



Struggles for land, forests and food sovereignty



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This bulletin has articles written by the Synaparcam (National Association of Peasant and River Populations of Cameroon (Synaparcam, for its acronym in French) and Earthsight UK. Likewise, members of the WRM international secretariat share their experiences and learning during field visits with local organizations in Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil; in Bali, Indonesia; in Uruguay; in Kwilu, Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Acre, Brazil.

Struggles for land, forests and food sovereignty

Our Viewpoint **Peasant communities and those dependent on the forests** **united in struggle**



Lao PDR. Ph: Focus on the Global South/Anthony Gueguen

On 17 April 1996, 19 peasants were murdered. All of them were members of the Landless Movement in the Brazilian state of Pará who were taking part in a land rights protest. As a result of this incident, La Vía Campesina - the largest movement of peasants from all over the world— established the date as **the International Day of Peasant Struggle**. This is a day to remember, emphasize and mobilize together against **the persecution and violence that peasants suffer on a daily basis all over the world as a result of the neoliberal policies of the dominant economic system**.

Every year, WRM unites in solidarity with struggles for land, livelihoods and subsistence, and people's autonomy.

Peasant struggles are intimately related to the struggles of forest-dependent communities. **It's also frequently the case that peasant communities depend on forests, and forest-dependent communities are, at the same time, peasant communities**. These communities live, reproduce and maintain their culture and food sovereignty thanks to their lands, forests and habitat.

Another aspect that links these communities is the threats they constantly face due to neoliberal policies that seek to **concentrate ownership of land and forests for the benefit of a few** - be they transnational corporations, government agencies, tycoons or conservation organizations, with the so-called forest carbon projects (REDD +) or 'compensation' projects in general. Land grabbing continues to expand mainly in the Global south, accompanied by intense oppression, criminalization and violence.

In this bulletin we present an article written by the National Association of Peasants and Local People of **Cameroon** (Synaparcam, for its French acronym) that details how the Socapalm palm oil plantation company is trying to extend certification with the sole purpose of generating greater profits. Socapalm has been repeatedly reported for its disastrous impact on forests, the environment and local communities. Another article highlights how a new trend and strategy in the expansion of palm oil plantations involves launching programs that claim they will improve the production of food crops. This led to a delegation from the largest peasant confederation of the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, the COPACO-PRP, together with WRM, to find out more about the experience of peasant families and the PPAKIN program in the province of Kwilu, a region that since colonial times has a history of dispossession, struggle, deforestation, land grabbing and resistance.

This edition of our bulletin also includes an article that highlights a tactic that has been used by logging and plantation companies **in the forests of the Congo Basin**. The most prominent logging companies in the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic have links to the plantation projects that cause the forests to be cut down. Moreover, plantation companies that have problems financing their operations are using timber extraction as a way to raise investment capital.

The case of the city of Três Lagoas, in **the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul** also demonstrates the strong influence that plantation and pulp companies can exert on populations, with the main aim of neutralizing resistance. Taking advantage of the absence of the State, the companies have managed to expand operations in these territories with the introduction of 'social projects' that make families dependent on their presence. While from **Uruguay**, another article warns us about the latent threat of the installation of a third mega pulp mill in that country, in this case belonging to the Finnish company UPM.

From **Acre, Brazil**, we present the story of a community that is part of a 40,000-hectare forest carbon project or REDD+ and their difficult struggle for access to and tenure of land, especially when the rubber tappers community that has lived there for generations, doesn't have the necessary legal documents. The project, for its part, has already sold numerous carbon credits and, to date, only provided the local community with dental kits and a visit to the dentist.

Communities of peasants and those who are dependent on the forests are rooted to their lands, forests and habitats. And it is they who resist efforts to concentrate more and more land. Their resistance involves protecting their lands and forests as well as their ways of conceiving and relating to the world around them. These other ways of being converge stories and knowledge that originated countless generations ago.

This fight for resistance and defense of life is also reflected in an article about the harmful advance of the agricultural industry and mega-tourism in **Bali, Indonesia**, where the communal grassroots organization, which is intimately linked to conceptions of the world that prioritize a direct and sacred relationship with their habitats, has been able to resist companies that wish to strip the people of their land, forests and water sources.

Enjoy the reading!

Democratic Republic of Congo: Turning peasant lands once more into oil palm monocultures:



Ruines of Unilever's facilities in Lusanga, DRC. Ph: WRM.

The PPAKIN project promises to improve the livelihoods of peasants in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). But in the Kwilu province peasants are angry. The project made them paying for industrial oil palm seedlings, but without receiving any more support afterwards.

Over the past 10-15 years, **a renewed wave of industrial oil palm plantations expansion has been taking place in West and Central African countries**. This is mainly due to the interest of transnational companies to make profits from the increasing demand for palm oil on the global market. Large-scale plantations have been invading land belonging to communities, affecting food sovereignty, cultural or sacred spaces, increasing violence in particular towards women (1) and leading to many community protests.

A new trend in this expansion is the launch of programmes that declare predominantly that they will improve the production of food crops. While promoting oil palm plantations is part of these programmes, their promoters, which involve (inter) national public and private sectors, assure that these are not their main objective. Besides, they claim oil palms will be planted by peasants, not by the companies.

An example of this is the GRAINE program in Gabon. Promoted by multinational agribusiness company Olam and the Gabonese government, it claims to increase domestic food production to improve the peasant and country's food security. But in practice, the project mainly promotes industrial oil palm plantations on peasant's lands through so-called peasant 'cooperatives'. (2)

Concerned with this new trend, a delegation of the Democratic Republic of Congo's largest Peasant Confederation, COPACO-PRP (*Confédération paysanne du Congo-Principal Regroupement Paysan*), and WRM, decided to visit a similar programme in the province of Kwilu in February 2018, about 500 kilometres east of the capital Kinshasa. COPACO and WRM wanted to learn about the situation of the peasants affected by **a programme called**

PAPAKIN, which stands (in French) for “Support programme for Kinshasa’s food supply and vegetable garden products centres”. The general objective of the program is to “contribute in a sustainable way to improving food security and income of peasant producers” (3). The project, which took off in 2014, is carried out by the DRC government and funded by FIDA (the International Fund for Agricultural Development of the UN) for a period of 10 years, with a total estimated investment of 115 million US dollars. (4)

The peasant families receiving us (5) told us that **they received from PAPAKIN so-called ‘improved’ Tenera oil palm seedlings, together with chemical fertilizers** in February 2017. They had to plant the seedlings as a monoculture in about 4-5 hectares, a considerable area for peasant agriculture in DRC. The technicians of the project told them that a specific dose of fertilizers should be applied with each planted seedling. In order to be part of the program, **peasants had to pay an admission fee** of 15,000 Congolese francs – about 9 US dollars – a considerable amount for DRC. Some also mentioned they had signed an agreement, a “*protocole d’accord*”. We got no access to that contract.

The peasants emphasized that they were promised to receive financial support to maintain the oil palm plantations during the 5-6 years before the oil palm tree started to produce. But until now, **they have not received any support at all**. They are angry about that and feel betrayed by the project. Moreover, **maintaining about 4-5 hectares of oil palm, with 280 oil palm plants per hectare, requires a lot of labour**.

One peasant showed us how he tries to face this situation by planting manioc in the middle of the oil palm monoculture, in an attempt to get some income and food from the area that before was covered by food crops. However, another peasant family, concerned about the chemical fertilizers they were obliged to apply, decided not to plant any other crop between the oil palms. In the experience of COPACO members, chemical inputs negatively affect the soil and their food crops. Therefore they cultivate their main food crops, like manioc and traditional maize as well as other vegetables, without any chemical inputs. One peasant stated: “chemical fertilizers do not let the other crops grow properly”.

