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Communities Resisting Deforestation and Greenwashing Tactics

Ph: YVE, Gana

This Bulletin articles are written by the following organizations and individuals:
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Communities Resisting Deforestation and Greenwashing Tactics

Our Viewpoint

2020: More Agreements to Increase Deforestation

Xerente children in Tocantins, Brazil . Ph: Tiago Reis

This year, 2020, comes with its own challenges for forests and forest peoples, as international forest-related processes appear to be entering new phases. However, the greatest challenge that we are facing remains the same: despite growing evidence of increasing destruction and deforestation over the last 20 years, of evermore dispossession and violence towards forest peoples, international negotiations on forests have become ensnared by corporate capture and profiting, land enclosures and “greenwashing” campaigns largely based on voluntary pledges.

This editorial aims to raise a high alert with regard to the undisputed corporate agendas that dominate these international decision-making processes. The decisions taken frequently have very real impacts on the lives of forest-dependent peoples and communities; it is therefore crucial that grassroots and forest groups and their allies remain vigilant against all possible risks.

This year the 2016 UN Paris Agreement on climate will re-assess the national targets set for each country. The Paris Agreement identifies forests (and trees) as one of the main “solutions” for removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, thus promoting industrial tree plantations worldwide. (1) However, no agreement was reached on key issues related to carbon markets and offset mechanisms during the November 2019 UN climate negotiations. Even so, various voluntary initiatives and millions of dollars are now being invested in

increasing forest-offset schemes (2) and large-scale plantations (3) as viable "solutions" to the climate crisis. Unsurprisingly, strategies for leaving fossil fuels in the ground (4) are not being discussed, despite the fact that the extraction and burning of fossil fuels has been identified as the main cause of the climate crisis gripping the planet.

During the 2019 climate negotiations, the fossil fuel and conservation industries gained momentum by developing a new term for offsetting: Nature-Based Solutions (5) (or Natural Climate Solutions), which was presented as the solution to the climatic crisis. REDD+ (6), the much-publicized forest policy that has been in place for the last 15 years, has been replaced with discourses around Nature-Based Solutions (NBS), which aim to increase carbon "storage" in the natural world. Meanwhile, discussions around deforestation have been replaced by the term "restoration". Once again, it is not about addressing the real drivers of the climate crisis. We face a scenario full of opportunities for the corporate sector, as the responsibility for the climate crisis is not placed with the corporations responsible for large-scale deforestation, forest degradation and climate pollution, but with peasant and indigenous farming practices.

Another international process that has been set up for this year is the Global Biodiversity Framework post-2020 at the UN Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD). The CBD is supposed to aim to protect biodiversity, but conversely has also promoted harmful false solutions, such as biodiversity offsets. (7) This mechanism has received the backing of numerous conservationist NGO's, polluting industries, the UN and the World Bank, and is being used mostly by the mining industry. Why? Because it basically allows extractive and other industries to enter forest areas where such extraction activities were previously banned, as long as these companies "protect" or "recreate" another area that is "equivalent" in terms of biodiversity.

The conservation industry and their corporate allies, with the aim of greenwashing destructive operations, are now pushing for a drastic increase in Protected Areas around the world. According to the IUCN, the target should be of 30% of the global territory. The mainstream conservation model (8) assumes that "nature" should be separated from human activity. As such, an increase in Protected Areas also means more evictions, violence and discrimination against the real protectors of the forests: indigenous and forest-dependent communities. It might also mean more areas available for offsetting corporate business practices.

Lastly, it is also relevant for forests and forest peoples to mention the plans of The Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA), due to start in 2021. The Aviation Industry ranks high up among the most polluting companies of the world. The main aim of this scheme is to allow the aviation industry's increasing fossil fuel emissions to continue to rise by claiming that they will "compensate for" those emissions. The decisions over what types of offsets will be included in CORSIA will be reviewed this year. Already on 7 January 2020, the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) applied for the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to accept FCPF's REDD+ offset credits. (9)

None of these agreements and negotiations is designed to solve any crisis. The real drivers are left untouched while false solutions that strengthen land pressure and enclosure for the benefit of corporate interests, along with historical injustices, deforestation, pollution, violence, discrimination and so forth, continue to be promoted, funded and facilitated.

