first step would be to make it permanent. (2)

What does the Paris Agreement say about monoculture tree plantations?

The text of the Paris Agreement does not explicitly mention tree plantations, but it indirectly creates the conditions for this to be one of the most benefited sectors. How?

First of all, plantation companies take advantage of the fact that the FAO's definition of forests includes monoculture tree plantations. Internationally, this is a more acceptable definition—including by the Paris Agreement—and is used by almost all national governments and UN initiatives, such as the UN Convention on Climate and Biodiversity. The FAO considers any area merely with trees to be a forest. Yet plantations—unlike forests—usually invade community territories, cause deforestation, pollute and dry up water sources due to their rapid growth, and require large amounts of poisonous agrochemicals. (3)

Another important part of the Paris Agreement—even as it accepts monoculture tree plantations as "reforestation"—is its highly ambitious goal to keep the temperature rise "well below 2°C and pursue efforts to limit temperature increase to 1.5°C…so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century."

The expected dependency on these carbon sinks is huge. This is because governments' voluntary plans to reduce emissions would cause a temperature rise of at least 3 degrees, as they do not anticipate a drastic reduction in fossil fuel burning. Additionally, the Agreement includes a simplistic view of the climate problem: there is too much carbon in the atmosphere and the solution is to get rid of this "excess" carbon. This has led to speculation on possible available technologies that would be capable of preventing more CO2 emissions by industries when they burn fossil fuels, and removing CO2 from the atmosphere. These technologies would need to be able to filter, capture, remove, and bury and/or inject the carbon emitted; so that it would remain "stored" somewhere in the earth, the ocean or even outer space. But none of the technologies in discussion has been tested and approved. Therefore none is considered to be safe for now.

Amidst this confusion, large-scale tree plantations are emerging as supposedly the most reliable and effective option to "store" carbon from the atmosphere. Advocates argue that this

mechanism "works" because trees naturally fix carbon. Tree plantation companies claim their trees can offset the CO2 emitted when they burn oil, for example, as well as remove "excess" CO2 from the atmosphere. Promoters of REDD projects in forest areas (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) have defended this mechanism for years.

Yet again we insist: this does not work. Although the CO2 emitted when burning trees or oil is made up of the same chemical ingredients. But when it comes to dealing with the serious climate crisis, there are important differences between the carbon dioxide caused by burning fossil carbon and that released from trees. The carbon that forms part of the natural cycle of emission and absorption by plants and trees cannot be equated to the carbon released in large quantities from extracting and burning oil, gas or coal. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the amount of the latter has greatly increased the total amount of carbon in the atmosphere, which enters into the natural cycle. This is because it was stored underground for millions of years. Even if plants or the ocean are able to absorb part of this additional carbon, they can only do so temporarily, because when a plant dies, or when there is deforestation or a fire, the CO2 is emitted again and returns to the atmosphere.
But the governments that signed the Kyoto Protocol years ago, and now the Paris Agreement, accepted this thesis of equating the two kinds of carbon. This is perhaps the greatest triumph of plantation companies, opening up opportunities for them to reap huge profits. Because from now on, it is valid to solve the serious climate problem by "planting more forests"–READ: tree plantations!—whether they are to "offset" the CO2 emitted by companies that burn oil, gas or coal; to remove "excess" carbon from the atmosphere; or to produce wood or vegetable oil as "renewable" or "clean" energy. Meanwhile, this is terrible news for farming, indigenous and traditional communities in territories with fertile lands—now targeted by these companies in Latin America, Africa and Asia—as well as for communities that have to deal with REDD-type projects in forest areas.

Final Considerations

Countless communities in the world have experienced the serious negative impacts of plantations, and WRM and many other organizations have published reports, videos, primers and articles on this issue for years. Yet despite these impacts, plantations continue to expand, and they just received a new international endorsement justified by the climate crisis. This is due to the ongoing unjust imbalance of power, wherein plantation companies, with the support of states and their repressive apparatus, seek to impose themselves and continue invading communities' territories, in order to control and convert them into more plantations.

Companies also have other major allies: large NGOs on their side that create nefarious initiatives which grant a seal of legitimacy to counteract the violations these companies cause and serve as "carte blanche" to obtain incentives and subsidies. Examples of this include the WWF initiative called the "New Generation Plantations" project, and the FSC (Forestry Stewardship

Council) certification system (4). These initiatives "green" monoculture tree plantations, despite the harm they cause, and guarantee they have a good reputation in the eyes of investors and end consumers of products. Meanwhile, these initiatives disrespect affected communities, who are not taken into account, and who face great difficulty engaging in dialogue, given the language that these initiatives use. (5)

It is necessary to join forces to strengthen the resistance of communities in the Global South that still have control over their fertile lands—because plantation companies, governments and institutions that support them (such as the World Bank) are targeting these communities. They are the ones threatened by this expansion of plantations, and most of all by new plans to combat the climate crisis—which are developed at an increasingly large scale and with a "landscape" approach. More safeguards or criteria will not solve this situation. It is necessary to make a radical break the large-scale globalized production-consumption model, which promotes waste and profit for some large companies, but which will destroy the livelihoods of many communities.

It is in communities, and through permanent dialogue with them, that we find answers, initiatives and alternatives that strengthen the fight against the hegemonic model. Indeed, this is essential for us to begin to see ways to combat climate change.

Notes:

(1) http://wrm.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/EJOLTplantations.pdf

(2) https://www.tni.org/en/collection/flex-crops

(3) You can sign an open letter to the FAO, which Timberwatch, Salva la Selva and WRM launched on September 21st, 2016, International Day of Struggle Against Monoculture Tree Plantations. Through this Open Letter, we argue the importance of the FAO's definition of forests, and demand that this organization take responsibility and immediately undertake a real review process of this definition. (To sign on, visit: http://wrm.org.uy/actions-and-campaigns/an-open-letter-to-the-fao-launched-on-september-21st-international-day-of-struggle-against-tree-monocultures/)

(4) http://www.wri.org/blog/2016/03/can-plantations-help-restore-degraded-and-deforested-land

(5) http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/new-briefing-on-fsc-certification-of-plantations/

Industrial oil palm plantations: A model that violates forest-dependent peoples and their territories

Bulletin 218 - September 2015

To mark the International Day of the Struggle against Monoculture Tree Plantations on September 21, WRM, together with organizations and networks from around the world, this year issued a declaration condemning the expansion of the industrial oil palm plantation model. The expansion of this model is leading to a growing number of economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts. Once again, aspiring to break the circle of silence around the violations faced by the communities whose territories are invaded and surrounded by these monocultures, we shout loud and clear: Plantations are not forests!

Industrial oil palm plantations have been the type of monoculture that has been expanding fastest in the last few decades. In the period 1990-2010 these plantations expanded globally about threefold, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia. And over the past 15 years, a series of free trade agreements favored the latest expansion wave of industrial oil palm plantations, not only in Indonesia and Malaysia but also in countries in Africa and Latin America. Another trend that pushes expansion comes especially from Europe with the increasing demand for agrofuels.

Palm oil companies are making (non-binding) so-called "zero-deforestation" pledges as part of their "corporate responsibility" policies. However, reports from the ground already show that even *after* companies have made these pledges, the evidence about environmental and social violations of these same companies continues. But most disturbing is the fact that the objective of these commitments is not to halt industrial oil palm expansion, but is instead an attempt to "green" the sector. By retaining a logic of unlimited expansion, these "commitments" are actually a threat to more communities losing their land and livelihoods.
Moreover, the growing interest of corporations in forests, and especially trees, is explained because these have become even more important under "green capitalism". Forests' capacity to store carbon and biodiversity is used as a source for generating carbon and biodiversity credits, which can be then sold to polluting countries and companies to either "compensate" for the destruction generated elsewhere or to make profits on financial markets.

REDD+ and REDD+-like policies, which promote financing forest conservation through the sale of carbon and biodiversity credits, can channel this money to oil palm companies for conservation of forest areas with a so-called "high carbon value" that oil palm companies have been identifying on their land concessions. This way, oil palm companies can "green" their activities. But conserving areas with "high carbon value" does not change the harmful impacts

of a sector that requires significant use of water, agrotoxins, chemical fertilizers and fossil energy, and that occupies vast territories which numerous communities used to live in or depend upon for their livelihoods. Rather than presenting any real solution to climate change, the oil palm industry contributes to climate destruction. And those who will be most affected by such policies are the forest dependent peoples and peasant communities, who will see their access to their lands and forests increasingly restricted by oil palm plantations expansion. For them, not only a "high carbon value" forest is important, but all of the areas that they need to maintain their livelihoods and cultures.

In addition, governments of palm oil producing countries, together with the industry's transnational companies have been active in appealing for the re-categorization of oil palm plantations as 'forests' instead of agricultural crops! This absurdity is made possible because according to the prevailing FAO definition, a forest is basically any area with tree cover. The aim of the re-categorization is to guarantee access to the "opportunity" represented by a potential REDD+ agreement under the UN climate negotiations in Paris by the end of this year. With such an agreement, palm oil companies would be able to sell carbon credits in the future, using the deceitful argument of promoting "zero net deforestation" or "reforestation".

The emphasis on deforestation tends to take attention away from the wider range of impacts caused by industrial oil palm plantations, such as:

- **Destruction of local livelihoods and displacement**. The regions where oil palm plantations are being promoted are home for peasants and indigenous peoples and are areas of tropical forests that they depend on for economic, social, spiritual and cultural reasons. Industrial oil palm plantations therefore cause the loss of land and thus the livelihoods of communities, especially for women, because of their specific relation with the forest, resulting in displacement of these communities.
- **Destructive logging and human rights violations**. In many cases, these plantations are also a result of devastating logging in the past that paved the way for oil palm plantations coming in. Moreover, land clearing through burning for developing oil palm plantations in Indonesia has been continuing for more than a decade, resulting in an almost annual haze across Southeast Asia. This practice not only harms the environment, but also the health of millions of citizens.
- **Privileged land access for corporations, not communities**. Introducing the model of industrial oil palm cultivation through land concessions guarantees privileged access to agricultural lands for long periods to corporations, increasing their power and influence. Thus, the struggles of communities in defence of their collective rights over these territories, and for a diversified, agro-ecological agriculture tend to become increasingly harder.

- **Miserable working conditions**. Jobs turn out to be few and labor conditions are often akin to slavery, and child labor as well as drug abuse among workers and prostitution have been documented in numerous instances. Workers are also especially affected by the obligation to apply agrotoxins in monoculture plantations, including products forbidden in many countries. Many become ill for the rest of their lives, without being able to count on any compensation.
- **Increasing criminalization of social movements and local opposition**. A very concerning aspect is also that communities and supporting organizations as well as workers in oil palm plantations have to deal worldwide with an increasing trend of human rights violations including criminalization. Also in other countries people were killed, arrested and/or persecuted, just because of their struggle to defend the collective rights of communities over their territories and their opposition against the invasion of their territories by industrial oil palm companies. Meanwhile, companies can count on all sorts of protection from security forces of the state.

Since 2006, September 21st has been established as the International Day of Struggle against Tree Monocultures, aiming to increase the visibility of the growing number of peoples and communities, often the most marginalized ones, including the women and youth, who are struggling in different places and countries against industrial oil palm and other monocultures of eucalyptus, pine, acacia and rubber plantations. Large-scale industrial tree monocultures are not acceptable, neither for local communities nor for a world facing a severe crisis with manifold symptoms, including climate change, economic and environmental deterioration and increasing militarization and human rights violations.

For these reasons, this bulletin focuses on denouncing oil palm plantations' expansion and some of its consequences for forest dependent peoples and their territories. The West Papua article brings attention to a remote region where the expansion of these plantations is benefiting large business conglomerates at the expense of indigenous and traditional populations. Furthermore, the Liberian government's push to facilitate logging concessions for large-scale oil palm cultivation is another important warning, especially in a context plagued by illegal logging and corruption. From Brazil, a report from the field reveals how the mining company VALE is establishing oil palm plantations in the Amazon state of Pará, as a way to meet the agrofuel industry's demand for trains to carry its minerals, but above all to strengthen an alleged "green" image. This bulletin also includes an article on the role of banks and investors who speculate on these plantations, helping to strengthen and expand oil palm corporations and generating huge profits for their portfolios. Finally, the bulletin also includes an article that reminds us that tens of millions of people in Africa not only depend on this tree for their livelihoods and cultures, but also preserve and value it as a source of life. Happy reading!