A region marked historically by oil palm

Since immemorial times, the province of Kwilu is covered with vast ‘wild’ oil palm plantations, extremely important and with multiple uses for the local communities. Kwilu has been historically the biggest palm oil producer of the country. (6)

Around 1910, the UK soap producing company, Lever brothers, looking for cheap vegetable oil, discovered this natural treasure. They got a concession from the colonial government and set up a plantation company called ‘*Huileries du Congo Belge*’ (HCB), which was renamed after independence into ‘*Plantations Lever au Congo*’ (PLC), and in the period of ex-President Mobutu into ‘*Plantations Lever du Zaïre*’ (PLZ). An older peasant told us that **after HCB got its concession, it started to ‘buy up’ access to the natural oil palm plantations in the district of Lusanga, paying the local land chiefs one sack of salt to secure access to 100 hectares**. The company started to produce seedlings from natural oil palms and planted these in lines in order to increase production, creating semi-intensive plantations. Several other Belgian and Portuguese businessmen followed the Lever Brothers example and settled to profit from this natural palm oil.

Workers were recruited by force from other regions and heavily exploited for doing the risky work of harvesting the palm fruits. They got accommodated in worker camps in

Lusanga - at the time called Leverville -, where the company set up its palm oil mill facilities. Following the economic crisis of 1929, with workers' payments being reduced, the town of Kikwit became the area of the biggest uprising against the Belgian colonial regime in Congo in 1931. (7) It resulted in a violent repression with hundreds of people killed. One older peasant tells his family had only survived keeping hidden in the bush.

When Mobutu came in power in 1965, decades of economic crises and civil wars started and the company abandoned Lusanga, including its oil palm mill facilities and the plantations. The company nevertheless kept plantations in other regions, and sold part of them in 2009 to the Canadian company FERONIA, where for years the communities have been struggling to get their lands back, stolen since the colonial period. (8)

Remember the past to build the future?

What happened with the Lever Brothers? In 1930, with their very profitable business in the colonial Congo, they merged with the Dutch Margarine Unie company, and created UNILEVER. This UK-Dutch company producing consumption goods grew out to become one of the biggest global multinationals with an annual profit of billions of dollars. The historical description on its website of the 'successful' company record seems to have **carefully excluded the story of abuses and violence against the Congolese people.**

Nowadays, in spite of its public discourse, **the PPAKIN project seems to intend to revive the past in the same Kwilu province, turning peasant lands once more into oil palm monocultures.** Its financial support tends to push in the same direction: UN-FIDA has been promoting the new wave of industrial oil palm expansion in Africa, in close collaboration with African governments, the World Bank and the private sector.

And what has happened with Lusanga and the peasants after UNILEVER left during the Mobutu period? The company's installations have turned into ruins. The town, nowadays with about 15,000 inhabitants, lacks basic services like water and electricity supply. Peasants took over the old UNILEVER plantations. Mainly men specialized in producing at a small-scale and with artisanal equipments are harvesting palm oil for the domestic market. They are looking for ways to organize and improve their production, as palm oil is key to their culture and can enable them with some income.

Peasants organizing to build a different future

Peasant organisations like COPACO alert for the threat of expanding oil palm monocultures and other crops, due to their social, cultural and environmental impacts. They stress that **peasants must maintain the control over the lands they depend on.** The suggested 'integration' of peasants with the agribusiness sector however, such as the PPAKIN programme, puts this control over their lands at risk. COPACO defends a diversified production system based on the control over lands to secure food sovereignty for present and future generations. The principles of agroecology, which radically oppose the implementation of monocultures depending on chemical inputs, are fundamental.

Nowadays in Kikwit you can still find the fine red palm oil on the market for sale, which is produced by women and is the one they prefer for cooking their meals. In their experience, it is impossible to produce this high-quality oil from the improved seedlings that the PPAKIN project distributes. **The push of the PPAKIN project is only to attract private companies to invest and control oil palm production.** This can become a serious

threat for the traditional palm oil, still under the control of peasants and with multiple uses very much linked with their daily life and needs.

An interesting comment of the peasants we talked with is that the natural oil palm spreads easily by itself. Its natural non-chemical nature facilitates its spread with the help of animals and birds.

Final remarks

If the PPAKIN project succeeds in attracting private sector investment to ‘rehabilitate’ the palm oil mill facilities in Lusanga, it will also ‘rehabilitate’ the same logic as before: **grabbing land and exploiting people/labour for private profit, with power concentrated in the hands of state-supported private companies.** Again, peasant communities play the essential role of producing the raw material for the palm oil business at the lowest possible cost. But under such logic, peasants producing oil palm but unable to fulfil the contract with the private company run the risk to lose their lands.

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(1) WRM Bulletin 236, March 2018, Women, tree plantations and violence: Building resistances, <http://wrm.org.uy/bulletins/women-tree-plantations-and-violence-building-resistances-bulletin-issue-236-march-2018/>

(2) The seeds of despair: Communities lose their land and water sources due to Olam’s agribusiness in Gabon, WRM Bulletin 231, June 2017, <http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/the-seed-of-despair-communities-lose-their-land-and-water-sources-due-to-olams-agribusiness-in-gabon/>

(3) FIDA, *Programme PPAKIN, document de conception de programme*, 2013.

(4) PPAKIN: *Une solution pour contribuer a la securité alimentaire*, Forum Des As, <http://www.forumdesas.org/spip.php?article581>

(5) When we arrived in Kikwit, we found out that our visit was announced on a local radio station the day before we arrived. Coincidentally, the cooperative set up as part of the PPAKIN project activities in Kikwit refused to receive us. We found out that the peasants who are part of the project had received instructions that same day not to talk with us. Nevertheless, we were still able to visit several peasants who participate in the project and who shared with us their experiences.

(6) Oil palm in Africa: Past, present and future scenarios – 2013 update, WRM, http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/oil_palm_in_africa/

(7) *RDC: a Lusanga, les fantomes d’Unilever au Congo*, 2017, JeuneAfrica, <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/depeches/433972/economie/rdc-a-lusanga-fantomes-dunilever-congo-zaire/>

(8) Land conflicts and shady finances plague DR Congo palm oil company backed by development funds, 2016, <http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/land-conflicts-and-shady-finances-plague-dr-congo-palm-oil-company-backed-by-development-funds/>

Cameroon: Local people respond to Socapalm's ISO 14001: 2004 Certification



Cameroon. Ph: Synaparcam.

Socapalm was established in 1968 by the Cameroonian government and was privatized in the year 2000. **It is controlled by SOCFIN, a multinational agro-industrial group that specializes in palm oil and rubber tree plantations.** SOCFIN is controlled by Belgian businessman Hubert Fabri and Frenchman Vincent Bolloré. The group has financial and operational companies in Belgium, Luxembourg and Switzerland, which manage plantations in around a dozen African and Asian countries. **The group's aggressive expansion policy has led to land grabbing practices,** the impacts of which have provoked numerous reactions from villagers. **With the arrival of the plantations in Cameroon in 1968, large areas of forest were cleared and replaced with monocultures of oil palm. This also reduced the forests that had been used by local populations for harvesting and hunting activities (1).**

Communities located near the agro-industrial plantations of Socapalm (a subsidiary of SOCFIN Bolloré in Cameroon) are concerned about the way in which the company's activities **have polluted their environment.**

They have continuously denounced an environmental management system that exposes them to **serious diseases and a host of other problems.**

In Central Africa, many companies have received ISO 14001 certification, which deals with the protection of the environment where the company carries out its activities. **Socapalm's ISO 14001 certification expired in May 2017. Prior to that date, Socapalm hired a consulting firm to carry out an environmental impact study so as to renew said certification.** We oppose the renewal because of the way in which Socapalm pollutes our environment, added to the legal work carried out by the consultancy in question.

The inhabitants of six Socapalm plantations have reported blatant cases of non-compliance with the requirements of ISO 14001: 2004 in terms of the general principles of environmental protection, the legal and regulatory requirements of the Republic of Cameroon, and also the agreements between the Cameroonian State and Socapalm.

Water sources used by local people for cleaning and consumption have been **contaminated by fertilizers and chemicals** that are washed away in runoff after the rains. Residues that accumulate in the lagoons also enter these water courses which, **without proper treatment, supply the neighboring villages**. Beetles that originate in the oil extraction plant enter the plantation, leading to **the proliferation of flies, added to which is the nauseating stench coming from the lagoons**. Furthermore, **the air is filled with ash smoke released by Socapalm factories**. The validity of the ISO certification is conditioned to the *continuous and satisfactory operation of the Socapalm management system*.