But it's not all bad news. Resistance is fertile. A recent research project commissioned by the Informal Alliance Against Oil Palm Plantations in West and Central Africa (10), shows that there has been a significant decline in the number and total area of land deals for industrial oil palm plantations over the past 5 years, falling from 4.7 to 2.7 million hectares. One important reason for this is the growing resistance to this destructive and violent industry.

WRM once again reaffirms its solidarity with forest-dependent populations who continue to engage in the struggle to defend their territories from the real drivers of the climate and forest crises.

(1) https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/viewpoint/the-paris-agreement-on-climate-change-promoting-tree-plantations-and-reducing-forests-to-tradable-carbon-stores/
(2) https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/redd-in-the-paris-agreement-secures-funding-for-conservation-industry-while-large-scale-deforestation-advances-unhindered/
(3) https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/the-paris-agreement-international-endorsement-for-tree-plantation-companies-to-start-a-new-cycle-of-expansion/
(4) https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/the-paris-agreement-undermines-the-global-campaign-to-leave-oil-in-the-soil/
(5) https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/new-name-for-old-distraction-nature-based-solutions-is-the-new-redd/
(6) https://wrm.org.uy/browse-by-subject/mercantilization-of-nature/redd/
(7) https://wrm.org.uy/?s=biodiversity+offset
(8) https://wrm.org.uy/bulletins/issue-242
(9) https://redd-monitor.org/2020/02/11/the-international-civil-avitation-organisation-should-reject-the-world-banks-forest-carbon-partnership-facility-from-its-offsetting-scheme-as-well-as-rejecting-all-other-offsets-of-course/
(10) https://www.grain.org/en/article/6324-communities-in-africa-fight-back-against-the-land-grab-for-palm-oil

Ghana: Eucalyptus plantations for producing energy

Ph: YVE, Ghana

The debates around producing so-called "carbon neutral" biomass energy, particularly in Africa, are increasing in the context of the climate discussions. However, it has been extensively documented that **for producing industrial scale biomass, large extensions of land are needed while, at the same time, the burning of biomass is highly polluting**. (1)

The Norwegian company African Plantations for Sustainable Development (APSD) is establishing industrial eucalyptus tree plantations in rural Ghana for burning the wood to produce electricity (biomass fuel). Since 2009, the company was able to **secure access to about 42,000 hectares of land with 50-year leases (with renewal possibilities)** near the Atebubu town, Brong Ahafo Province in Central Ghana, on the western side of Lake Volta, some 400 km north of the capital city of Accra.

In parallel, APSD is constructing a **60 megawatts biomass power** plant in the same area, to be operational in 2021. For the power plant to operate, **an annual supply of 600,000 m³ of logs is needed, which translates into 22,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations**, of which 9,000 hectares have already been planted. The company is also building access roads and transmission lines.

In a presentation done by the plantations company (2) the **long term plans of the project are shown: supply fuel for generating 600 megawatts. This would imply 180,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations**. The 60 megawatts power plant currently under construction, according to the presentation, is only the first phase of the project.

APSD is financed by the **African Development Bank**'s initiative, **the Africa Renewable Energy Fund (AREF)**, which is managed by **Berkeley Energy**, a pan-African equity fund on renewable energy infrastructure. (3) This Fund has other investors, including **CDC**, the UK's development finance institution, and **BIO**, the Belgian investment company for developing countries. (4) Moreover, the project is also financed by **Erling Lorentzen, founder of the Brazilian pulp and paper company Aracruz Celulose**, which plantations nowadays are part of the giant pulp and paper company Suzano. The APSD presentation that was mentioned before says, "Having witnessed the employment and development benefits of large scale sustainably managed plantations in Brazil, Mr. Lorentzen wishes to transfer the benefits of his knowledge to Africa." (5) Both, Aracruz and Suzano however, hold a disastrous record of environmental destruction and communities' rights violations in Brazil. (6)

APSD is a member of the New Generation Plantation platform, created by the conservationist NGO WWF in order to greenwash the timber and pulp plantations companies images and facilitate their expansion. (7)

The Stories from the Communities

On the websites of the company and its financers, the project portrays to have good relations and no conflicts with the communities. In December 2019, members of the Youth Volunteers for the Environment (YVE) in Ghana went to the plantation areas to speak with people in three of the communities that have been directly affected by the plantations. These are their stories.