Main initiatives to expand tree plantations in Latin America, Africa and Asia

Bulletin 228 - January 2017

Years before governments adopted the Paris Agreement, international initiatives promising millions of hectares of reforestation and forest restoration were launched, supposedly to benefit the environment and local communities. Yet, not one example of reforestation at scale exists that has achieved the promised benefits for communities and the environment. The one experience that has "worked" is the planting of hundreds of millions of hectares of eucalyptus, pine, rubber and oil palm plantations — which the UN, governments and companies misleadingly call "planted forests." Analyzing international plans more carefully, is it clear that communities in countries where the "reforestation" and forest restoration plans now announced in connection with the Paris Agreement should be on high alert.

The Bonn Challenge (1) was launched in 2011 in an event sponsored by the German Ministry of Environment and the conservation organization IUCN—the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (2). According to its website, the Bonn Challenge is "a global effort to restore 150 million hectares of the world's deforested and degraded land by 2020(..)." The initiative emphasizes the importance of a "landscape approach" instead of a "limited approach." Promoters say that 124.32 million hectares have already been "pledged" for this purpose, and that the 2014 New York Declaration on Forests has endorsed the Bonn Challenge — thereby increasing its goal to no fewer than 350 million hectares and moving its deadline to 2030.

However, we cannot find a clear explanation on the Bonn Challenge's website of the kind of "restoration" that will take place. It is unclear whether this might be with monoculture tree plantations, remembering that there are no examples in the world of native "restoration" programs on the scale of millions of hectares. The only "reforestation" on this scale that "worked," has been the planting of tens of millions of hectares of monoculture eucalyptus, pine, acacia, rubber and oil palm. This expansion has occurred — almost without exception — on fertile lands, forest areas or natural pastures which were essential for communities that previously depended on them. People from these communities have become landless rural or urban workers, and their lands degraded due to "restoration" with tree monocultures. In many places, communities have managed to resist and are fighting to reclaim their lands take for initiatives mislabeled as "forest restoration".

Disturbingly, the German Ministry of the Environment interpretation is that monoculture tree plantations count as "restoration" under the Bonn Challenge if a few native trees are included throughout monoculture plantations.

According to the Bonn Challenge, "Regional platforms (…) are appearing throughout the world." In this vein, let us see what has happened in Africa, Latin America and Asia:

Africa

The African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100), launched in an event parallel to the Paris Climate Conference in 2015, claims it will "restore" 100 million hectares of deforested and degraded land in Africa by 2030—almost 30% of the Bonn Challenge's entire goal. AFR100 is presented as an initiative to mitigate climate change and "benefit" populations in African countries. In the first AFR100 regional conference in October 2016, it was announced that 21 countries have joined the initiative so far, committing to restore 63.3 million hectares of forest. (3)

The World Bank is the main investor and promoter of AFR100, and has promised to invest US$ 1 billion in 14 African countries by 2030. The German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) will finance the institutional set-up of AFR100, complementing the World Bank's contribution. The FAO and World Resources Institute (WRI) are also key contributors. There are also private investors such as the Dutch Sustainable Forest Investments Fund (SFI). The total amount committed by private financiers has reached US$ 540 million. (4)

Complementing the AFR100 is the initiative, "Forests for the future: new forests for Africa." This initiative hosted a conference in Ghana in March 2016 with the participation of Green Resources. Green Resources, one of the leading plantation companies in Africa, has been repeatedly denounced for the negative impacts its plantations cause to local communities. (5) The African Resilient Landscapes Initiative (ARLI), also funded by the World Bank and the German government, states that it will "work with agricultural land, forest areas and pastures through interventions based on climate-smart agriculture, restoration of forests and ecosystems, the preservation of biodiversity, and pastures management." Another initiative worth mentioning is the African Landscapes Action Plan (ALAP), which receives support from the Dutch government. (6)

The World Bank's FIP — the Forest Investment Program — supports AFR100 and contributes financially to AFR 100. In June 2016, the Bank announced that it endorsed FIP country programmes in Mozambique and Ivory Coast. Programmes in both countries promise to reduce deforestation through REDD initiatives and to encourage "reforestation." Two points in these countries' proposed plans deserve special attention. First, World Bank-backed plans have targeted rural communities and their practices — for example nomadic agriculture or firewood collection — as the main cause of deforestation. Second, for the World Bank "reforestation" through monoculture tree plantations are an important solution. For example, the FIP Plan in Ivory Coast discusses planting of 100,000 hectares of "industrial tree plantations," while the Mozambique Plan aims to promote "commercial forest plantations." Both praise the private

sector. For example, the Plan of Ivory Coast speaks of counting on the expertise of the private sector, which has promoted oil palm and rubber monoculture in Ivory Coast. Meanwhile in Mozambique, the FIP Plan aims to complete activities that led to the largest expansion of eucalyptus and pine plantations in South and East Africa in recent years, with adverse impacts on the local peasant population. In addition to further harming rural communities, another aggravating factor is that most of the World Bank financing comes from loans, thus increasing the Mozambique's national debt and placing a greater burden on people. (7)

Latin America

The 20X20 initiative was launched in 2014 to restore 20 million hectares in Latin America and the Caribbean by 2020. Today, it includes 12 Latin American countries, which together have promised to restore 27.7 million hectares in this timeframe, and have secured US $730 million from private investors. In order to guarantee these investments, the initiative says it will "reduce risks" — at an unprecedented and ambitious level — and "collaborate with the private sector for the development of ecologically, socially and economically sustainable investments on the ground in a variety of restoration activities, such as agroforestry, silvopasture and assisted or natural reforestation." In conclusion: this is a huge incentive for the monoculture tree plantation industry. (8)

In Brazil, in 2015, the government announced that by 2030, the country would "reforest" 12 million hectares and use 20% "renewable" energy sources, as well as hydroelectric power. (9) But what can we expect from the 20X20 initiative and this announcement, when we look at Brazil's recent experience in this area? In 2003, the Brazilian government created the National Forests Council which developed a National Forest Plan. Yet, instead of minimally restoring the country's vast areas previously deforested, between 2003 and 2007, the plan subsidized the construction of new pulp mills and expanded the area of industrial tree plantations by 2 million hectares — primarily with eucalyptus trees to feed the new pulp mills. Between 2003 and 2009 the government invested US $1.95 million through the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) for this purpose. (10)

The state of Mato Grosso plays a big role in Brazil's 20X20 initiative. It is also a key state in terms of deforestation. By 2020, the state government aims to recover no fewer than 2.9 million hectares of forest in legal reserves and Permanent Preservation Areas (PPAs). It is striking that that government announced it will increase the area of "planted forests" by 0.5 million hectares. (11) To predict what kind of "reforestation" might occur in practice, one need only recall the new Brazilian Forest Code, which now allows legal reserves to be "recovered" with monoculture tree plantations of exotic species such as eucalyptus. (12)

Regarding its goals to increase its national share of "renewable energies," Brazil's experience is directly connected to the large-scale monoculture model — for example the use of sugar cane

to produce ethanol fuel, and the use of energy co-generated from sugar cane bagasse produced as a by-product (residues) in the country's dozens of sugar cane processing plants. Soybean, another monoculture, are counted toward Brazil's goals of biofuel production. Companies in Brazil and Chile want to obtain incentives and supply the European market with 'wood pellets' for biomass. Currently, plantations located in the United States and Canada dominate this market. (13)

Management of large-scale monocultures requires large amounts of fossil fuels, in the form of petrol and petrochemical products. Given this enormous consumption of agrochemicals and chemical fertilizers, and the mechanized and globalized model of production and transportation that is part and parcel of these tree monocultures, they will never be a solution to the climate crisis or industrialized countries' addiction to fossil fuels.

Asia

For years, governments of several Asian countries have been promoting plans to significantly expand tree monocultures. Thus, they welcome new international initiatives to expand plantations — in order to remove "excess" CO2 from the atmosphere and support other actions supposedly meant to mitigate the climate crisis.

Six years ago, Indonesia announced it would expand plantations as carbon sinks. In 2010, the Minister of Forestry and Environment at the time announced a target of 21 million hectares of "planted forests" to remove CO2 from the atmosphere. (14) Considering the nearly four million hectares of existing plantations for pulp and rubber, this would indeed imply a mega-expansion. The expansion would be smaller — but still huge — if the government decided to include the 10 million hectares of existing oil palm plantations. In fact, this has already occurred. In line with the FAO's "forest" definition, the Indonesian government decided to consider its oil palm plantations as forests, and not as agricultural crops.

Oil palm companies in Indonesia and Malaysia, the world's top producing countries, have been operating on the "clean energy" market for years, betting on the increasing use of palm oil as a "biofuel." This is mainly the case in Europe — where palm oil consumption increased sixfold between 2010 and 2014. By 2014, almost half of this oil was used as fuel for land transport. (15) Meanwhile, the expansion of oil palm and other monoculture plantations is directly linked to ongoing deforestation, wherein huge forest fires occur every year in order to make way for plantation expansion — a process for which affects the population of Indonesia in many ways. (16)

Since its inception in the 1980s, Asian Pulp and Paper (APP) — one of the largest pulp companies in the world—has been considered responsible for the loss of one million hectares of Indonesian forest, and for other social violations. (17) Ironically, APP has become the leading

private actor in the Bonn Challenge. The company says it is committed to restoring forests and degraded lands. (18) According to an announcement in March 2016, APP says that participation in the Bonn Challenge is in continuation with its "Forest Conservation Policy" and the "zero deforestation" commitment it made a few years ago. Of course, conserving forests is absolutely necessary for APP to begin correcting its destruction of natural forests to supply its pulp mills — actions which communities have denounced for years. What is striking however, is that — vis-a-vis the overarching goal of the Bonn Challenge to restore forests — APP did not announce any additional actions to restore part of the nearly one million hectares of forest that the company itself destroyed to date. APP annually produces over 19 million tons of pulp, paper and packaging paper, and it sells its products in 120 countries on six continents (19). Additionally, APP parent company Sinar Mas is also interested in generating "renewable energy," and in 2015 announced plans to operate wood-based biomass energy plants in Indonesia. The wood to feed these biomass power plants will come from: tree plantations. (20)

The Bonn Challenge also seems to be in line with ambitious plans in the Mekong and India. In the Mekong, large expansion of industrial rubber plantations has already been underway for the period of 2008-2018, with an expected increase of four million hectares, mainly in Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia. (21) In India, the Compensatory Afforestation Fund law (CAF) was approved in July 2016. In addition to violating the existing law — which recognizes use rights of forest communities and traditional peoples that live and depend on forests — this new law reinforces the permission to destroy native forests, since the destruction will be "offset." Social organizations in the country also denounce that the CAF law reinforces channeling resources toward government agencies that are incentivizing the planting of at least five million hectares of monoculture tree plantations.

Final Considerations

This brief introduction to the erroneously titled "reforestation plans," internationally promoted as an alleged solution to the climate crisis, reveals the need for more research on these international and national plans and the connections between them and towards the plantations industry. More importantly, even the cursory look at these plans reveals the need for ongoing denunciation of monoculture expansion and its known impacts.

Notes:

(1) http://www.bonnchallenge.org/content/challenge.