Article 29 of the Framework Law on Environmental Management and Article 5 of Law No. 98/005 of April 14, 1998, which deals with the water regime, prohibit such practices. The pollution of the environments inhabited by communities living downstream leads to an exponential increase in the number of victims of waterborne diseases. Fecal matter from septic tanks is discharged into non-functional lagoons or watercourses. Each year, Socapalm dumps the contents of septic tanks from the toilets used by plantation workers into the lagoons and some of the waterways instead of providing their own treatment plants for such wastewater. This is a flagrant violation of Decree No. 2001/165 / PM issued on May 8, 2001, which specifies the methods for the protection of surface and groundwater from pollution.

Furthermore, fertilizer bags are used to collect loose or fallen fruit. During the harvesting of palm nut clusters, some fruits fall to the ground. So as not to lose these, **Socapalm asks young children and women to collect them in bags contaminated by dangerous toxic chemicals** (pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides), thus exposing them to illnesses caused by these products and contaminating a large part of the harvest. This is a violation of the regulations established in Law No. 2003/003 of April 21, 2003 regarding phytosanitary protection, which in Article 19 and those that follow advocates specific treatment for such hazardous waste.

Community concerns have not been taken into account. We, the inhabitants of the areas surrounding the plantations and the main victims of the failures mentioned above, have consistently reported these problems and many similar issues directly with Socapalm. However, the company has never attempted to provide lasting solutions. Furthermore, they have not complied with Article 8, paragraph 1 and following on the transfer agreement of 90% of the shares that are the property of the State in terms of Socapalm's assets, signed on June 30, 2000.

The only thing that matters to Socapalm is generating more profits with impunity and the help of ISO certification, which it certainly doesn't merit. However, according to the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992), "Human beings are at the center of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature."

Synaparcam (National Association of Peasant and River Populations - Synergie Nationale des Paysans Et Riverains du Cameroun)

(1) SYNAPARCAM, Mobilisations des paysans a travers le Cameroun (Mobilizations of farmers throughout Cameroon), https://www.asso-sherpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016_06_01_dossier-de-presse-synarcam.pdf

Congo Basin: The coming storm



Ph: Earthsight

This article is based on a recent Earthsight publication: "The Coming Storm", March 2018. The publication with all the references can be found in English:

https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/624187_3ad671d82fe74cf98a8a3a662d463521.pdf

And French: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/624187_c72f6f1f3119453b8c17a32e7ca83f46.pdf

The Congo Basin holds one of the three last great tracts of rainforest in the world, providing a livelihood to more than 75 million people. Though much has been degraded by logging, most of Central Africa's forests remain standing. But a storm has gathered.

The NGO Earthsight monitored throughout 2017 the development of oil palm and rubber plantations in the Congo basin, with a particular focus on Republic of Congo and DR Congo. Findings show that while unfavourable global economic conditions have led many projects to be slowed or cancelled, industrial plantations continue to pose a huge threat to the region's forests and people. **There is little to prevent a rapid acceleration of the forest destruction once commodity prices rise.**

During the late 2000s, palm oil and rubber prices rose dramatically, leading to a rush of investment into the Congo Basin, with huge new plantations being announced every few weeks. By 2013, deals had been signed covering half a million hectares for oil palm alone, with 1.1 million more hectares of projects under negotiation. The single most advanced projects in Cameroon, Republic of Congo and Gabon were forecast to increase the deforestation rates in those countries by 14, 48 and 140 per cent respectively. Fortunately for the region's forests, palm oil and rubber prices crashed in late 2011 and remain well below their peak. Many projects have made little progress due to a lack of finance. Others were quietly cancelled. **The plantations that have made the most progress have been those with the biggest backers, including overseas governments.**

The most rapid development has been in Gabon, where Singaporean agro-commodity giant **Olam** is developing massive palm oil and rubber plantations. (1) Satellite images reveal that the company **has cleared some 35,000 hectares of forest** during the last six years. In February 2017, after a high-profile exposé of its continued destruction, Olam

agreed to suspend further clearing for a year. The commitment has now been extended to January 2019.

The second largest destroyer is also government-backed. **Sudcam, a subsidiary of the giant Chinese state-owned oil and chemical conglomerate Sinochem, has cleared almost 10,000 hectares in Cameroon.** The project is directly adjacent to the Dja Faunal Reserve, a World Heritage Site. A 2012 UNESCO report cited the threat to the reserve posed by the rubber plantations. Local inhabitants allege that the plantation has dispossessed them of their lands, and that government authorities have reacted to their protests with threats and intimidation. Latest satellite images show that the rate of clearing in this area accelerated during 2017.

Logging companies diving into the plantations industry and vice versa

The largest and most notorious logging firms in Republic of Congo, DR Congo and Central African Republic are connected in some way with plantation projects clearing forests. **Having a long history of flouting the law and getting away with it, logging companies are now taking that experience to the tree plantations sector.**

Plantation firms struggling to finance their operations are in many cases also turning to timber as a source of cash. This is especially true in the Republic of Congo, which is home to by far the largest area of forest under imminent threat from industrial plantation development.

Republic of Congo: plantation concessions for logging

On paper, the government of the Republic of Congo is doing a lot to protect forests. It has ratified more than a dozen different environmental treaties and conventions. It signed in 2010 a deal with the EU that aims to ensure that all timber imported into Europe from Congo is legally sourced (FLEGT-VPA). It also signed the 'Marrakesh Agreement' in 2016, a promise to promote a palm oil sector that "secures the long term survival of ... tropical forests". However, in reality, through the government's actions and deliberate inactions, it is directly undermining and contradicting these treaties and agreements.

Between 2008 and 2012, well **over half a million hectares of new oil palm and rubber concessions were granted. Almost all of the land issued was forested.** The government has never published the contracts, maps or permits for any of them. All have been found by the Independent Observer of Forest Law Enforcement to be logging or clearing forest illegally. None of the companies involved has carried out the legally required Social and Environmental Impact Assessment, nor obtained the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) from customary landholders.

One of these projects, run by **Atama Plantation SRL**, is the largest lease for a plantation ever issued in the region. In 2010, the company **got control of 470,000 hectares of forested land.** The company's owners were carefully concealed behind multiple layers of shell companies in secrecy jurisdictions. It later emerged that key players included Malaysian property magnate Robert Tan and Reuban Ratnasingam, the boss of one of Congo's largest and most notorious Malaysian-owned logging firms.

Already in late 2011, authorities uncovered evidence of multiple serious illegalities. Hundreds of trees had been cut without official reporting, records had been illegally

altered, and the company had cleared forest for more than two kilometres outside the boundaries of its existing permit. The company was also operating without a legally required Environmental Impact Assessment.

The clearing of land for the oil palm concession progressed extremely slowly through 2014 and 2015, before coming to a complete halt late that year. **Atama then began a new strategy to make money: turning itself into a logging firm.** Although Atama had been cutting, selling and processing wood since it first began operating, it could just about claim that this was a side-effect of its clearance of forest for oil palm. Now, any semblance of doing anything else was abandoned. From May 2016 onward, satellite images show the rapid spread of intensive and destructive selective felling of trees across a wide area of previously dense forest within the company's concession.

In February 2017, the government finally demanded a halt to the illegal logging. By that time, 5,000 hectares had been heavily impacted. Shortly afterwards, an investigation by a local NGO found the company continuing to process large volumes of high value timber. (2) According to their investigation, **Atama had also suppressed protests through intimidation.** In September 2017, the Forestry Department announced it had discovered that some 14,000 cubic metres of logs cut within Atama's concession had been smuggled out of the country. Large volumes of additional logs owned by Atama were seized at the port of Pointe Noire, and the company's export license suspended. But its oil palm license remained intact.

In December 2017, Robert Tan's Malaysian stock-exchange-listed firm Wah Seong, which had formally purchased Atama in 2012, quietly sold its stake for 6 million US dollars: 19 million less than it paid for it. The announcement was rushed out just prior to Christmas, and only named an intermediate shell company described as an investment holding firm. It was not mentioned that its main asset is a contract to develop a vast oil palm plantation in the Republic of Congo. This mysterious company, whose given address is a nominee firm operating out of a small office in a Kuala Lumpur suburb (and operating as a front for more than 250 companies), is now the largest shareholder in the Atama project.