The communities affected by the installed plantations are: Laylay, Bantama, Byebye, Nframamu and Galadima. Each community has about one hundred and forty households. It is important to highlight that **the community members we spoke with, including the opinion leaders, have never seen the contract or any official document. They were only told that the lease of the land is for fifty years.**

Unanimously, all farmers that spoke with us **complained of not having access to enough land** like they used to have. Most of them are witnessing their sons and daughters migrate to the city, with all the consequences attached to this. In a nutshell, the reality is that the communities are angry about how **the project has become a threat to their lives and livelihoods**.

These communities are specialized in cultivating the tuber yam (in its varieties), banana plantain, cassava, pepper (in its varieties) and rice (in its varieties). However, two of the visited communities complained that now they can only produce one variety of most crops, which also directly impact their income related to their sales in the local market.

APSD has also constructed a road that crosses through one small dam, which served as drinking water for the community members while they are on their farms during the day. Some also use this water for household usage. Members of the Bantama community told us that, on several occasions, while fetching water from the dam, the manager from the company ("the white man", as they call him in the community) was seen urinating in the water in order to stop people from fetching it.

Some community members, from the 3 communities we visited, were told not to come close to the APSD concession, which means that they cannot cross to their various farms, which are located behind the APSD plantations.

Moreover, community members seem to not be too aware about the dangers of agrotoxins, and testified that some kind of spraying was being done by APSD. This has seriously affected the pepper farms that are not far from the eucalyptus. They also complained bitterly about how the workers employed as sprayers, were given only mouth covers for protection.

Although most of the community members have been employed, the jobs are only temporary. Workers get between one to two dollars per day. At the end of each month, people complain that almost always there are some deductions made which they are not acquainted with.

Women are feeling very insecure and their daily tasks have increased. **Getting water is no longer possible from some of the water sources they used to use since it is prohibited to go through the company's plantations.**

Only a few households have a well in their houses but most need to contract a young man with motorbike to get them water from far, which of course leads to increasing daily costs and economic constrains.

Community members are also not allowed anymore to set fire for cooking on their land, because APSD is afraid this could generate fires in their plantations and destroy their business. We met women coming from harvesting their yam, so we asked them to see their roasted yam - as it is traditionally done in their culture. But they angrily replied "that is why we are coming home this early, because we were officially told never to set fire on our farm for cooking or for anything else".

In this context, one woman from the Laylay community, who is a food vendor, is facing **a court hearing because APSD argues that she was seen using a dry eucalyptus stem for firewood and that would be forbidden under company rules**.

Community chiefs who initially supported the project, as well as the opinion leaders, the assembly man for the district (elected person per district that works under the parliamentarians) and the community members **are seriously willing to do whatever they can to claim back their lands**.

Mr. Wisdom Koffi Adjawlo,
Executive Director of the Youth Volunteers for the Environment (YVE), Ghana

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(2) APSD, Forests for the Future, New Forests for Africa, March 2016, http://newforestsforafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Session-D-APSD.pdf
(3) Berkeley energy, Africa Renewable Energy Fund, https://www.berkeley-energy.com/africa-renewable-energy-fund/
(4) CDC, Africa Renewable Energy Fund https://www.cdcgroup.com/en/our-investments/fund/africa-renewable-energy-fund/ ; BIO, Africa Renewable Energy Fund, https://www.bio-invest.be/en/investments/africa-renewable-energy-fund
(5) Idem 2
(6) WRM, Suzano https://wrm.org.uy/?s=suzano ; WRM, Aracruz https://wrm.org.uy/?s=aracruz
(7) New Generation Plantation Platform, Participants, https://newgenerationplantations.org/en/participants/

Driving “Carbon Neutral”: Shell’s Restoration and Conservation Project in Indonesia

Ph: Daphné Dupont-Nivet

According to companies such as oil multinational Shell and airline company KLM, it is perfectly possible to drive or flight “carbon neutral”; simply offset the carbon emissions by planting trees or investing in existing forest areas elsewhere. What is often silenced though is that those trees should remain standing in order for any compensation to happen, at least during the trees’ lifetime. And that is by no means always the case.