(2) An important partner to the Bonn Challenge is the IUCN and its TRI initiative (The Restoration Initiative) which, with approximately US$ 254 million in funding, aims to restore 10 million hectares in Cameroon, Central African Republic, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau Kenya, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sao Tome and Principe y Tanzania. https://www.iucn.org/news/iucn-and-partners-launch-global-effort-boost-restoration-degraded-forests ; On the New York Declaration on Forests, see http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/united-nations-2015-international-day-of-forests-theme-forests-climate-change-what-change/

(3) http://sdg.iisd.org/news/afr100-discusses-means-needed-to-restore-100-million-hectares-of-african-forests/

(4) http://www.wri.org/our-work/project/AFR100/impact-investors#project-tabs ; y http://www.cp-africa.com/2015/12/07/10-african-couce-the-afr-100

(5) http://wrm.org.uy/actions-and-campaigns/stop-plantations-expansion-in-mozambique/
(6) http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/new-forests-for-africa-a-nice-slogan-for-promoting-industrial-tree-plantations/ ; http://terrafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/resource-publications/Concept%20Note%20ARLI_Brochure_Nov%202015_Final.pdf
(7) https://www-cif.climateinvestmentfunds.org/news/cif-endorsement-investment-plans-cambodia-cote-d%E2%80%99ivoire-mozambique
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(12) http://www.canalrural.com.br/noticias/codigo-florestal/plantio-arvores-nativas-alternativa-para-recuperacao-das-areas-preservacao-permanente-34610
(13) http://wrm.org.uy/pt/livros-e-relatorios/plantacoes-de-eucalipto-para-energia-o-caso-da-suzano-no-baixo-parnaiba-maranhao-brasil/
(14) http://wrm.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/EJOLTplantations.pdf
(15) http://www.dw.com/en/new-palm-oil-figures-biodiesel-use-in-eu-fueling-deforestation/a-19298426
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(17) http://wrm.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/EJOLTplantations.pdf
(18) https://www.iucn.org/theme/forests/our-work/forest-landscape-restoration/bonn-challenge
(19) https://www.asiapulppaper.com/news-media/press-releases/asia-pulp-paper-participates-bonn-challenge-develop-forest-restoration
(20) http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/01/08/sinar-mas-develop-biomass-power-plants.html
(21) http://wrm.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/EJOLTplantations.pdf
(22) http://wrm.org.uy/actions-and-campaigns/india-support-forest-dependent-communities-against-plantations-expansion/

"New forests for Africa": A nice slogan for promoting industrial tree plantations?

Bulletin 222 - March 2016

A conference called "Forests for the Future: New Forests for Africa" has taken place on March 16 and 17 in Ghana (1). A promotional video on the Conference's website showing many wonderful images from forest areas states that the event "serves as the starting point to learn from each other and to boost reforestation in Africa". But what can we really expect from this Conference? What is meant for example with the term "reforestation"? Considering that industrial tree plantations are called "planted forests" by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the institution that defines what forests are at the international level, what are the implications of the "new forests" promoted by the Conference? And which are the Conference partners that are supposed to share experiences in order "to learn from each other", in other words, what are Conference participants going to "teach" each other, if we look at their experiences and specific agendas?

Africa got a lot of attention at the UN climate talks last December in Paris. The discussions were not about the fact that it is the continent that contributes far less to the climate crisis while probably being hit the most by it than any other continent. The attention was there because Africa is being announced as having "the largest restoration opportunity of any continent" (2) by, for example, the World Bank supported AFR100 initiative, that aims to plant 100 million hectares of trees in Africa (3). The Conference in Ghana is clearly organized as a follow-up to these climate-related initiatives. It states in its introduction text that "reforestation and landscape restoration as means of combating climate change are now high on the agenda of many governments and organizations". The WRM has explained and stated many times that although planting trees sounds good at a first glance and may be necessary in many cases, it is crucial to make the question of how they are being planted and for whose benefit.

How the "reforestation" that is being talked about in the Conference will be done is a crucial question. It can be done at a small scale with a local community or group of farmers by replanting different native species aiming at having some diverse forest back of what existed in the past with ownership and benefits for the local people. But it can also be done by planting thousands of hectares of an industrial tree monoculture with many negative impacts for the local populations and environments; this form is always pushed by companies and investors seeking for profits, and supported by governments and multilateral institutions like the FAO or the World Bank. It is therefore crucial to understand what the Conference partners mean by "reforesting Africa". The latter practice of "reforestation" seems to prevail if we only look at the program and one of the main Conference organizers, the Dutch forest management and con-

sultancy company Form, and its Ghana branch called Form Ghana. Form Ghana promotes "reforestation" mainly with teak monoculture tree plantations. The "reforestation" also generates carbon credits that can be sold. Even though they try to promote their plantations as sustainable through the FSC-certification, as WRM pointed out many times, this certification system is above all a mechanism in the benefit of companies, allowing the wood demand and thus plantations to expand more.

Besides, Form Ghana claims that "sustainable (plantation) forestry offers an interesting investment opportunity". No surprise that also the Conference that the Form company helps to promote gives a lot of attention to "reforestation" as an investment opportunity, and necessary changes in legislation are therefore also essential, as the Conference video explains, highlighting the importance "to ensure a secure and growing return on investment". UN ex-secretary general, Kofi Annan, from Ghana, also appears in the same video stressing this point, when he says: "You always have to have an enabling environment and the right regulatory system to encourage the investors to invest, (…)". However, the experience in countries in the global South, where industrial tree plantations have expanded with millions of hectares in the past decades, shows that governments passed laws and regulations like tax breaks, and even in some countries like Brazil tax money was given to plantation companies through national development banks, always with the aim of creating as much benefits as possible for plantation companies and investors, including flexible labour and environmental legislation. (4)

Industrial tree plantation companies are among the Ghana Conference speakers. For example, the Norwegian Green Resources company, that portraits itself as Africa's largest forestation company, will talk, among others, about the "successes" of the company. Green Resources has tripled the size of its industrial tree monoculture area – eucalyptus and pine plantations – during the last five years, The company is present in Tanzania, Uganda and Mozambique (5). But for communities in Mozambique, for example, the experience with this company is far from a "success" story. During a WRM visit to the area, we heard a number of serious complaints about how the company with its "reforestation" activities with eucalyptus plantations invaded fertile lands crucial for their food crop production and thus affected severely their food sovereignty. Promises of employment and other benefits did not or very poorly concretize (6).

Another indication of how corporate interests, and thus the industrial tree plantation lobby, are present at this Conference is having also consultancy companies from the North on the speakers' lists, such as the Finnish Indufor, one of the main ones. They are key actors in the industrial tree plantation lobby of Northern countries like Finland with a wood-based economy (7). Together with the tree plantation business, pulp and paper companies, like Finish Stora Enso and UPM, are spreading the monoculture tree plantation model across several countries in the global South, aiming to produce at a lower cost and thus be able to profit more.

Plantations are not Forests!

No doubt that reforestation is an urgent and real need in many African countries. But reforestation should not be inverted into the promotion of industrial tree plantations, because plantations are not forests! Large-scale monoculture tree plantations create more business opportunities and profits for companies and investors, while creating more problems for local communities.

If the communities directly impacted by these "new forests" would meaningfully be part of the speakers list of this Conference, participants could learn that the "successes" of corporate models based on amount of trees and profits from investments are not real, and definitely not the way forward! And let's not forget that besides all the severe impacts of industrial tree monoculture plantations at the local level (see WRM's website section on the impacts of industrial plantations), this model has also severe impacts on the climate to which it is supposed to contribute by the Conference in Ghana and related initiatives. They are promoted as steps forward to "help" fighting the climate crisis. But promoting large-scale industrial monoculture plantations is a heavily oil and natural gas-dependent activity. It requires heavy mechanization, the intensive use of fertilizers and pesticides, the transportation of products over long distances, and different forms of deforestation.

To promote this model – instead of stopping with it – will only worsen the climate crisis. It is therefore essential to support and strengthen communities in their struggles against large-scale tree plantations.

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Notes:

1. http://newforestsforafrica.org/
2. http://www.wri.org/our-work/project/AFR100/about-afr100
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4. http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/an-overview-of-industrial-tree-plantations-in-the-global-south-conflicts-trends-and-resistance-struggles/
5. http://www.greenresources.no/Plantations.aspx
6. http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/the-farce-of-smart-forestry-the-cases-of-green-resources-in-mozambique-and-suzano-in-brazil/
7. http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/an-overview-of-industrial-tree-plantations-in-the-global-south-conflicts-trends-and-resistance-struggles/

World Forestry Congress in Africa 2015: More tree monocultures or more forest conservation for Africa?

Bulletin 212 - March 2015

In September this year, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is organizing the XIV World Forestry Congress, this time to be held in the African continent, in Durban, South Africa. This Congress is the most significant gathering that FAO organizes in relation to forests and is held every six years. But, what sort of "forests" is been talked about here? What does the Congress pretend to achieve, and what impacts could it have on the African continent, especially thinking on the communities and peoples who depend on the forests?

The terms "forestry" and "forests" are so nearly identical that they can be easily confused. But their meanings are very different. According to dictionary definitions, "forestry" is "the science of planting and taking care of trees and forests", as well as "managing timber growth and yield." This shows that when speaking of forestry, the predominant view is that wood production is an important function of forests, of trees, hence the definitions talk about "planting forests" when we all know that, in reality, it is only possible to plant trees.

When the most important FAO Congress on forests concentrates its focus on forestry, it is clear how much weight this concept has within the organization. The view that a forest is basically a "big wood storage," without people, plants, insects or animals, without all those webs of life that are present in each forest. This view is also reflected in the forest definition that the FAO keeps defending: basically a collection of trees, with no mention of all the other elements that make up a forest as it is usually understood: a place of biodiversity rather than industrial monoculture, a place often regarded as "sacred" by forest-dwelling communities.

Although FAO has a "strategy" document for "forests and forestry," this document keeps guiding the work of a department called "Forestry Department" (1), another indication of FAO's priorities. Besides, this Department is advised by a relevant commission called "Advisory Committee on Paper and Wood Products", which meets once a year with the main goal of offering guidance to the work of the Forestry Department's activities and programmes on relevant issues to the paper and forest products industry. (2)

The Finnish Tiina Vähänen, the World Forestry Congress Deputy Secretary-General, said: "When the world's foresters and forest supporters come together for the XIV World Forestry Congress in Durban in September, they will have a unique opportunity to highlight the urgent need to give forests credit for the true value they provide." (3) This is indeed a fundamental issue requiring serious reflection on the part of FAO. Why?

Since FAO was founded in 1945, it dedicated to the following objectives: eradicating hunger and poverty. To do this, it invested in programmes which in its vision intended to develop food production within nations in order to guarantee food security for their populations. Based on its definition of forests, in which forests can be "planted," FAO promoted the expansion of large-scale monocultures of trees like eucalyptus, pine, acacia, rubbertree, etc. Including oil palm plantations, which share many features with these tree monocultures, tens of millions of hectares of monocultures have been planted in countries of the global South over the past 20-30 years, particularly in Latin America and Asia.

Without exception, these plantation projects were imposed on local populations and presented as programmes that would "develop" the region and would "fight" poverty. Today, we find that in the regions where the large-scale tree plantation monocultures are concentrated, the local populations are poorer than they were before. Many people have been evicted from their homes and territories, besides the losses incurred through the destruction of forests. A large number of studies already show that large-scale tree plantations increase the ravages of hunger and poverty instead of eradicating them (4).

It is symbolic that this year's World Forestry Congress is being held in Africa. According to consulting firm Pöyry, also Finnish as Ms. Vahanen: "There is growing interest in Africa as a destination for forest investors, drawn by the availability of land, competitive rates of tree growth, and low labour costs." (5) In fact, the African continent is facing an invasion of companies and investment funds that are appropriating land to promote African palm plantations, especially in West and Central Africa, and eucalyptus, rubbertree and pine plantations, mainly in the east and south of the continent. The negative impacts in Africa may be even more devastating than in other global regions due to the importance of the land for food production for its people, a majority of whom are rural dwellers. When small food farms are replaced by tree monocultures, as is happening in several countries, poverty and hunger follow in their footsteps. Many people lose their source of food supply when forests are lost in order to make room for "planted forests", together with other highly biodiverse areas such as native pastures and savannas, of great value to the communities.

Africa has also become a favorite place for tree plantations for carbon "storage" under the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) mechanism. (6) Coincidentally or not, Ms. Vähänen formerly coordinated REDD promotion work within FAO. We suspect that when she says it is time to highlight forests and "the true value they provide", she is first thinking of the economic value of the carbon stored in forests, when it is traded to "offset" the polluters' emissions, mainly from industrialized countries. In any case, the fact that this year the Congress is being held in Africa provides an excellent opportunity for FAO to learn, from African people who depend on forests for their livelihood, how they view "the true value forests provide."

In this regard, Ms. Vähänen said: “We are working to ensure that the voices of young people, women and local communities will be heard”. (7) It remains to be seen whether this will really occur in a truly meaningful way, and whether FAO and its officials will really open their ears to hear the voices of African young people, women and local communities who depend on the forests for survival. These are the people who have protected the forests from the threats posed by FAO’s own policies, such as promoting tree monocultures. If FAO does not listen to these communities in a real and meaningful way, the organization will probably continue to be “prey” to the interests of large timber companies and others interested in promoting tree monocultures, principally in countries of the global North, including Finland.