Around the same time that logging activity ramped up at Atama's concession in the middle of 2016, **logging and clearing also began at an oil palm and rubber concession issued to a related company, Lexus Agric, in southern Congo.** Reported to be a Malaysian-owned subsidiary or sister firm of Atama, Lexus was issued a license for a 50,000 hectares concession in 2013, half of which was to be planted with oil palm and half with rubber.

No concession contracts or permits have been published, but a map obtained from the authorities reveals that most of the license area was also forested. The latest findings of the official Independent Monitor show that Lexus Agric is also operating illegally, while satellite images reveal **additional logging extending far beyond the legal boundaries of its deforestation permit.** By January 2018, the company had cut more than 20km of logging roads into the surrounding forest.

Lexus's Director General is Jeremie Issamou, who until 2015 was also Atama's Assistant Director General. In June 2016, while both Atama and Lexus were busy logging illegally, Issamou posted a picture of a giant log on the back of a truck on his Facebook page. A comment says (in French) "Be careful. Don't brag too much about your secondary activity."

Otherwise sanctions...” The person who made that comment was Simon Dieudonné Savou, the Director General of Agriculture in Republic of Congo.

DR Congo: clearing forests without permits

Illegal clearance of forests is occurring in DR Congo under the guise of projects to re-develop abandoned plantations. The lack of transparency is especially concerning given what was found behind a veil of secrecy.

Since 2002, authorisations have been required for clearing any area of forest bigger than two hectares. Yet to-date not a single such permit has been issued by the Forestry department to an agricultural firm. A former senior official at the Ministry of Environment affirmed that companies were being allowed to clear forest without permits or impact assessments and without paying taxes.

One large company appears to confirm the situation: **The Groupe Blattner Elwyn (GBE), a powerful conglomerate controlled by a US expatriate**. Elwyn Blattner built much of his family’s Congolese business empire during the reign of the kleptocratic Mobutu Sese Seko. GBE’s holdings include a bank, an airline and **DR Congo’s largest logging company: SIFORCO, which produces a quarter of all the timber harvested in the entire country**. The officially mandated Independent Observer of Forest Law Enforcement discovered that in 2013 one of SIFORCO’s concessions had cut 50 per cent more trees than authorised, which was worth millions of dollars.

GBE is also one of DR Congo’s largest agribusiness firms. It **controls more than 42,000 hectares for producing palm oil, rubber and cocoa**. Among its holdings are the *Compagnie de Commerce et Plantation (CCP)*, Lisafa and Ndeke plantations, which cover around 6,900 hectares. Earthsight, in partnership with the local NGO Group for Action to Save Man and the Environment (GASHE), uncovered evidence that CCP has **illegally converted an estimated 1,860 hectares of forest to oil palm plantations**. The company is also operating without the required Social Environmental Impact Assessment or Management Plan.

The NGOs also discovered that the company is **in conflict with local communities in all six-plantation areas**. Their findings also call into question the company’s rights over much of the land it occupies.

Stories of **broken promises and shattered livelihoods** are repeated in village after village. The Chief of Nkoy-Moke village, for example, claimed that CCP had converted 1,200 hectares of forest on their customary land between 2009 and 2011. A resident of another village, Nkoy-monene, complained that “the scarcity of non-timber forest products is causing malnutrition in our villages.” On its website, GBE claims to be supporting local communities by building and equipping schools, but many promised schools were never finished nor equipped. This should not come as too much of a surprise, since **GBE has a long history of failing to deliver on its obligations to communities in its logging concessions**.

Powerful agriculture ministries and other relevant authorities in these countries remain a total black box, and the international donors working with them have made little observable effort to crack it open. On the contrary, **the donor money continues to flow**.

Earthsight, info [at] earthsight.org.uk
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(1) For further information on Olam in Gabon, see “Seeds of despair: Communities lose their land and water sources due to Olam’s agribusiness in Gabon”, WRM Bulletin 231, June 2017, <http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/the-seed-of-despair-communities-lose-their-land-and-water-sources-due-to-olams-agribusiness-in-gabon/> or “Green’ oil palm plantations are a scam: The case of Olam”, WRM Bulletin 230, April-May 2017, <http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/green-oil-palm-plantations-are-a-scam-the-case-of-olam/>

(2) For further information on Atama, see “Republic of Congo: “Atama plantations is today a source of discontent for local communities and the entire nation”, WRM Bulletin 233, September 2017, <http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/republic-of-congo-atama-plantations-is-today-a-source-of-discontent-for-local-communities-and-the-entire-nation/>

Uruguay: the threat of a third mega pulp mill



Uruguav. Ph: WRM

With barely 17 million hectares of land and a population of just over three million, Uruguay is now home to two mega pulp mills. The mill run by Finnish company UPM (ex-Botnia) has an annual production of 1.3 million tons, and is located on the Uruguay River. The other, Montes del Plata, was set up by a consortium of the Swedish-Finnish company Stora-Enso and Chile's Arauco on the banks of Río de la Plata and produces 1.4 million tons per annum.

Work is now underway on a third such mill. In 2017, UPM signed a contract with the Uruguayan government to set up its second plant in the country. However, the final agreement for the project was subject to exorbitant conditions imposed by the multinational, all of which were accepted by the government.

This is nothing new. The Uruguayan government granted all of the concessions demanded by the aforementioned companies for the first two mills, including locations in a customs-free zone, tax exemption, customized investment protection agreements, and the signing of "secret" accords between the government and the companies. All of this took place in total secrecy, and civil society was only informed of the agreements once they had been signed.

The company imposes, the government disposes

In 2016, rumors began to circulate about a third mega pulp mill. It was to be installed in the center of the country and on another key source of fresh water, the Negro River, and with an investment of USD 4 billion. The factory would be located about 300 km. from the country's capital, Montevideo. And thus the story was repeated. The government acted in total secrecy, completely excluding any form of civil society participation and initiating negotiations with the Finnish UPM for the installation of its second mega pulp mill (UPM2) in Uruguay. (1)

Towards the end of 2017, the government signed a contract with the company, guaranteeing that UPM would have the necessary conditions to make its investment. The new factory would have an annual production capacity of up to 2.4 million tons of pulp. According to the contract, the government agreed to provide road and rail infrastructure to connect the pulp mill to the capital, as well as to provide installations in the port of Montevideo for the exclusive use of UPM. With a cost exceeding USD 1 billion, these works have been set as a precondition for the company to build its plant in Uruguay. Only after the government has made “considerable progress” towards its investment commitments will the company confirm whether or not to install its UPM2 factory. (2)

Secret negotiations and false promises

Once more with the conviction that a third pulp mill will represent the country’s “salvation,” the Uruguayan government has caved in to the pressure exerted by UPM. When the secret contract was finally made public, it soon became clear how nonsensical had been the negotiations.

Both the company and the government issued false promises to try to “tone down” the scandal of UPM’s demands. And it’s the same story as before, with identical promises to those made with respect to the two previous pulp mills: thousands and thousands of jobs, an increase in GDP, and development, development and more development.

In March 2018, the “Environmental Feasibility of Location” document was published. This is one of the steps taken prior to the presentation of an Environmental Impact Assessment. The document has provided the public access to more information about the proposed enterprise. (3)

Investment: According to a recent article published by MOVUS (Movement for a Sustainable Uruguay), the investment that the company promises to make if the government of Uruguay fulfills its part of the bargain would not be USD 4 billion as initially announced, but rather closer to USD 2.5 billion. However, the investment of the Uruguayan government would be around USD 1.85 billion, instead of the 1 billion dollars initially stated. (4)

Plantations: One of the main complaints from civil society groups about the installation of pulp mills is the subsequent expansion of monoculture plantations. Despite the hundreds of thousands of hectares of eucalyptus plantations that already exist in the country, the mills will always need more plantations and located within a close radius. Although the government has stated that it would not be necessary to increase the area of plantations, recently released documents show that if this project is completed, the area covered by eucalyptus monocultures will increase by almost 90 thousand hectares in the project’s zone of impact.