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(1) http://www.fao.org/docrep/012/al043e/al043e00.pdf
(2) http://wrm.org.uy/browse-by-subject/tree-plantations/forest-definition/
(3) http://forestry.fao.msgfocus.com/files/amf_fao/project_59/February_2015/WFC_InFO_News.pdf
(4) http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/an-overview-of-industrial-tree-plantations-in-the-global-south-conflicts-trends-and-resistance-struggles/
(5) http://www.poyry.com/sites/default/files/africanplantationforestry_-_june2011-lfwp-br.pdf
(6) See the WRM publication “REDD: a Collection of Conflicts, Contradictions and Lies,” at:http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/redd-a-collection-of-conflicts-contradictions-and-lies/
(7) See reference (3)

While FAO celebrates the International Day of Forests, artificial trees advance: genetically engineered "forests"

Bulletin 212 - March 2015

For several years now the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has celebrated the International Day of Forests on March 21. This year's theme is: "Forests, Climate, Change." But the changes we see that the FAO promotes only increase the problems of the peoples who depend on forests, such as the trend in Southern countries, like China, Malaysia, Brazil and Chile, to promote commercial plantations of genetically engineered trees.

Forests are vitally important for many indigenous peoples. One leader from the Amazon rainforest said: "We have many customs, many beliefs and traditions, which are directly related to the forests, the air, water, the earth and the sun, in a very unique, cosmological spiritual relationship, very profound and respectful".

But according to FAO's one-minute promotional video for the 2015 International Day of Forests, forests are essential because "[they] are the frontline against climate change," emphasizing exclusively the capacity of forests to absorb CO_2 in the wood and soil. This focus seeks to include forests in a climate agreement to be made in Paris at the end of this year. Could the change that FAO is advocating with the International Day's theme, "Forests, Climate, Change", be to persuade everyone to share that limited vision in which forests are needed merely in order to combat the climate crisis? And, what does that mean for the peoples and communities that depend on forests?

Supposed solutions to reduce deforestation of tropical rainforests put forward in the last decades, have been characterized by narrow visions, impositions and benefits for only a few:

- Already in the 1980s, "Sustainable Forest Management" (SFM) of tropical rainforests promoted the idea that it is important to "keep forests standing" while promising benefits for local communities and forest conservation. But in practice, SFM has continued to destroy tropical forests, because instead of seeking to stop logging, it only recommends doing it "selectively". This has benefited timber companies, perpetuated forest destruction and provoked negative impacts on local communities. In fact, wood extraction and forest destruction actually increased in areas under "sustainable management" in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). For more information, see WRM Bulletin Issue 207.
- In 2005, the mechanism for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) was launched, making the same promises as SFM and adding that it would also combat global warming. But again, it has not benefited communities or stop deforestation. On the contrary, local communities are blamed for deforestation and their way of life is under-

mined by these projects, as restrictions are imposed on their use of the forests. The beneficiaries are polluting industries that are able to buy carbon credits from these projects, which grant them the right to pollute. Meanwhile, the real causes of deforestation are not addressed by REDD or REDD+. For more information, see WRM Bulletin Issue 184.

- In 2007, large conservation NGOs in Brazil launched the idea of "zero deforestation". In the last years, this has been followed by a torrent of similar announcements from several of the companies promoting tree monocultures and which are among the main perpetrators of deforestation, such as Wilmar and Asia Pulp and Paper (APP), main drivers of deforestation in Indonesia. One of the problems is that it is a non-binding commitment, making it difficult to enforce. Wilmar alone has 800 supplier companies. Still, in 2014, the New York Declaration on Forests renewed the same commitment, with Wilmar and many other companies signing and promising to bring deforestation down to "zero" by 2030. The declaration also states that "forests represent one of the largest, most cost-effective climate solutions available today."

Although the Wilmar corporation, for example, has undertaken to monitor "zero deforestation" in each of the 800 companies that supply it with palm oil (even using satellites), we need to ask which are the forests we talk about. Will they be the "High Conservation Value" forests, identified by certification schemes like the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) (see WRM Bulletin Issue 201) as worth keeping intact? Or will they be the forests as understood by the communities, who consider all the areas they use, with more or less biodiversity, as important and therefore of "high value"? And although deforestation can be monitored by satellites, what "satellite" could monitor the countless land and labour conflicts in countries like Indonesia, which are as serious as the problem of deforestation?

What these supposed solutions to deforestation have in common is that they see forests as merely a "tree storehouse", from which trees can be extracted, or even "sustainably" planted to provide wood or store carbon. A further problem is that FAO has shown no willingness to change its current definition of forests, which also regards them as collections of trees. As a result, FAO promotes tree monocultures as "planted forests", to serve the furniture, pulp and paper, tire and palm oil industries, among others, as well as to act as a carbon "storage", serving dirty industries that seek to buy a right to keep on polluting. The false concept of "planted forests" introduces a subtle, but key, change to the policy of "zero deforestation," transforming it into "zero net deforestation." This means that a given area of forest can be cut, so long as another "forest area", such as a tree monoculture, is planted elsewhere. In the 2000-2010 decade alone, the area of monoculture tree plantations worldwide increased by 50 million hectares, especially in the countries of the global South.

And there is no shortage of incentives to expand these plantations still further, as with the genetic manipulation of trees like the eucalyptus. An application has recently been made for authorizing commercial plantations of genetically engineered eucalyptus in Brazil, with the aim

of achieving even greater productivity or incentivizing their capacity to store carbon. But this would have major ecological impacts, denounced by one thousand women from the *Via Campesina* organization which occupied this month an experimental field planted with transgenic eucalyptus. In this bulletin, besides analyzing the situation in Brazil, we also reflect the expansion of transgenic trees in China, mainly with poplar monocultures, Malaysia with rubber trees and Chile with experiments on pine and eucalyptus trees. And, as for shocking anyone: even a monoculture plantation with transgenic trees is called by the FAO as a "planted forest."

Perhaps the most serious aspect of all these proposed "solutions" to combat deforestation is that they envisage no other prospect than the continuation of the destructive model of production and consumption and the strengthening of corporate power. None of the plans put forward by FAO and other institutions considers the idea of leaving oil or minerals in the ground, producing food in each country to promote food sovereignty, or ending the extraction of tropical woods and the expansion of monoculture plantations of palm, soy, eucalyptus, etc. All these are excellent proposals to fight both climate change and deforestation.

In the current race for the last remaining fertile lands, oil reserves and mineral deposits, communities that depend on forests are liable to lose their territories, either because their lands are being destroyed by these expansions, or because the area they live in will be preserved for being an area chosen to "offset" destruction elsewhere, or because the forest is considered of "high conservation value."

We cannot accept proposals to continue destroying forests on the pretext that they will be "offset," even less if this was made with monocultures with transgenic tress, as that would only deepen even more the problems and impacts. The simple reason is that every area, every place, with its own specific people and community, is unique and needs to be preserved, not destroyed, and cannot be compensated for. Recognizing this has so far proved the best way to combat deforestation. This may be the most important change that FAO needs to promote.

Source: WRM information document on the occasion of FAO International Day of Forests, see:http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/united-nations-2015-international-day-of-forests-theme-forests-climate-change-what-change/
See also a short WRM video in response to the advertisement video made by the FAO for the 21st of March: http://wrm.org.uy/other-relevant-information/this-is-not-sustainable-video/

Stora Enso and GM trees: Intensifying destruction of forests and peoples

Bulletin 212 - March 2015

Stora-Enso, a giant Swedish-Finnish industrial forestry company and one of the largest producers of pulp and paper in the world, is anxious to forge ahead with research into genetically modified (GM) trees. The vast industrial tree plantations Stora Enso owns in Latin America and Asia have already been causing multiple violations of environmental and human rights (1). A survey made public in 2014 by *The Forests Dialogue*, a multi-stakeholder platform, revealed that the company intends to expand its production even further, likely with GM trees (2).

Expansion of its tree plantations, which already cover hundreds of thousands of hectares across the world, is the driver of Stora Enso's business. The company is building a new pulp and paper plant and a cardboard factory in China, which will be supplied by approximately 90,000 hectares of tree plantations. The company also owns operations in India, Korea, Laos and Pakistan. In Uruguay, the "Montes del Plata" pulp and paper company owned by Stora Enso and the Chilean firm Arauco are supplied by 190,000 hectares of tree plantations. In Brazil, Stora Enso and the Brazilian company Fibria own Veracel Celulose, which holds 211,000 hectares, 90,000 hectares of which are planted with eucalyptus. It also owns 43,000 hectares in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, about half of which are covered with eucalyptus (3). According to its reply to *The Forest Dialogue*'s questionnaire, the company expects to develop field trials of GM trees in Brazil.

With the objective to keep developing new products and services based on wood (4), Stora Enso is seeking technologies to intensify production. Although it is not known to have GM tree plantations as yet, the company clearly intends to go down this path in spite of the environmental and social hazards involved.

In its response to *The Forest Dialogue* questionnaire, Stora Enso admitted that GM trees could spread just like any other "improved" specie emerging from its breeding programs or their hybrids. The company even remarked that it sees no difference between possible GM trees and "other clones emerging from our breeding program," which indicates that the company refuses to acknowledge the risks associated with GM tree propagation. These risks include the genetic contamination of habitats which could seriously affect biodiversity. Besides, as they grow faster, they consume more water, causing more wells and springs to dry up. Local populations would be exposed not only to the hazardous agrochemicals used on the plantations, but also to inhaling pollen containing transgenic Bt toxin, introduced to produce deathly proteins for insects (6).

Similarly, Stora Enso continued saying that: "We do not see any social impacts, positive or negative, which could be attributed to genetic engineering technology *per se*." And it went on to say: "From a social point of view, we think that GM trees are no different than other plantation[s] emerging from the breeding program." No social impact at all?

Industrial plantations, with or without GM trees, occupy vast areas of land and forests, contaminate soils and water sources and, directly or indirectly, worsen the displacement of more communities from their territories, destroying local livelihoods and food sovereignty. In saying that they don't see "any social impacts at all", Stora Enso is ignoring complaints against it, such as one lodged before the UN Human Rights Council in 2013 for environmental and human rights violations in its eucalyptus plantations and planned cardboard factory in China (7).

Intensifying land use: What for?

One of Stora Enso's main arguments for pushing ahead research of GM trees is to intensify production as, according to the company, "intensification of production of food, fibre and fuels is necessary to meet the needs of the growing world population." As an example, the company provided a link to a video about its plantations in the Brazilian state of Bahia, where it claimed "intensive wood production in tree plantations has stabilized land use and enabled restoration of native forests."

The video titled "Stora Enso is saving rainforest" (8), tells the story of how the establishment of eucalyptus plantations alongside areas set aside for land recovery led to increased biodiversity. What the video does not tell is that since the initial years of operations, its local subsidiary Veracel caused a great deal of deforestation with its tractors and bulldozers. So much so that a historic verdict by a federal court on June 17, 2008, obliged Veracel to replant native trees on all the areas for which eucalyptus planting licences were issued between 1993 and 1996, and to pay a fine of more than 12 million dollars (9). But eucalyptus plantations keep on spreading, and so do complaints by local communities due to the occupation of inhabited lands and devastating native forests, who have joined together in the Social and Environmental Forum of the Extreme South of Bahia and the Alert Network Against the Green Desert (10).

"Every year we plant 400 hectares of rainforest," says Eliane Anjos, Veracel's sustainability manager, on the video. She adds that the company has trained local populations on how to relate with forests and to manage native seeds. Besides that Ms. Anjos should be made aware that the planted area with eucalyptus plantations is way larger than that – at least 10 thousand hectares per year – and that plantations are not forests; the reality is that Veracel's plantations are encroaching on the traditional lands of the Pataxó indigenous people, who have denounced that the company has occupied roughly 30,000 hectares of their territory (11). How

can a company having such serious negative impacts on forests and local communities claim to be "saving the rainforest"? Shouldn't the company be listening to local peoples and learning the real meaning of the rainforest and biodiversity from them?

"Intensifying land use," that is, the idea of producing more wood per hectare, would seem to be a convincing argument for relieving pressure on rainforests. But in that case, why, despite the already intensification of wood production in the last decades in countries like Brazil, have monoculture tree plantations continued to grow exponentially?