Employment: In the short term, promises of thousands of jobs during the construction phase of UPM2 might appear highly alluring. But after the first three years, and following the plant’s start-up, only around 500 jobs will be generated in the entire industrial complex, according to the company’s own data.

Income for the country: Given that its mill will be located in custom’s free zone, the company will not pay any type of tax. The cost for the company to use the zone will be around USD 2.1 million per annum. However, compared to the more than USD 1.8 billion

invested by the Uruguayan government in infrastructure and other subsidies, such a return is derisory.

Water: According to UPM, the company will contribute to improving the quality of the waters of the Negro River. The reality is that the mill will extract 125 million liters of river water each day, returning approximately 106.5 million liters of "treated effluents", according to the company. The factory's demand for water is equivalent to that of a city of 960 thousand inhabitants! (4) The waters of the Negro River are already saturated with substances such as phosphorus and nitrogen. No matter how many assurances are offered by the company that its effluents will contain levels of these and other chemicals below permitted levels, it will still be contributing to and worsening the existing eutrophication of the river (and an excessive increase of toxic algae).

Lessons that haven't been learnt

Today, Uruguay has more than one million hectares covered by monocultures of eucalyptus and pine trees, mostly belonging to a handful of transnational companies. UPM and Stora-Enso / Arauco own almost half a million hectares between them.

Industrial tree plantations, along with sojization, have contributed to an unprecedented transformation of the countryside: the prairies (Uruguay's main ecosystem) have been replaced by green deserts of soybeans and exotic trees. Land tenure has varied significantly, becoming highly concentrated in the hands of a few transnational corporations, while the exodus of the rural population has accelerated. According to the last census, less than 5% of the country's inhabitants now live in rural areas. The price of land multiplied 10 times between 2000 and 2014.

As time passes, promises of employment and development have proven to be false. Compared to the huge profits made by the companies, the local population only receives the measly hand-outs provided by "corporate social responsibility" programmes. While the department of Río Negro, where the first UPM factory was built, beginning operations in 2007, also has the highest unemployment rate in the country.

Despite the obvious and reported impacts, companies try to make their activities green by "preserving" some "islands" of native flora and fauna. To achieve this, they invest in conservation technicians and NGOs. However, outside these "islands of conservation," hundreds of thousands of hectares of countryside have been destroyed with the establishment of monocultures of trees over several continuous cutting cycles of 7 or 8 years each. Ample evidence can be found throughout the country of the negative impacts that industrial plantations have generated: decrease or total loss of water from streams and wells; negative impacts on native fauna and flora; the rupture of social and family life in rural areas, to name just a few.

However, the Uruguayan government continues to bind the country to new pulp megaprojects without discussing the industrial model of large-scale monocultures that these entail, nor the consequences for local populations and the country in general.

Such megaprojects promote inequalities, inequities and dependence on foreign capital. This consolidates an enclave economy in yet another country in the global South that supplies raw materials to industrialized nations, while the local population has to shoulder

the environmental costs and part of the project's economic investment. Is this the country we really want?

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(1) "What's the benefit to Uruguay of a third mega pulp mill?" <http://www.guayubira.org.uy/2017/05/que-ganaria-uruguay-con-una-tercera-planta-de-celulosa/>

(2) Contract between Uruguay and UPM

https://medios.presidencia.gub.uy/tav_portal/2017/noticias/NO_Y823/contrato_final.pdf

(3) Environmental Feasibility of Location of UPM2 https://www.dinama.gub.uy/oan/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/VAL_Planta-de-celulosa-Paso-de-los-Toros-.pdf

(4) "The unsustainable lightness of the UPM 2 pulp mill." <http://www.observatoriodelaguaenuruguay.com/la-insustentable-levedad-de-la-planta-upm-2/>

Indonesia: the resistance of the sacred in Bali to the "green revolution" and the tourism industry



Indonesia. Ph: WRM.

Of the more than 17 thousand islands that make up what is now known as Indonesia, Bali is a world tourism hotspot. The millions of people who visit each year come in search of its beaches, rice fields considered a world heritage site by UNESCO, and its famous Hindu temples. And it's no coincidence Bali is referred to as the Island of the Gods: one of its main attractions is the set of sacred practices that form part of daily life. However, what many don't hear about is the impact of tourism on the life of local communities.

Subaks under threat

The age-old irrigation system of *subaks* is an expression of community relations in Bali. Legally recognized as a simple mechanism of irrigation, *subaks* are **an ancient system of beliefs that guide the way people relate to each other and other spheres of life.**

Consequently, *subaks* are not only irrigation channels that provide water to flooded rice fields or for the cultivation of fruit and other foodstuffs. They also connect the elements that make water the religion of Bali: time, land, the air, the forests, the crops, dances, offerings, and temples. *Subaks* are part of the life experience of the communities and are managed by federations that are made up of leaders whose role is to observe them from an integrated perspective.

Threats to the *subaks*, however, have been building up over the last 50 years. In the 1970s, Suharto's dictatorship forcibly introduced "green revolution" packages in Indonesia: farmers were forced to use new "improved" rice seeds produced by corporations which required high levels of fertilizers and pesticides. Those who refused to use the seeds were imprisoned. As a result, the cultivation of Bali's traditional seeds declined, the water became polluted with agro chemicals, and families were made dependent on the farming supplies that they were forced to buy.

These traditional social systems had to contend with the imposition of a "modernized agriculture" and, almost simultaneously, Bali's new status as a tourist destination. Economic sectors began to covet their seas, land and forests, transforming what was a complex cultural and philosophical system into a commodity that could be sold as a tourist attraction.

Since then, mega-tourism has caused an exponential increase in the demand for water and an expanding construction sector (roads, hotels, resorts, retail), widely promoted by investors. Due to a lack of sanitation, much of the waste from local sewers is discharged directly into *subaks* that are distributed throughout the island. These are also used to supply water to the villages and to irrigate the rice fields, which are the center of reproduction of life in the communities. In Bali, there are 17 names for a grain of rice according to each stage from when it's planted to the dinner plate.

The rice fields in Jatiluwih, South of the Batu Karu volcano, have become a world-famous tourist attraction. Spanning over 2 thousand hectares, traditional Balinese seeds are cultivated in terraces of rice that meet the needs of local families. An integrated cultural system of 20 *subaks* is connected to the forest and to Lake Tambligan, all protected by a series of temples, the largest of which was built on top of a volcano. The carefully designed and flooded terraces are part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Its worldwide fame, however, attracts 160 thousand visitors each year, leaving communities in a dilemma: **what could be a source of income actually favors the appropriation of land and housing by outsiders as well as the reduction of available water for the rice fields, especially in the dry season.** While communities await resources from UNESCO, there is no regulation to prevent the land being bought up by investors, putting at risk the way of life of the communities, their subsistence and the world heritage site itself.

The Subaks fight back

In spite of the imposition of the "green revolution" and the appropriation of the area by tourist investors, **traditional agriculture provides continuity, helping to defend communal land ownership and to re-establish the relationship with the sacred.** In the Karangasem district of East Bali, 214 families have joined together to produce organic rice and other crops. The plan is to return to traditional Balinese rice seeds, which do not

require fertilizers and pesticides and last longer after harvest. As different *subaks* share the same source of water, families know that if they use chemical products, they would not just be contaminating their own community, rather **the whole system would be affected**.

"According to the ancient inhabitants, we must not take water just for ourselves, much less sell it. The same applies to farming. We borrow the water and then return it just as we found it. We make daily offerings to the water, and water will be provided as long as we respect it," explains Dwi Mardana, a farmer from the Peladung community located at the foot of the Agung volcano. The same local community prevented the French multinational food giant Aqua Danone from exploiting its water sources in 2010. Farming families unanimously voted to block the company from extracting the water to bottle and sell even though local leaders favored such extraction.