Expansion of industrial tree plantations goes hand in hand with increasing demand for wood products, especially in countries of the global North, whether for pulp and paper, fibre, fuel, carbon "storage" or other purposes. As demand for wood increases, so does pressure on rainforests and land. Genetic modification of trees in order to obtain faster growth, increased resistance to chemicals and insects and frost tolerance supports companies' profits and, therefore, the expansion of plantations. Commercial release of GM trees would cause loss of biodiversity and fresh water, soil desertification and serious effects on human health, all of which directly or indirectly cause the degradation and collapse of rainforest and native grassland ecosystems.

Notes:

(1)http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/stora-ensos-propaganda-campaign-in-laos/
(2)http://theforestsdialogue.org/publication/company-responses-questionnaire-development-genetically-modified-trees
(3) http://www.storaenso.com/About-Site/Pages/Stora-Enso-in-brief.aspx
(4) See reference (3)
(5)http://assets.storaenso.com/se/com/DownloadCenterDocuments/Policies_Wood_and_Fibre_Sourcing_and_Land_Management_2012_english.pdf
(6)For more information, see: http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/genetically-modified-trees-the-ultimate-threat-to-forests/
(7)http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section2/ngos-filed-a-complaint-to-united-nations-against-stora-ensos-human-rights-violations-in-china/
(8)http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwrV_yQ46Q0&list=FL3WUNpTDWw42Yms2lemkaNA&index=3
(9) http://www.wrm.org.uy/oldsite/bulletin/132/viewpoint.html
(10)http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section2/brazil-occupation-of-veracels-tree-plantations-calls-upon-land-reform/
(11)http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section2/brazil-veracel-plantations-certified-land-seizure/

Tree plantations – silently stealing us dry

Bulletin 214 - May 2015

While much of the world is caught up in economic and political turmoil, there is a far more serious but less obvious issue. As a slow, almost imperceptible process which is difficult to detect or to measure, water theft is seldom viewed as a high priority crime. Yet, beneath our very noses, vast volumes of water are being misappropriated by "silent" thieves that operate 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Corporations setting up monoculture plantations are the culprits, but, how can planted trees behave so differently from natural forests? Most people assume that they are the same. This fallacy however has led to a water crisis wherever "fake forests" of alien trees have been established on land once covered by real forests, or biodiverse grassland and scrublands.

This artificial conversion of the landscape has many negative impacts that so-called "foresters" and plantation companies choose to ignore. Despite there being ample evidence, both empirical and scientific, the ugly truth about how monoculture plantations affect water sources and biodiversity has been deliberately obscured by those who profit from it.

In many cases, the effect of water taken by industrial tree plantations can be matched only by the worst drought. Experiments conducted in areas where land was converted to tree plantations have proven that their water consumption can exceed the amount of rain that falls where they stand. This has been demonstrated, for example, in South Africa, by measuring the reduction in stream flow that occurs after grassland catchments have been converted to plantations. Reports by researcher Joan Whitmore (1) describe this effect as "water piracy", due to its impacts on adjacent land users and downstream ecosystems including wetlands, estuaries and coastal marine habitat.

How this works

Evergreen plantation trees consume water throughout the year, unlike natural vegetation which consumes very little in the dry season. In addition, the dense leafy canopy of these plantations prevents rain water from reaching the soil surface. The combination of evaporation from water caught in their foliage, combined with groundwater drawn up from their roots to their leaves is called evapo-transpiration. During the dry season, when there is little or no rain, trees drink from the groundwater table. This results in localised depletion of the aquifer, causing groundwater from adjacent areas to flow towards the depleted aquifer beneath the plantation. This also reduces the flow of water into natural systems when it is needed to maintain downstream habitats and farming communities. Streams and rivers that normally flow throughout the year become seasonal and this creates localised drought, compromising ecosystem functions.

Apart from stealing water from nature and from human communities, tree plantations also cause a state of dehydration in adjacent areas, and this has the effect of increasing the incidence of wildfires. Besides destroying the plantation, such wildfires also devastate the human environment causing deaths and loss of community resources, as recently occurred in parts of Australia, Portugal, South Africa, California and Chile. Public monies must then be spent on the construction of dams and pipelines to replace the water lost due to plantations, and carrying water in tanker-trucks to affected communities.

Conclusion

Plantations are of course not in themselves the real robbers – they are merely one of the tools used by multinational corporations and international financial institutions to steal the "natural resources" of countries in the South, especially of those who live in and depend on forests. Trees are usually industrially processed near to where they were grown, using even more water and energy to churn out millions of tonnes of cellulose and paper, packaging, and other products that generate profits for the owners of the plantations and pulp mills, along with their financial backers. At the other side however, stand the many affected communities that end up with their territories and livelihoods polluted or dried up. Industrial tree plantations severely damage freshwater resources that supply drinking water to millions of people.

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Notes:

(1) Whitmore J. S. "An estimation of the possible effects of land management practices on run-off from the Catchment Control Areas in the Natal Midlands", May, 1972. Technical note no. 26, Department of Water Affairs, Hydrological Research Division; Whitmore J. S. "Factors controlling the precipitation / water yield relationship", March, 1976. Technical note no. 62, Department of Water Affairs, Division of Hydrology

Greenwashing continues: FSC certifies industrial tree plantations as forests and RSPO oil palm plantations as sustainable

Bulletin 233 - September 2017

For over 20 year now, certification schemes such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) (1) have helped plantation companies secure their profits and protect their reputation. How do they do that, when the impacts of large-scale industrial eucalyptus, pine, acacia and oil palm plantations are so obvious for all to see?

When reports of plantation companies breaching FSC and RSPO standards come to light, the certification schemes refer to their internal complaints and conflict resolution processes developed to address these situations. Reference to these processes gives rise to a false impression that their labels are trustworthy. FSC and RSPO market the message that their labels stand for thorough field assessments of practises at the plantations; that the 'multi-stakeholder' processes from which the certification standards emerged, were open to all concerned parties; that products carrying their label stand for decent working conditions on the plantations, and that expansion and management of these large-scale monoculture plantations minimize harm to communities and their cultures and customs, to soil, water, land and landscape. This marketing world of plantation schemes is far away from the reality in which communities enclosed by large-scale industrial tree plantations live. Theirs is an experience of an inherently unsustainable and harmful industrial plantation model that grabs prime agricultural land, turns diverse forests into monocultures; destroys and pollutes water sources, and causes grave harm to local communities, their economies, cultures and customs. (2)

Yet, the 'green consumption' promise is powerful and attractive in European, US-American and urban markets in so-called emerging economies with growing numbers of environmentally conscious buyers. In fact, the 'green consumption' promise that FSC and RSPO plantation certification labels provide, is crucial to maintaining consumer support for an excessive and destructive production and consumption model of which these plantations companies are part. These labels mask the reality that plantations carrying the green seal nonetheless are part of a model that is a root cause of current crises including climate change, soil degradation and the major wave of extinction of biological diversity (see also article 'Why the RSPO facilitates land grabs for palm oil' in the WRM Bulletin 219, 2015).

More misleading marketing messages

Although websites and marketing material of both FSC and RSPO prominently feature images of small-scale producers, the labels have proven particularly useful to large corporations. By August 2017, RSPO had certified 2,46 million hectares of oil palm plantations, producing more

than 11,7 million tonnes of RSPO-certified palm oil (around 19 per cent of globally traded palm oil). (3) Only about 12 per cent of 2016 volumes of RSPO-certified oil was grown by smallholders who are part of corporate outgrower schemes or are otherwise obliged to sell to corporate mills. Less than 0.4 per cent of RSPO-certified palm oil was grown on plantations of independent smallholders. (4) Figures for 2015 show the extreme concentration of RSPO-certified palm oil production in the hands of a few very large producers: 65 per cent of global RSPO-certified palm oil supply was produced by only 10 companies. Oil palm plantation giant Sime Darby alone produced 25 per cent of the global RSPO-certified palm oil on its roughly one million hectares of certified plantations (5).

Perhaps, such figures are no surprise considering that while appearing inclusive and consensus-oriented on paper, "RSPO certification largely favours three dominant groups of stakeholders when it is implemented: the downstream agro-business firms, the international environmental NGOs and the largest palm oil producers." (5). Palm oil buyers which dominate the global palm oil trade to 'green' consumer markets in Europe or the US, hold over 80 per cent of votes in the RSPO's General Assembly. Among the top-ten countries for RSPO membership, only one is a palm oil-producing country (Malaysia), and among ordinary members, oil palm growers are far outnumbered by palm oil processors, traders and global food companies such as Unilever. (4) Researcher Denis Ruysschaert notes that almost all local social and environmental NGOs have left RSPO, and that no local actors remain on the RSPO Board of Governors since Sawit Watch, a network of Indonesian social organisations, gave up its seat in 2012. (5)

The situation is similar for the FSC, where in 2015, certified 'smallholders' accounted for only 4 percent of the total of 198,6 million hectares of FSC certified forests and plantations, and. Worthy a note also that the FSC defines forests as "a tract of land dominated by trees". With such a definition it is perhaps no surprise that the FSC continues to greenwash plantations by including them in statistics as FSC certified 'forests'. In fact, over 17 million hectares of what FSC markets as 'FSC certified forests' on its homepage should correctly be labelled as plantations – the large majority most likely large-scale industrial tree plantations occupying thousands of hectares. According to the FSC 'market info pack' 2016/17, 9 per cent of the total certified area and 27 per cent of 'forest management' certificates are in reality handed out to plantations companies, not for forest management. This figure is likely at the low end, because many additional plantation areas are included in what FSC calls 'semi-natural and mixed plantation and natural forest'. (6)

One consequence of this extreme imbalance between small-scale producers and large-scale industrial operations that carry FSC or RSPO labels is that certification de facto allow large-scale producers to dominate this 'green' market and further consolidate their dominance in the global market. In addition, the bias of certification towards industrial tree plantations creates the false impression that industrial plantation companies operate in a more environmentally

and socially benign way than small-scale producers whose products do not carry these 'green' labels.

Certify first, request end to violations later

Both FSC and RSPO have developed impressive – some might say, intimidatingly large – online libraries filled with documents explaining their respective 'Principles and Criteria' and the various national adaptations and other policy decisions relevant for certification. But the quantity of documents cannot hide laxness of criteria and inherent contradictions they contain. Despite well-documented negative impacts of industrial eucalyptus plantations, for example, on biological diversity and water, (2) many such plantations have been certified by FSC as complying with its Principle 6 on 'Environmental Values and Impacts'. On paper, this principle requires that in certified plantations, the continued existence of naturally occurring native species and genotypes is effectively maintained, the loss of biological diversity is prevented; that natural water courses are protected or restored and that negative impacts on water quality and quantity are avoided, mitigated and remedied. It is hard to image how any industrial eucalyptus plantation managed for maximum yield and profit could possibly satisfy such a condition. And yet, thousands of hectares of industrial tree plantations in South Africa, Brazil and elsewhere carry the FSC logo.

Both certification schemes have issued certificates even though auditors note violations ('non-compliance' in the language of the certification schemes) of the certification standards. This is possible through a tool called "corrective action request". These "corrective action requests" are issued where management of a plantation does not meet certification requirements, but where a certificate already has been or will soon be issued regardless of the violation. Depending on the seriousness of the violation, auditors might carry out another visit to assess whether some action has been taken to end the violation of the standard, but eventually, an auditor will downgrade any 'major' violation to a 'minor' one, and a certificate can be issued or renewed even though the violation might be far from resolved.

"Corrective action requests" are a convenient tool for certificate holders because it means they can violate principles and criteria without a risk of losing the certificate easily once they have received it. They can thus continue to market their operations as being in compliance with international certification standards when, in fact, they are in breach of them. A recent report released by the US-based NGO Mighty Earth, in collaboration with the Gabonese NGO Brainforest, for example, shows that Olam, an RSPO-certified company, has cleared about 20 thousand hectares of forests in Gabon across its four concession areas since 2012. (7) Many more examples could be cited. (8)

In a 2016 article, Marcus Colchester, Senior Policy Advisor with the UK-based Forest Peoples Programme, describes how through the use of "corrective action requests" in the RSPO system,

in Indonesia, "land-grabbing based on imposed concessions remains the norm". (4) This happens when, for example, companies are certified to RSPO standards before they have demonstrated that they have fulfilled the RSPO requirement for free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). In addition to a violation of the requirement for *prior* consent, such a practise also puts communities in a very weak position to withhold their consent, because the company already has what it wants – the FSC or RSPO label which secures access to key consumer markets. Although both FSC and RSPO have set up complaints mechanisms that could be used in such cases, communities face a complicated, tiresome and in most cases, eventually unsatisfactory process to see their grievances addressed once a certificate has been issued. (9) In almost all cases where complaints have been filed by communities, the community has had to rely on outside support from NGOs familiar with the certification system and able to provide resources for a community to access the complaints system and present the evidence in a manner required by the certification system.