The sacred nature of water (treated not as a good that is retained nor a merchandise) prevailed over the promises of employment and money offered by the government and by Aqua Danone, which had agreed to hold a vote, confident that they would win the community support for their project. They were wrong. In the confrontation of opposing ways of conceiving the world, victory went to the importance for the sacred, rooted in the day-to-day life of the people, and representing an imprint of their identity. "Water is our religion and our way of life, so it's just not possible for someone to come here and disturb that," summed up Dwi.

Adat: community regulation

In Bali, communities have their own traditional systems of "community regulation" known as *adat*, which is based on customs passed down from generation to generation, and which go beyond State laws. The case of the resistance to the business plans of Aqua Danone in Peladung, demonstrates the strength that this community regulation can have, and is one of the examples of the contradiction between the logic of the State and that of the community.

To the south-west of the Batu Karu volcano, in the center of the island, Munduk, which dates back to the 8th century, is one of the four communities that protects Lake Tambligan, offering another demonstration of how "community regulations" can prevent the appropriation of life by the tourism industry. Surrounded by forests, the region is coveted by businessmen and loggers. However, any economic activity requires the permission of the local community.

In the 13th century, the community that lived on the shores of the lake decided to move to the foot of the mountain, leaving its old settlement surrounded by temples for protection. Here, as in other parts of the island, resistance is linked to the sacred: the community has its own project to protect Lake Tambligan, which is considered a source of life, and has therefore repeatedly fended off the incursions of the business sector.

In the ancient village of Tenganan, which is protected by mountains and symbols of Balinese resistance to successive invasions of the island, a strong manifestation of "community regulation" was able to impose limits on the expansion of the tourist industry and impose a moratorium on logging in over 900 hectares of forest. Although tourists have visited since the 1970s, the community, considered the oldest in Bali, has an internal code and decision-making system that, as in Munduk, have prevented businesses from gaining access to the area.

In Tenganan, the *adat* has a set of rules and sanctions that community members must follow to protect their culture and way of life, although they may decide to receive tourists and an income from tourism. Land, for example, cannot be sold and tourists are not allowed to stay in the community or take part in sacred ceremonies. The residents of the community themselves cannot take photos of rituals. Children go to the school that is located outside of the community, but they also participate in the educational process on internal regulations.

The case of Benoa Bay

Such resistance shows that **the tourist industry acts in a manner similar to the extraction sector, threatening the livelihoods of local communities, and co-opting local leaders and youth. The commercialization of land on the global market plays an important role in this process.**

A clear example of this is a large project in Benoa Bay, at the southern tip of the island, where Denpasar International Airport, the main tourist portal, is located. This is the only place in Bali where you can see both the sunrise and sunset over the sea. At the end of his term in office, the ex-president of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, signed a decree that converted a conservation area into a "reclamation" project. The current government of Joko Widodo has continued this initiative.

The project, which has the backing of the World Bank and a large local economic consortium led by tycoon Tomy Winata, Tirta Wahana Bali International, includes the construction of artificial islands interconnected by bridges for the location of resorts and other tourist ventures, as well as a Formula 1 racing circuit. Thousands of jobs have been promised. However, Benoa Bay is home to numerous fishing communities who are dependent on the sea and would be prevented from accessing their temples, lands and the bay, as well as their fishing boats. In addition, these communities live off the mangroves, which have been left out of the "reclamation" project.

Faced with the threat of losing community territory and the appropriation of lands, in addition to the destruction of the mangroves, **a huge resistance movement has formed in Bali against the bay project.** Consisting of island inhabitants, artists and activists, the ForBALI Balinese Against Reclamation Forum, has managed to delay the plans of the government and the private sector through protests, meetings with local leaders and demonstrations in front of public institutions.

Resistance in Bali thus consists of the coordination between the ForBALI movement, the strength of traditional "community regulations" or *adats*, and the experience of the sacred as related to the *subaks*, the forests and water. It is also due to small but emblematic actions: in order to hide the beauty of their rice fields, communities erected large billboard posters that prevent curious tourists from taking photographs of their daily activities on the plantations. The sacred continues to resist, opposing concepts of the world as represented by the "green revolution" and forms of tourism that transform everything into a business.

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Envira REDD+ project in Acre, Brazil: Gold certificate from carbon certifiers for empty promises



"Forestry headquarters" - Envira Amazonia Project. Ph: WRM

The 'Envira Amazonia Project' is one of three forest carbon (REDD+) offset ventures that the US-based company CarbonCo LLC is pursuing in the Brazilian state of Acre. The project area covers almost 40,000 hectares of Amazon rainforest, and is part of a massive 200,000 hectare property claimed by the company JR Agropecuária e Empreendimentos EIRELI. That claim, however, is disputed. **Rubber tapper families have been living on the land for generations** but most have been unable to obtain legal title documents that confirm their rights to the land. **The REDD+ project threatens the future of the community** because it imposes restrictions on the future use of the land and prevents reactivation of peasant farming plots abandoned in the last decade.

The main owner of the Brazilian company involved in the Envira Amazonia REDD+ project is Duarte Jose do Couto Neto. Do Couto Neto is involved in a number of enterprises (1), and was candidate for the ultra-right Prona party in Acre in the 1990s. As recently as September 2017, he expressed his support for the current presidential candidate of the ultra-right in Brazil, and the military dictatorship stating that he was longing for the military regime ("*Saudades e muita do regime militar*"). (2)

Like in most parts of the Brazilian Amazon, **land tenure within the project area is complicated and disputed**, but you would not know that from reading the project or certification documents: the land owner's claim to a massive 200,000 hectares is taken for granted and no disputes over land are mentioned. Nor do the auditors who approved the Climate, Community and Biodiversity (CCB) certificate question how one person, in this case, Duarte Jose do Couto Neto - was able to legally acquire such a vast expanse of privately held land in relative proximity to the country's border area with Bolivia and Peru. Rubber tappers have used the land for generations and therefore, have legal rights to the land they occupy. Yet, very few families hold land titles. **Approximately 10 rubber tapper-turned-peasant families hold land titles inside the almost 40,000 hectares that make up the Envira Amazonia REDD+ project. In addition, around 40 families live inside the surrounding area but outside the REDD+ project site.** According to

project documents, the REDD+ project claims to protect the entire 200,000 hectares and suggests these communities outside the project area also as beneficiaries but does not explain why or how they are involved or affected.

In 2015, the Envira Amazonia REDD+ project was certified under the Climate, Community and Biodiversity (CCB) standard by the Rainforest Alliance's Brazilian partner, Imaflora. The assessments for the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS – now called Verra) certification were carried out by Environmental Services Inc. (3) In 2016, the certifiers issued the first batch of carbon credits from the project, a second batch of carbon credits was issued in November 2017. (4) The VCS database shows that during 2016/2017 at least 750,000 carbon credits from the Envira Amazonia REDD+ project have been sold. (5)

Community unaware that the project is already selling carbon credits

When the World Rainforest Movement (WRM) visited families living within the almost 40,000 hectares of the Envira Amazonia REDD+ project site in March 2018, **community members were unaware that the project had been 'approved' and was selling carbon credits already.** Residents explained that many foreigners had been to the area in the previous years, but few had spoken to them and many did not seem to speak Portuguese. They had carried out studies and **one person had been visiting each family individually to convince them to support the carbon project.**

Most families had signed a form suggesting support for the project or had been photographed when receiving a dental kit. **This dental kit contained a small tube of toothpaste and a toothbrush,** and has been, along with the offer of a gratis visit to a dentist the only tangible benefit that community members have received to date.