After drawing out conflict resolution mechanisms for as long as possible, companies give up certificate rather than address violations

Most conflicts between companies and local communities are not registered as complaints in the certification systems and continue to affect community life and livelihoods despite the company holding a 'green' label. Of the complaints that are picked up by the RSPO and FSC certification systems, few are resolved to the satisfaction of communities. In comparatively few cases, companies do not succeed to see violations downgraded to 'minor' without the remedial action interfering with the company's bottom line or a community regaining access to land lost to the plantation company. In those situations, companies have repeatedly chosen to simply give up their FSC or RSPO membership rather than change their practises. One such recent example is the decision of Melka Group subsidiary Plantaciones de Pucallpa in Peru in late 2016 to exit the RSPO. The company was faced with RSPO complaint panel sanctions over destruction of more than 5 thousand hectares of forests in violation of the RSPO standard. "What hope for justice or reparation can there be for communities if companies can neutralize a complaint by simply withdrawing from RSPO?", the Forest Peoples Programme notes in a press release on the Plantaciones de Pucallpa announcement to terminate its RSPO membership, asking "What is the real value of this industry standard if members can simply withdraw when they fear that the Complaints Panel will rule against them?"

Another example is a subsidiary of one of the world's largest agribusinesses, Singapore-based Wilmar. PT Asiatic Persada, an Indonesian company partly owned by two Wilmar subsidiaries, had taken over indigenous lands in Jambi, Indonesia, without consent or compensation. After a seemingly endless dispute and efforts by a mediation panel to negotiate a solution, the company called in the local mobile police brigade, who chased the indigenous peoples off their lands, while equipment of company contractors was used to destroy their houses (11). When complaints continued, Wilmar sold off its ownership in PT Asiatic Persada in 2013 without

any resolution to the certification standard violations or the harm caused through destruction of houses in the indigenous village. Despite refusing to take responsibility for the damage and harm caused by PT Asiatic Persada when Wilmar subsidiaries held substantial ownership of the company, Wilmar remains a certified member of RSPO to this day.

Nothing new, but worth reiterating

RSPO and FSC are not working to transform a heavily concentrated and unequal production model that provides cheap vegetable oil and fibre for global food, energy or pulp and paper industries into a localized model of small-scale production based on agroecological and social justice principles. Their certification practise is also not aiming to end but rather to facilitate the continued expansion of this large-scale industrial monoculture plantation model with their countless negative impacts for local communities and their environment. They are about increasing the share of RSPO-certified palm oil and FSC-certified wood products and the safeguarding of corporate profits through providing a 'green' label to greenwash ultimately inherently unsustainable industrial monoculture plantations.

In the past, many social and environmental NGOs, especially in industrialized countries, focused on denouncing such destruction of forests for industrial tree plantations and making the contribution of these companies to tropical deforestation visible through public action. Today, such public action has been largely replaced by negotiations with agribusiness and pulp and paper companies. Instead of questioning the underlying model of large-scale plantations controlled by a small number of transnational corporations, they legitimize this concentration of control over community land by discussing voluntary certification principles and criteria with these companies. Yet, as we have seen, companies can abandon these standards without consequences if they do not like the sanctions imposed for violation of the certification standards. This joint involvement of NGOs and corporations in certification schemes often weakens local community struggles, for example when companies now say 'we have support from the NGOs'. And banks can continue to finance the expansion of the destructive plantations model with reference to financing only expansion of companies that adhere to RSPO or FSC (12). Yet, the destruction of forests and the violation of community rights continues where large-scale industrial tree plantations operate, whether they are certified or not.

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Notes:

(1) The FSC was founded in 1993 with the mission to "promote environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests". FSC defines "environmentally appropriate" as management that "ensures that the production of timber, non-timber products and ecosystem services maintains the forest's biodiversity, productivity, and ecological processes". The RSPO was founded in 2001 as a joint initiative between the palm oil industry and some international NGOs, with WWF as one of the main actors. The RSPO now has over 750 members; only 13 of them are NGOs, the remaining well over 700 members are companies related

to the international palm oil trade. The RSPO delivers certificates to palm oil producers, based on a set of principles and criteria approved by RSPO members and checked in the field by third-party auditors paid by the companies applying for certification.
(2) See, for example, the collection of materials at http://wrm.org.uy/all-campaigns/international-day-of-struggle-against-monoculture-tree-plantations-2017/ and http://wrm.org.uy/browse-by-subject/tree-plantations/certification/
(3) RSPO website: Impacts. http://www.rspo.org/about/impacts
(4) M. Colchester, 2016. Do commodity certification systems uphold indigenous peoples' rights? Lessons from the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil and Forest Stewardship Council. In: Pavel Castka et al. Certification and Biodiversity – How Voluntary Certification Standards impact biodiversity and human livelihoods. Policy Matters, Issue 21. http://bit.ly/2kH1H95
(5) D. Ruysschaert, 2016. The Impact of Global Palm Oil Certification on Transnational Governance, Human Livelihoods and Biodiversity Conservation. In: Pavel Castka et al. Certification and Biodiversity – How Voluntary Certification Standards impact biodiversity and human livelihoods. Policy Matters, Issue 21. http://bit.ly/2zfl7VS
(6) FSC Market Info Pack. An overview of the Forest Stewardship Council market developments, statistics, and trends. https://ic.fsc.org/en/for-business/fsc-tools/local-market-successes/fsc-market-info-pack
(7) Mighty Earth, 2016. Palm Oil's Black Box. How agribusiness giant Olam's emergence as a major palm oil trader is putting forests in Southeast Asia and Gabon at risk. http://www.mightyearth.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Olam-technical-report_Dec-9_with-images_lowres1-002.pdf See also WRM Bulletin article "Green" oil palm plantations are a scam: The case of OLAM. WRM Bulletin 230. http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/green-oil-palm-plantations-are-a-scam-the-case-of-olam/
(8) For more examples, see FSC Watch website: https://fsc-watch.com/
(9) WRM, 2013. FSC consultation and complaints procedures: the case of Veracel Celulose in Brazil. http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/new-briefing-on-fsc-certification-of-plantations/
(10) *Condenan a Plantaciones de Pucallpa por destruir 5000 ha de bosques*. https://www.servindi.org/24/05/2017/rspo-condena-plantaciones-de-pucallpa-por-su-destruccion-de-mas-de-5000ha-de-la-amazonia
(11) M. Colchester et al. 2011. Human rights abuses and land conflicts in the PT Asiatic Persada concession in Jambi: report of an independent investigation into land disputes and forced evictions in a palm oil estate. http://www.forestpeoples.org/en/topics/palm-oil-rspo/publication/2011/human-rights-abuses-and-land-conflicts-pt-asiatic-persada-conc
(12) Greenpeace, 2017. Dirty bank' cleaning up its act? http://geographical.co.uk/places/forests/item/2326-dirty-bank-cleaning-up-its-act

FSC: Certifying accumulation markets

Bulletin 213 - April 2015

For a long time, WRM, along with other organizations and social movements, has denounced the certification of projects that are destructive to forests and their web of life. These projects have also proven to be detrimental to communities living in and depending on forests. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification not only legitimates industrial logging in tropical forests and vast areas of monoculture plantations, but has also been associated with carbon markets, by certifying trees planted for "carbon capture". Furthermore, by the end of 2015, the FSC aims to have a comprehensive plan to certify so called "ecosystem services". Without addressing the underlying causes of deforestation, FSC promotes the idea that "nature" can be quantified and commodified, while encouraging increased consumption of timber and wood products – provided they have their label.

Forest certification systems are voluntary market-based schemes to assess "forest management" through a set of indicators related to the economic, environmental and social "sustainability" level of a given project. Thus, certification labels are regarded by consumers as an "insurance" that those products have been produced or extracted with "sustainable forest management" practices. In the early 1990s, various certification systems were created through "public private partnership"- initiatives between governments, companies and conservation NGOs. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) was one such initiative, which currently enjoys widespread recognition and credibility.

The FSC, established in 1993, has a set of principles and criteria to certify wood extraction as "ecologically, socially and economically viable" and thus, consumption of these labelled products is believed to be "responsible". But, how can logging at industrial level be awarded a label ensuring a "socially beneficial and environmentally appropriate" management? How can one ignore that the growing demand for tropical timber has driven corporate expansion at all stages of the production process – from raw material extraction, through manufacturing, marketing and distribution? The reality is that social disintegration and destruction of forests are common consequences of industrial logging and this often violates the territorial rights of indigenous peoples and other traditional communities – the same groups who have been major defenders of their forests and territories for generations (see WRM Bulletin of October 2014). Besides, the FSC defines monoculture plantations as "forest areas", which allowed the possibility of certifying monoculture tree plantations, adopted since 1996. Despite countless criticism and strong resistance in the affected territories, millions of hectares of monoculture tree plantations are considered by the FSC as "certified forests". In practice, the FSC approves and certifies land grabbing worldwide for the economic benefit of few forestry companies (see further information on the FSC at WRM's website).

Later on, the FSC also decided to support the carbon market by certifying forest and plantation areas that are marketing themselves as "carbon sinks". With this decision, the FSC not only helps to legitimize a false solution to global warming, but, again, sides with large forestry industries, at the expense of local populations (see WRM publication "REDD: A Collection of Conflicts, Contradictions and Lies").

Increasing the market, intensifying the plunder

The FSC aims to provide the global market as much certified timber as possible. Although at first glance this sounds like a laudable goal, the only way to achieve it is to certify as many large-scale operations as possible. The goal then is not to stop excessive consumption of timber and wood products – demand fueled by corporations that profit from excessive consumption of paper and timber products, mainly from the industrialized North – nor is it to question the steady increase in logging and industrial monoculture plantations. By contrast, FSC wants its "green" label to be increasingly consumed. So, who is benefiting?

Behind the label and attractive marketing campaigns are the countless communities that are directly and severely affected by this insatiable demand. Monoculture plantations throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America are sweeping away forest territories that are home of communities, biodiversity, water sources and complex webs of life, and leave behind dispossession, poverty, destruction and social repression (see cases of resistance against monoculture plantations on WRM's website). And besides, how many of the communities that have been evicted to make room for monocultures on their territories, who are sick due to pesticide pollution, impoverished by the loss of their livelihoods or criminalized for attempting to hinder those projects, have been ignored while the big forestry companies worldwide have been certified?

The WRM, along with many local and international networks, has consistently criticized the misleading description of tree plantations as "planted forests" due to their harmful environmental and social impacts (1). The FSC reinforces this idea when certifying large areas of monoculture plantations under a "forest" certification label. From certified forestry companies to auditing companies (which are paid by the same companies who want to be certified), there is a network of interests that seek to maintain and expand the model of excessive consumption of pulp and wood products. More recently certified plantations include those for possible ethanol production and/or wood pellets for burning in power plants (2).

Expanding market certification: "Ecosystem services"

A project called "Forest Certification for Ecosystem Services" (ForCES) is focused on assessing how the FSC can become the global leader in the certification of "ecosystem services". The project involves implementing ten pilot projects to "evaluate and reward the provision of critical

ecosystem services such as biodiversity conservation, watershed protection and carbon storage/sequestration" (3).
Trading "ecosystem services" transforms nature into quantifiable units that can be translated into marketable assets, also called "certificates", "titles" or " credits". It is based on the idea that nature, with its "ecosystem services" can be destroyed provided that such destruction is "compensated" with "protection", "recovery" or "improvement" somewhere else. "Ecosystem services" trade is something radically different from the way in which people who depend on forests value them (See WRM Bulletin of February 2012).