(Empty) Promises the basis for issuance of CCB Gold Level certificate

While residents have not seen any tangible benefits beyond the dental kit and a one-off visit to the dentist, many promises were made when the project was presented to the families. Residents confirmed that the promises made are in line with those mentioned in the project document prepared for the CCB certification: "the landowners will also implement numerous activities to assist local communities and mitigate deforestation pressures such as: offering agricultural extension training courses; beginning patrols of potential deforestation sites in the early stages of the Project; granting land tenure to local communities; and establishing alternative economic activities including commercializing the collection of medicinal plants and açaí." (6)

Imaflora granted a 'Gold Level' CCB certificate to the Envira Amazonia REDD+ project in 2015 / 2016, based on the project developer's promises to the community. Yet, **none of these promises have been fulfilled.** As mentioned above, the project owners seem to not even have informed the community that the REDD+ project had passed the certification assessments and was already selling carbon credits. Advertising for the Envira Amazonia REDD+ project also highlights the benefits the project supposedly brings to the community. A carbonfund.org advert for the project, for example, claims that the community is benefitting from the REDD+ project: "Social projects and activities to mitigate deforestation pressures and benefit the local communities include, but are not limited to: agricultural extension training courses; boat patrols of potential deforestation sites; improving local schools and health clinics; and developing local infrastructure to collect, transport and sell locally-sourced açaí, medicinal plants and rubber." (7) Pictures of

children in front of the community school (which has not been operational for the last two years and is in a poor state) and a picture of a community meeting inside the school building are included to suggest a project that is beneficial for the local community.

Envira Amazonia REDD+: Restrictions, not benefits, the reality for families

While project owners and certification bodies create a virtual reality of the Envira Amazonia REDD+ project benefitting families in the project area, the reality for the community on the ground is similar to that faced by communities affected by the other two CarbonCO LLC REDD+ projects in Acre: the Purus and Valparaiso / Russas REDD+ projects. (8) **A large-scale land owner with questionable land title takes advantage of the insecure tenure situation and isolated location of the community and uses his position of power over the families to impose land use restrictions that are likely to accelerate a rural exodus.**

The Envira REDD+ project prohibits use of the forest by rubber tapper families outside the 150 hectares currently available to each of the families living inside the REDD+ project site. Residents are thus not allowed to reactivate recently abandoned plots that were used by rubber tapper families as late as the 1990s. This will force youth who have grown up in the area and wish to continue their parents' way of life as rubber tappers and peasant farmers to leave the land and migrate to the city where employment opportunities will be scarce. **Deforestation for cattle ranching continues to be pursued in the surrounding areas by large-scale land owners, yet rubber tapper and peasant families are denied the land** that has been used for generations for rubber tapping and peasant farming.

The virtual reality of a REDD+ project providing 'Gold Level' community benefits, that advertises on the carbonfund.org website and certification reports create is in sharp contrast to the reality of empty promises and future land use restrictions that characterize the Envira Amazonia REDD+ project on the ground.

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(1) A partial list of companies and properties in Acre and Mato Grosso that is apparently monitored as part of the REDD+ project certification (to prevent so-called leakage, i.e. the owner just moving cattle ranching to these other properties) is included in the certification documents. Several of the properties (e.g. Seringal Canada) listed form part of the massive 200,000 hectare land holding of which the REDD+ project is part. However, the list appears to be incomplete and not include activities in the Amazonas state which several residents of the area referred to. At least two companies that list do Couto Neto as Partner are not on the list: Santa Cruz Da Amazonia Empreendimentos Ltda and Start Up Da Amazonia Projetos De Exploracao Sustentavel Ltda Me.

(2) Comment Duarte Jose do Couto Neto to article 'General do exército bate forte no STF'
<https://www.blogdobg.com.br/general-do-exercito-bate-forte-no-stf/>

(3) Financial reports of the non-profit organisation Carbonfund.org show a payment of USD 136,802 in 2015 to Environmental Services Inc. The reports do not explain whether this was the cost of validation and verification of the Envira Amazonia REDD+ project to the VCS carbon standard. CarbonCo LLC is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the non-profit organisation Carbonfund.org. The Carbonfund.org Foundation 2016 annual report is available at https://carbonfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/CF_AR_2016.pdf ; documents filed for exemption from income tax are available at <https://carbonfund.org/about-us/>

4) See http://www.vcsprojectdatabase.org/#/project_details/1382 for the long list of documents linked to the Verra / VCS carbon and CCB certification documents.

(5) Link to VCS / Verra database: http://www.vcsprojectdatabase.org/#/vcus/p_1382

(6) Envira Amazonia project document prepared for CCB certification: http://verra.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CCB_IMP_REP_SUM_ENG_DRAFT_1382_01JAN2015_31DEC2015_V1.pdf

(7) Carbonfund.org advert for the Envira Amazonia REDD+ project: <https://carbonfund.org/2016/12/12/envira-amazonia-project-acre-brazil-submitted-ccbs-public-comment-period-2/>

(8) For information about the impacts of these projects on communities inside the REDD+ project sites, see the WRM publication 'Observations on a private REDD project in the state of Acre, Brazil' <http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/observations-on-a-private-redd-project-in-the-state-of-acre-brasil/> and C. Faustino & F. Furtado (2015): *Economia Verde, Povos das Florestas e Territórios: violações de direitos no estado do Acre* Bericht für die Plataforma DHESCA Brasil. http://www.plataformadh.org.br/files/2015/08/economia_verde_relatorio.pdf

Brazil: The cerrado and the city of Três Lagoas under the control of the paper industry



Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. Ph: WRM.

When we visited Três Lagoas in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul in Brazil, the presence of pulp and paper companies in every corner of the city was highly noticeable. Over the last few years, the Brazilian region has witnessed a huge expansion of monocultures of eucalyptus trees (1). They have taken over areas once occupied by other rural activities as well as the culture and image of the city, politics and social programs.

In this region, two companies have over 500 thousand hectares planted with eucalyptus and are representative of the economic dominance of this sector. Fibria, recently purchased by Suzano, has a total production capacity of 3.25 million tons of pulp per year just in the production plants of Três Lagoas. Eldorado, which was bought out in 2017 by Paper Excellence, produces around 1.7 million tons of pulp per year in the same city. Regardless of whether it's a transnational or domestically owned company, **this issue is about the expansion of a large-scale production model that only brings benefits to big companies and harms rural communities.**

Pulp companies moved into this region because they had identified advantageous and favorable conditions: the low cost of land, a lot of available land owned by just a few, tax incentives, flexible legislation, and the absence of well-coordinated and organized social movements. Above all, they identified the complicity of governments that, as part of a

'development' model, prioritize 'big investments' to the detriment of the inhabitants of agrarian reform settlements, peasants, indigenous peoples and other local communities.

WRM and representatives of the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul (**UFMS**) visited Três Lagoas and its region towards the end of 2017. We also went to see several settlements and rural communities, where we witnessed that companies enjoyed all the necessary conditions to successfully set up operations. As one local inhabitant stated: "If the land is profitable for the big ones, why are they going to use it for the little ones? If they could, they would hook us all up and throw us out of here."

In this article we will show how the notion of the public ends up being confused with that of the private, in a process that leads the local population to economically and symbolically depend on companies, creating the perspective that change is impossible in the present context.

Settlements: omission and dependence

In the region of Três Lagoas, eucalyptus monocultures have expanded on the old pastures of farms leased to pulp companies. These are settlements that had been part of the agrarian reform, and which with their plantations and livestock farms broke the monotony of a landscape full of tree plantations. For their part, **companies have expanded throughout these territories with 'development plans' that consist of social projects that have made inroads, given the absence of the State** in terms of the implementation of public policies that benefit the population.

Consequently families end up 'dependent' on the companies, either because they take part in social projects, ranging from teacher training to courses in agro-ecology and the distribution of seeds and farm supplies; or due to the fact that many local people end up working in the tree plantations to supplement their income.

"If someone says they live off the land it's just not true. The Incra (National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform) really didn't give us a thing; then the companies arrived and from then on they didn't help us anymore. We were here before the eucalyptus, and not in settlements but camping out. The struggle isn't going to fall back," one inhabitant told us.

The UFMS group calls this the process of "**privatization of agrarian reform,**" as companies implement projects that stand-in for 'public policies.' Thus the companies take control over such projects and consequently exert a form of control with respect to the inhabitants.

Social projects are one of the main tools of companies to meet two objectives: **neutralize the resistance of communities, and obtain forest certification that makes them appear to be committed to green and socially responsible initiatives.**

The silence about the impacts of the plantations is due to the fact that if the families living in the settlements or the local indigenous people make any complaints, they would lose access to social benefits and projects, which themselves should be rights guaranteed by the State.

Surrounded by eucalyptus plantations, local people also suffer from the use of agro-chemicals and animals attacking their crops, such as wild boar, tapir, macaws and toucans. In the communities visited, we were told stories that such animals attack their crops because they've lost their natural environment.