According to ForCES's website, FSC is "well positioned to extend its market-based approach and promote ecosystem services". Within this context, by the end of 2015, FSC plans to have "an enhanced global system which targets key ecosystem services with present or future market potential", as well as "successfully certified demonstration sites for ecosystem services". The ten projects currently carried out by ForCES are located in Chile (3 projects with a total of 320,000 hectares), Indonesia (3 projects with a total of 290,000 hectares), Nepal (2 projects with a total of 57,000 hectares) and Vietnam (2 projects with a total of 37,000 hectares).

ForCES's website highlights that the pilot sites in Chile aim to expand FSC certification at the "landscape level". This will help to promote "sustainable forest management" around "natural and planted forests" (4). In a context of opposition to extensive monoculture plantations, the FSC has granted its approval to plantation companies which are facing serious social conflicts over land disputes and evictions. One of the ForCES pilot projects in Chile, Bosques Cautín, has as a partner Forestal Mininco, a company that in 2011 was reported for having many of its certified hectares on Mapuche indigenous territories (see article WRM Bulletin of January 2015).

In the case of Indonesia, ForCES promotes it as the biggest timber production country in Southeast Asia, while at the same time asserting that deforestation has dropped sharply in the past seven years. How could deforestation drop "sharply" in a country that has, to the detriment of forests, the largest area of industrial oil palm plantations worldwide, an area which is still expanding, alongside other extensive areas of tree monocultures? Such a conclusion can only be drawn if a plantation is regarded as a forest. ForCES affirms however that even though deforestation is still a problem in Indonesia, the cause is that "ecosystem services" are not being economically accounted for (5). Once again, the FSC emphasizes the ideology that nature has to be turned into market units.

In Nepal, planned activities include "guidance to policymakers and stakeholders in drawing up rules, laws, regulations and policies [to certify ecosystem services]" (6). And in Vietnam, ForCES plans to contribute to national programs in the field of "natural resource management" and "sustainable forestry" (7).

All these plans and pilot projects clearly illustrate that the FSC legitimizes the expansion of accumulation markets, not only with large forestry companies and their logging operations, but also creating projects and laws for the so-called "ecosystem services". As pointed out by Zenzi Suhadi from the Indonesian NGO Walhi, "Decisions on forests in Indonesia are still in the hands of powerful institutions. The Government fails to mention land ownership issues or deforestation causes, such as the model of production and consumption. These topics are intentionally excluded from discussions to avoid the enormous responsibility that the State and corporations would need to take for their crimes." (8)

It is time to listen and respect people who live in and depend on forests, the communities who have defended and depended on their territories for generations. This should start by radically transforming the plantation and energy production model which is fed by corporate expansion and the generation of increased profits. To certify this expansion is to certify ongoing environmental and social devastation.

Notes:

1. See some WRM materials in: http://wrm.org.uy/?s=FSC; "FSC: Unsustainable certification of forest plantations", WRM, September 2001, http://wrm.org.uy/oldsite/actores/FSC/libro.html; and also see FSC-Watch: http://fsc-watch.com
2. http://www.isealalliance.org/online-community/news/forest-plantation-first-to-receive-rsb-and-fsc-certification
3. http://forces.fsc.org/index.htm
4. http://forces.fsc.org/chile.11.htm
5. http://forces.fsc.org/indonesia.26.htm
6. http://forces.fsc.org/nepal.27.htm
7. http://forces.fsc.org/vietnam.28.htm
8. http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/indonesia-forests-are-more-than-land/

Chile: Discredited FSC label continues to legitimize industrial tree plantations

Bulletin 210 – January 2015

The companies Forestal Mininco y Forestal Arauco account for the vast majority of tree plantation activities in Chile, with almost two million hectares of monoculture plantations of exotic tree species, mainly pine and eucalyptus. Despite the resistance, denunciations and harsh criticisms on the part of numerous Mapuche Indigenous organizations and communities, both companies have been certified with the FSC label through foreign consulting firms.

The aim of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is to promote "environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable" management of forests worldwide. The FSC certifies wood, paper and other forest products in order to, theoretically, guarantee "sustainable" forest management. In order to receive FSC certification, forestry operators and suppliers must adhere to 10 principles and associated criteria, which include respect for the rights of indigenous peoples. The certification process is carried out by external consultants. In many cases, such as in Chile, these consulting firms have granted the FSC label to companies that have been harshly criticized for their social and environmental impacts.

In recent years, FSC certification has become a standard for the international wood and forest products market. While certification is voluntary, it is practically a requirement for export. For example, the fact that the countries of the European Union demand the FSC label has obliged Chilean forestry companies to comply with its procedures.

Certification that ignores communities and forests: Forestal Mininco and Forestal Arauco

Industrial tree plantations owned by the companies Forestal Mininco and Forestal Arauco are expanding in central-southern Chile, along with numerous pulp mills for paper production. Complaints have been lodged against all of these companies' pulp mills for severe pollution. The plantations have also generated many social and environmental impacts, particularly impacts on water sources, conflicts with Mapuche Indigenous communities who claim ancestral rights to land under the control of these companies, and the destruction of sacred sites.

In January 2011, the Mapuche Territorial Alliance (*Alianza Territorial Mapuche*), together with numerous communities, denounced the fact that Forestal Mininco's FSC-certified area largely overlapped with Mapuche traditional territory. The Alliance stressed that the company does not respect the communities or their territories, and provided evidence of a series of acts of violence and conflicts caused by the company. Meanwhile, in September 2011, the Working Group for Collective Rights (*Grupo de Trabajo por Derechos Colectivos*) presented

evidence of the bad practices of both companies to the FSC-accredited certification bodies SmartWood Program/Rainforest Alliance and Woodmark, urging them not to be complicit in the human rights violations and the serious social, environmental and economic damages and conflicts provoked by the companies. For its part, Forestal Arauco initiated the certification process in 2009, with Woodmark as the certification body. The Association of Engineers for Native Forests (*Agrupación de Ingenieros por el Bosque Nativo*) declared that, based on the evidence gathered, Forestal Arauco had not complied with the FSC's principles and criteria.

Nevertheless, both companies were certified. The Rainforest Alliance granted certification for Forestal Mininco's pine and eucalyptus plantations in 2012, ignoring the long list of land conflicts with Mapuche communities, the numerous denunciations of acts of violence, and even the loss of the Mapuche people's sacred sites – despite the fact that the Rainforest Alliance had registered some of these sites. Woodmark, meanwhile, had initially rejected Forestal Arauco's request for certification in 2013, but ended up certifying it in September of the same year.

In January 2014, numerous civil society organizations, residents associations and peasant and indigenous communities filed a challenge to overturn the FSC certification granted to Forestal Arauco. In August of the same year, the Mapuche community Eugenio Araya Huiliñir de Renaico filed for an injunction against Forestal Mininco to halt the work that the company was carrying out in territories currently being reclaimed as ancestral lands. In December, the Mapuche community of Juan Bautista Jineo denounced damages caused by the company to the community's lands, as a result of plantation activities on the bordering property. That same month, Forestal Arauco was denounced by Mapuche authorities and cultural researchers for the serious impacts of its operations on areas considered sacred and of spiritual importance to the Mapuche people.

Both companies have lobbied the public pillars to militarize and criminalize communities, as well as the application of the anti-terrorism law.

The impacts of industrial plantations and questioning of certification bodies

The FSC is contributing to the expansion of industrial monoculture tree plantations around the world. Numerous different communities and organizations have insistently denounced their many impacts. These include the displacement of native forests; the loss of surface and groundwater resources; the indiscriminate use of pesticides and resulting pollution; the fencing in of rural communities by plantations; the destruction of rural roads and pollution caused by logging trucks and heavy machinery, particularly at harvesting time; the loss of food sovereignty due to the replacement of livestock grazing and agricultural land by tree plantations; the desecration of sacred sites; and rising poverty.

The certification of industrial tree plantations is unacceptable. The FSC presents itself to the world as the most trustworthy and respected label for wood products, particularly since its members include a number of NGOs. Criticism once again points at the fundamental problem of excessive patterns of consumption. If the consumption of paper and paper products is not curbed, it will be difficult to stop the expansion of tree plantations. In Chile, the FSC label continues to spread. It is crucial to expose the contradictions and lies behind the certification process, as well as the objectives of the labels themselves, because they are complicit in the violations of human rights and destructive social and environmental impacts generated by industrial tree plantations.

Article extracted from "*El desacreditado sello FSC en Chile a causa de las certificaciones a empresas forestales*" by Alfredo Seguel, editor of the Mapuche news agency Mapuexpress http://www.mapuexpress.org/2014/12/30/el-desacreditado-sello-fsc-en-chile-a-causa-de-las-certificaciones-a-empresas-forestales#sthash.OtGD9Kkj.lqzykeIA.dpuf

The Green Invasion: Promoting Plantations in India

Bulletin 233 - September 2017

Forests? Or Plantations?

According to data presented by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) in their biennial State of Forest Reports (SFR), India's forest cover has been showing a consistent increase for the last several years. For instance, the SFR released in 2015 mentions a net increase in the area of very dense forests. How does one explain this data, given the apparent scale of deforestation, including large-scale illegal logging as well as diversion of forests for other uses that results in forest destruction? FSI interprets it mostly as a result of plantation activities undertaken by the state forest departments. However, the same SFR says that 'man-made forests' contain only 5.31 per cent of the total forest area, while 'natural forests' occupy 80 per cent.

We face a riddle here, or several. How much of India's 'increasing' forest cover consists of plantations, or as the FSI calls them, 'man-made' forests? If natural forests are so plentiful, how does one explain the expanding plantations, which, according to the 2015 FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment, have jumped to more than 12 million hectares in 2015 from just under 6 million hectares in 1990? According to another official estimate from 2009, the plantation area in India at the time amounted to 32,57 million hectares, accounting for "17 % of the global forest plantation".' (1) Yet another study from 2014 mentions that annually between 1 and 1,5 million hectares has been afforested since 1980. (2)

One question that arises is why the FSI does not maintain systematic and reasonably accurate data about plantations. Also, why routinely include plantations in forest cover figures? Raising similar questions, several studies in recent years have pointed out that India is witnessing severe deforestation and forest degradation, despite FSI's claim to the contrary. (3) It has been observed that while there is no clarity as to how much of the total area reported as forests under SFR is made up of 'forest plantations', it is also not known if natural or secondary forests are being converted to plantations without making this conversion statistically visible (4). Moreover, India's 'native forests' are being eroded steadily. (5)

It is clear that the official agencies in India use the terms 'forest' and 'plantations' interchangeably. All tree plantations, on lands more than one hectare in area, and with a tree canopy density of more than 10 per cent, are treated as forests. Peter Smetacek, an environmentalist based in Uttarakhand, northern India, thinks that this conceptual muddle can be traced back to the Germanic origins of Indian forestry. (6) It is known that Dietrich Brandis, a German forester, introduced the practices of commercial forestry in India. Smataeck observes that in German a '*Forst'* is a plantation of commercially important forest trees, while a 'natural forest' is called a '*Wald'*. Smataeck further observes that because Brandis failed to establish an official difference between *Forst* and *Wald*, forest departments in India had ever since continued to 'plant' forests, without pausing to think that you can only create a '*Forst*' by planting, not a '*Wald'*. Natural forests cannot be planted.

Puyravaud, J. P et al suggest that in India, plantations have steadily replaced forests over the years. (7) Comparing FAO and FSI data, they conclude that while the total forest cover rose from 660,337 km^2 in 1995 to 690,250 km^2 in 2005 (FSI), plantations expanded from 146,200 km^2 to 300,280 km^2 over the same time interval (FAO). Consequently, the authors point out, forests have declined from 514,137 km^2 in 1995 to 389,970 km^2 in 2005, which translates into a mean loss of 2.42 per cent per year. What type of trees came up in the 'planted forests'? The most prominent plantation species are eucalyptus, poplar, acacia, silver oak, rubber, teak and pine. (8) According to FAO, nearly 45 per cent of India's 'forest plantations' are fast-growing, short-rotation species. (9) In particular, India's forests, countryside and farmlands have been filled up with various species of Eucalyptus, at great social and ecological costs.

"Social Forestry" and Eucalyptus

The Eucalyptus colonization of India is closely related to the much-hyped social forestry project, which was sponsored by the World Bank. It has been observed that the so-called 'social forestry' project was, in its early days, largely a product of development aid. (10) The ambitious project led to large-scale afforestation mainly in the 1970s and 1980s when plantations were established at a rate of 1.4 million hectares a year. (11) In the states of Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and West Bengal in particular, Eucalyptus trees spread like wildfire, evoking and leading not only to a raging environmental controversy, but also social discontent and active

resistance. Eucalyptus plantations reportedly drained huge volumes of water from the plantation sites as well as their neighbourhoods downstream, sucked the soil dry of nutrients so that other plants could not come up. They also release toxic substances into the soil, suppressing growth of native species. (12) In Karnataka, the plantations have allegedly resulted in severe drought-like situations, forcing the state government to ban the cultivation of all Eucalyptus species. (13)

Though Eucalyptus plantations are usually short-rotation and known to bring quick monetary returns, the benefits are limited mostly to the rural elite. Even in case of state projects like the social forestry, it is the landed and the upper-caste sections of the rural populace who benefitted from the plantations. (14) Moreover, communities have shown explicit concern over the diversion of fertile food producing land as well as pasture to Eucalyptus plantations. During the 1980s, the area under the traditional staple food, ragi, had declined significantly in Karnataka. In the Kolar district, for instance, between 1977 and 1981, ragi cultivation dropped from 142 thousand hectares to 48 thousand hectares, producing a marked reduction in yield from 175 thousand tonnes to just 13 thousand and increasing its price by 200 per cent in the market. (15)

A rich legacy of resistance

State-run plantation programmes have provoked intense resistance from forest communities and peasants. People who had traditionally depended upon forests for food and livelihood resisted the conversion of forests to monoculture plantations of exotic/introduced species such as Eucalyptus and Teak. Peasants opposed Eucalyptus plantations in particular because these often led to wholesale desertification of their agricultural landscapes, besides encroaching upon village commons as well as good cultivable lands. Major movements against plantations flared up across India in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The now famous Chipko movement in the Garhwal Himalayas started as a people's protest against clear-felling of hill forests for commercial interest. (16) The 'Jangal Katai' (cut forests) Movement in the tribal areas (today's Jharkhand) of erstwhile Bihar came up as a response against the forest department's efforts to raise commercially valuable Teak monocultures in natural Sal forests. (17) Peasants of Karnataka opposed a project of Eucalyptus plantations in the village commons by a forest department backed private company. (18) And the *adivasis* (indigenous people) of Bastar in the undivided village of Madhya Pradesh put up a strong resistance against a World Bank-funded plantation of exotic blue pines. (19)

More plantations, more attacks on community rights

Undeterred by the legacy of the popular resistance against plantations, the Indian government continues to promote huge plantation programmes. While its flagship Green India Mission (GIM) has a target of raising 5 million hectares of new plantations for 2024, the government promises to spend more than 15 billion US dollars in the coming years for 'afforestation' purposes. A major part of the money would come from the Compensatory Afforestation Fund, pre-

viously known as CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Authority), expressly after a new legislation called Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act has been enacted in 2016 (See article in 217 WRM Bulletin, August 2015). Another contested scheme of leasing out 40 per cent of identified 'degraded forests' to private corporations for raising plantations is in the pipeline.

Because the government agencies responsible for carrying out the afforestation programmes do not clarify where the huge amount of land required for raising new plantations would come from, there is every reason to suspect that community lands—cultivable as well as pasture—would be encroached upon. Besides, in the name of restoring degraded forests and raising compensatory afforestation, community rights over forest commons would be violated. Sporadic incidents of land-grabs for plantations have already been reported from Odisha, Chattisgarh, Telengana and Andhra Pradesh. In Pidkia village in the Kandhamal district of Odisha, for instance, land for which title has been issued to communities under the Forest Rights Act has been fenced off. (20) In other areas, *podu* (swidden cultivation) lands have been taken over and forests have been cleared. (21) In Chattisgarh, village farmlands are being filled up with plantations of Eucalyptus and Teak. (22) In Telengana and Andhra Pradesh, village commons, *podu* lands and agricultural areas have all been enclosed for raising plantations that are supposed to compensate the loss of forest lands by the controversial Polavaram dam project (23). Apart from the state-run plantation programmes, big private players such as ITC (Indian Tobacco Company) and JK Paper Limited (24) have virtually taken over hundreds of thousands of hectares of agricultural lands in Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Odisha and Chattisgarh for raising plantations of mainly Eucalyptus (25).

Community access and control over forests are being undermined in many ways. Though the new Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act is yet to come into force and its rules have not been framed, money from this and the Green India Mission are flowing to the state forest departments. Defying the mandate of Green India Mission, its funds are going to the Joint Forest Management Committees set up by the forest department, and not community institutions such as *Gram Sabhas* (26).

As the attacks upon communities and their forests and village commons escalate, it is expected that the resistance will also grow correspondingly stronger. As in the past, the *adivasis* and other poor and landless people in India will not allow the new green invasion to take root.

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Argentina: New law promotes tree plantations in Cordoba Province

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Located in the central region of Argentina, Cordoba is one of the five largest provinces in the country. Between 1904 and 2004, it lost 95 percent of its native forest, mainly as a result of the expansion of large-scale agriculture. Its annual deforestation rates are among the highest in the world, bringing serious consequences for the environment, health and food sovereignty of the population, according to researchers at the National University of Cordoba (1).

Deforestation in Cordoba has continued over the last decade, and today only three percent of its forest remains, according to data from the Paraguayan NGO, Guyra (2). As a consequence of the destruction of the forest, serious flooding has occurred in recent years in both the central and southern parts of the state.

In this context, the Government and Legislature of Cordoba decided to create the Provincial Agroforestry Plan (3), a law that promotes exotic tree plantations and the development of the forestry industry. In August 2017, they announced that they aim to reforest 150,000 hectares over the next ten years.

Cordoba's Agroforestry Plan is part of agribusiness's ongoing encroachment onto native forests and farming and indigenous lands in Argentina. The serious consequences of this extractive model have become more acute in the last 20 years, with the displacement of rural communities to poor urban neighborhoods, the increase in diseases caused by agrochemicals, floods caused by changes in land use, fires, and the loss of food sovereignty.
This new law was presented by authorities as a solution to environmental and social problems. However, the Provincial Native Forest Defense Coordinator—which brings together over 80 civil society, peasant and indigenous organizations from the province—opposed the law. Its members understood that this initiative is a false solution to the problem of deforestation, and only seeks to promote business for industrial plantations.

"It is an economic instrument to encourage the installation of pine and eucalyptus plantations, through which the State subsidizes the planting of these exotic species (…) and benefits agribusiness economic groups," the Coordinator stated in a public letter (4). "A law in the environmental sector must be designed to protect the environment. And pine and eucalyptus monoculture is not the way to achieve that objective," they asserted.

The law mandates that farmers plant trees on at least two percent of their farmland over the next ten years. However, it gives landowners the choice of not planting trees on their property, and instead buying a "share" of a plantation in what will be called "aggregated forests." These

"aggregated forests" are plantations that will pool the mandatory area percentages that producers in the same region must meet.

The Government argues that this is an environmental protection policy because, it claims, tree plantations will regulate water levels, help soil conservation and capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. However, at least three central issues have not been clearly communicated to the public:

Promotion of monoculture plantations: The State of Cordoba makes no distinction between a rural producer planting native species on a small scale in order to regenerate the forest, and developing commercial plantations of exotic species—with all the impacts the latter entails.

Impacts of tree plantations: Industrial tree plantations exhaust the groundwater, deteriorate soils and cause damages to health and the environment, due to the use of agrotoxins. Furthermore, they contribute to greenhouse gas emissions because of the carbon dioxide released when trees are cut down. This is compounded by the increased risk of fires, which are already a serious problem in mountainous areas of Cordoba.

Subsidies (and thus greater benefits) to those who have deforested: Through tax exemptions and non-refundable contributions, the State will subsidize the reforestation of fields, without taking into account whether their owners logged illegally years ago. In Argentina, these benefits have existed since 1999, through the Cultivated Forest Investment Act (5). In May 2017, the national government announced it will extend these benefits until 2030, in order to expand the country's plantations by 800,000 hectares, according to the local press (6). According to official data, there are 1.2 million hectares planted with commercial monocultures in Argentina today—mainly conifers and eucalyptus trees (7).

The wolf guarding the sheep

The implementing authority for Cordoba's Agroforestry Plan will be the state's Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, which presented the bill with the support of state agencies and agribusiness chambers of commerce. The Native Forest Defense Coordinator identifies these groups and entities as being responsible for the deforestation that has taken place in recent decades.

"The alleged enrichment of the forest that they say the agroforestry law promotes will be in the hands of the Ministry of Agriculture. Yet the Ministry of Agriculture allowed the province to be devastated by plantations and pesticide fumigations near peoples' homes," said Laura Dos Santos, a member of the Coordinator. "They are responsible for the flooding of the territ-

ory, which occurred because they destroyed the forest; now they are going to be in charge of the agroforestry plan."
Four months before approving the Plan, the Government of Cordoba had announced it signed a $1 million agreement with Misiones Province to buy technology to develop plantations (8). The company, Biofábrica Misiones S.A., which develops biotechnology for commercial forestry species, will provide these services to Cordoba (9).

Misiones is one of the provinces with the greatest timber production in Argentina. In recent decades, forestry companies in Misiones—mainly the Chilean company Celulosa Arauco—have overtaken farming and indigenous lands and territories in a dramatic way, through the installation of plantations (10).

Absence of a forest land-use plan

In addition to denouncing that the Agroforestry Plan is tailor-made for agribusiness companies, organizations defending the forest wonder where the trees will be planted, when there is no land-use map that accurately depicts the current situation.

Since 2007, Argentina has had a law mandating that provinces draw up a Native Forest Land-Use map, and that they update it every five years (11). In it, different regions with plant cover are identified and classified according to their level of protection. According to the law, this map must be drawn up through a participatory process that involves the whole society.

However, since December 2016, the Government of Cordoba has tried to move forward on updating its map and reforming the provincial forestry law without a citizen participation process (12). Moreover, the changes it proposed enabled more deforestation to take place.

This caused a huge social backlash. It was at that time that citizen assemblies defending health and the environment, together with peasant, indigenous and environmental groups, organized to form the Native Forest Defense Coordinator. They began to share information and raise awareness among the population. As a result, in December 2016, and in March and June 2017, mass marches took place in the state capital, forcing the Government back off on its attempts to push through a land-use plan without citizen participation.

Unable to continue with the forest law reforms, the provincial government decided to expedite sanctioning of the Agroforestry Plan. The presentation of the bill and the political agreement reached in the Legislature was so swift, that there was no time for organizations to carry out the same information and awareness-raising process they had done so months earlier.
Nonetheless, due to popular pressure, some lawmakers proposed a change in the concept of "native forest enrichment." The original text of the project spoke of enriching forest with "nat-

ive or exotic forest species of high commercial value." The modified text established that this could only be done with native plants.

Furthermore, an article was included that forces the regulating authority to develop and maintain an updated list of tree species recommended for each region, and a list of prohibited invasive exotic species. This list has yet to be distributed.

On the path of struggle

The prompt formation of the Native Forest Defense Coordinator in late 2016, in the face of the new threat, showed once again that it is Cordoba's organized society that defends the forest from the onslaught of extractive, State-endorsed companies.

The speed which this organization took place reflects years of experience with struggle and resistance in the state of Cordoba. Among the most recent examples are the historic triumph of the community of Malvinas Argentinas, which in 2016—after four years of resistance—prevented multinational Monsanto from installing one of the largest corn seed factories in Latin America. Additionally, there have been struggles against fumigation, mining and real estate development in the forest.

With experience, and bolstered by the victories achieved, organizations in Cordoba are determined to continue defending the three percent of forest that is still standing.

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About WRM

The World Rainforest Movement (WRM) is an international organization that, through its work on forest and plantation related issues, contributes to achieving the respect of local peoples' rights over their forests and territories. WRM is part of a global movement for social change that aims at ensuring social and environmental justice.

The WRM distributes an electronic bulletin in English, Spanish, French and Portuguese, to serve as an information dissemination tool of local struggles and on global processes which may affect local forests and peoples. The WRM also disseminates relevant information and documentation through its web site in four languages English, Spanish, French and Portuguese. Besides, WRM has produced a number of other written and audiovisual materials, all free for download at this webpage.

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