As one local inhabitant told us: **"The social function of the settlement has turned into feeding the wild animals."**

"We have a lot of problems to plant because of the beasts. After we plant corn the birds attack. And I saw a toucan eating the green squash. There's no more wild fruit. According to the companies, the banks of the streams have been preserved, but that's not true, there's nothing left for the beasties."

Another observation of the communities regarded the impact on waterways. After the arrival of extensive eucalyptus plantations, communities claim that water became scarce. "Before there was always water, but not anymore. The rivers and streams have dried up. My husband used to go fishing in lakes that no longer exist." The biome in the region is the *cerrado*, which we call the 'water tank' or 'upside down forest.' The deep roots of the trees interact with the water table, but with plantations this doesn't happen, rather the opposite: these trees consume huge quantities of water.

Expulsion from the countryside

Changes in land use due to eucalyptus plantations have caused many impacts: on people, the flora and fauna, the soil and water. Before the arrival of the pulp industry, the region was mostly occupied by livestock. However, and although such an agricultural system is also harmful, negative changes in social relations have now been observed in rural areas. According to testimonies, many families that lived on the old farmsteads were always able to plant their own crops and raise animals for meat and milk, whether one member had a working wage or not. But when they leased their farmsteads, families were forced to move to the city of Três Lagoas, where they need a wage to live and have to buy all their food.

"In the city we even need to buy the green papayas."

"There was more employment than there is now with the eucalyptus plantations. On the leased farmsteads they've even destroyed the houses. People were forced to migrate to look for work in other regions."

Consequently, the social fabric has been damaged. The people who left for the city almost never see their children due to their long working days and the distances they must travel each day from where they live to where they work: "We can't teach our children or watch them grow up; it just creates more poverty as people crowd into the outer sectors of the city."

This also has an impact on rural schools. There is a very large turnover in schools (in the district school of Arapua, there is a turnover of around 50 students per month), while many were closed due to the falling number of students. This was down to the mobility of workers and their families; for example, in the district of Garcias where a railway station already existed.

The student turnover makes the daily life of the teachers difficult and impacts teaching quality. "It's so sad to see our reality. Our school used to have a 100 percent pass rate to State universities; but just last year only two of our students went on to study in private programs," a teacher from Arapua told us.

Is it possible to resist?

The presence of the companies can be seen everywhere: in schools, in the media, in public activities. With its symbols and propaganda, a kind of 'eucalyptus culture' has been created. Popularly known as the "City of Waters," Três Lagoas has 'won' the title of "Pulp Capital of the World" due to the sector's growth, the transformation of the agricultural sector, industrialization and plantations of eucalyptus monocultures. (2)

If the arrival of the companies has 'driven' the economy, there are other negative impacts that are frequently not associated with their presence. These include the sexual exploitation of women and girls, along with numerous labor and infrastructure problems in the city and the countryside, which have been caught unprepared to receive the large number of people attracted by the promises of employment made by the industries.

At first glance, it would appear that 'everything is lost,' that the companies have taken total control of the countryside and the city. However, after talking with the farming communities, we felt that families are aware of this circumstance, but still try to take advantage of social projects in order to gain independence.

Despite the limited resources that some families receive from the companies (insignificant amounts that should in any case have been distributed by the government), they were able to produce food not only as a source of income, but also as an affirmation of their dignity. We view this as a form of resistance, albeit a silent one.

For its part, within the UFMS research is being undertaken that highlights criticisms of the model of large-scale tree monocultures, and which attempts to promote a discussion of this issue within the government and the population of the city regarding the impacts, including the promotion of debates and field visits. Moreover, UFMS has been promoting projects that support and encourage production by local people, such as the fairs held on the university campus and selling bags filled with food. What is at stake are two different projects regarding the present and the future for the city of Três Lagoas and the surrounding rural area.

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(1) See "Mato Grosso do Sul – a nova fronteira do eucalipto" (Mato Grosso do Sul - the new eucalyptus frontier) in <https://wrm.org.uy/pt/artigos-do-boletim-do-wrm/secao3/brasil-mato-grosso-do-sul-a-nova-fronteira-do-eucalipto/>

(2) <http://www.treslagoas.ms.gov.br/a-cidade/>

ACTION ALERTS

Demand Swedish Energy Agency to suspend future payments to Green Resources and cancel the deal for purchase of carbon credits!

The operations of Green Resources—a Norwegian industrial tree plantation and a carbon offsets company—have resulted in loss of lands, livelihoods and increased hunger for the local communities at Kachung and Bukaleba—its two sites in Uganda. Its only carbon credit buyer, the Swedish Energy Agency, suspended in 2014 a four million dollar deal until ten key grievances associated with the project were addressed. **As the Swedish Energy Agency reassesses whether to resume payments to Green Resources, join a petition from the Oakland Institute to demand it to suspend all future payments, as well as cancel its deal with Green Resources for the purchase of carbon credits in the future!** Send a letter to the Swedish Energy Agency here:

<https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/demand-swedish-energy-agency-cancel-deal-green-resources>

India: stop evictions from tiger reserves!

Hundreds of Baiga people rallied on March 2018 to oppose the authorities' attempts to evict them from the forests that they have lived in and managed since time immemorial. Joining forces from over 70 different villages, the protests were sparked by official efforts to evict two Baiga communities from a wildlife 'corridor'. The Baiga are particularly worried by two upcoming evictions, as both state authorities and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) promised that evictions would not take place in the 'corridor' areas, which run between the protected nature reserves. However, Baiga people report threats, intimidation and violence until they have no choice but to leave their homes. These evictions are illegal under Indian and international law. **Demand the Minister responsible to uphold the law and stop all evictions that don't have the free, prior and informed consent of the tribal communities concerned. You can send him an email here:**

<https://www.survivalinternational.org/emails/tigers>

RECOMMENDED

Who will feed us?

A report from the ETC Group compares the industrial food system with peasant farming. Industrial farming gets all the attention (and most of the land). It accounts for more than 80 per cent of the fossil fuel emissions and uses over 70 per cent of the water supply used in agriculture, but it actually produces only about 30 per cent of the world's food. On the contrary, it is a diverse network of small-scale producers who is feeding 70 per cent of the world, including the most hungry and marginalized people. Access the report in English and Spanish here: <http://www.etcgroup.org/whowillfeedus>

Finnish activists protest against Stora Enso and Veracel

In March 2018, activists from Friends of the Earth Finland and an association supporting landless peoples around the globe (Maattomien ystävät ry - in Finnish) organized a protest in Finland during the general meeting of the shareholders of the Stora Enso. That company and Brazil's Fibria are the owners of Veracel Celulose in Brazil. The protesters accused Veracel of illegally occupying land and promoting violence by evicting landless families from areas planted with eucalyptus monoculture plantations. Complaints have been made against Veracel since the company established operations in the extreme

south of the state of Bahia around 25 years ago. The company's history is marked by illegalities, environmental degradation and violence. Finnish researcher Markus Kroger, who recently visited the region, says the underlying problem is large-scale centralized production that needs vast production areas in the vicinity of a mega-pulp mill. This model negatively impacts the lives of thousands of people in the region who are fighting for their rights to their land in a country that has not yet implemented any far-reaching agrarian reforms or even demarcated all indigenous lands. For articles published by the Finnish press please see the following:

http://www.iltalehti.fi/politiikka/201803282200844866_pi.shtml e

Where does all the gold processed in Switzerland come from?

Switzerland is a country poor in raw materials and yet, every year, 70 per cent of the gold extracted in the world is refined there. Switzerland is home to four of the largest refineries in the world. But where does all this gold that is processed and marketed in this country come from? The Society for Threatened Peoples (*Société pour les Peuples Menacés* - SPM) in Switzerland explored the global gold trade with a close look at the cases of Peru, the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The report "Switzerland, gold platform at risk?" shows that there are significant risks that some Swiss gold processing and trading sites are indirectly complicit in human rights abuses and environmental destruction. Read the summary and access the publication in French and German at: <https://www.gfbv.ch/fr/or-resume/>

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