Since April 2019, Shell offers its customers the option of driving "carbon neutral". Anyone choosing to pay an extra cent per litre of gasoline or diesel or fills up the slightly more expensive fuel brand V-power, is paying to offset his or her carbon emissions. Shell uses the extra money to plant trees and to invest in existing forest reserves. According to Shell’s website, more than 20,000 car rides’ emissions have already been compensated in this way. That would amount to around 55 million litres of gasoline. To compensate for that, according to Shell, 376,000 trees need to be planted or protected and should remain standing forever.

How does Shell do this?

Among others, the oil company buys carbon (CO_2) credits from The Katingan Peatland Restoration and Conservation Project (also known as the Katingan Mentaya project) in Central Kalimantan, a province in the Indonesian part of the island of Borneo. Although the biggest forests-related compensation scheme of the last 15 years is called REDD+, in Indonesia they use terms like Ecosystem Restoration Projects or Restoration and Conservation Projects. These nonetheless operate under the same logic and purpose of REDD+: allow fossil fuels extraction and burning to continue.

The Katingan Mentaya project is the world's largest forest compensation project, according to its website. It was created in 2007 by the Indonesian company PT Rimba Makmur Utama in collaboration with the British project developer Permian Global, and two NGOs: Puter Indonesia Foundation and Wetlands International. The director of the company is a former JP Morgan banker in New York, Dharsono Hartono, whom after discovering that conservation and profiting go well together, decided to return to his home country. The Ministry of Forestry approved the Ecosystem Restoration Concession in October 2013 with about 100,000 hectares; around half of the area the company had applied for. Three years later, the Department for Environment and Forestry approved a second concession covering almost 50,000 hectares.

The reserve covers a total area of 157,722 hectares of tropical forest and peat soils. Developers argue that without the project, the area would be converted into industrial acacia plantations for paper production. Carbon credits have been sold since 2017 for five to ten dollars per tonne and therefore the reserve can earn up to 75 million dollars per year by "avoiding" CO_2 to go up in the air.

"Avoiding", however, does not mean that the total amount of CO_2 in the atmosphere gets lower. Carbon credits are sold as a licence to emit a similar amount of greenhouse gases elsewhere in the world. There is no climate gain but, on paper, no loss either. Hence the term "carbon neutral".

The theory goes that if you can ensure that the same amount of CO_2 emitted during a car ride can be removed from the air somewhere else, the pollution is compensated. But this only counts if it can be proven that the planted trees that are removing the CO_2 would never have been planted without the offset project. If not, the compensation is not "additional". Now, if the compensation is based on the protection of existing forests and peat soils, such as with the Katingan Mentaya reserve, the story gets even more complicated. How do project developers know for sure that the forest that they are protecting was going to be cut down?

The answer is that they cannot know for sure. Project developers rely on risk profiles and future models. They estimate the future likelihoods of deforestation by looking at other similar areas. This is called the baseline. Based on this, they calculate the amount of CO_2 "stored" within the project area, which is then converted into saleable carbon credits. Each credit represents a tonne of "avoided CO_2 emissions". But, of course, the more deforestation they predict in their baselines, the greater the CO_2 gain they can claim and the more credits they can sell.

Five years ago, the French research agency Chaire Economie du Climat concluded that 26 per cent of the 410 analysed REDD+ projects overlapped with an existing protected area or national park. REDD+ simply served as a logo to attract new financing.

On top of this, another major criticism against REDD+ is that protected forests are vulnerable and can disappear due to fire, logging or illness. Compensation projects must guarantee that these forests will remain standing for a lifetime.

Despite this, the oil and aviation industries are embracing REDD+ projects, mainly under the so-called “voluntary market”. This market assists not only consumers who want to feel better for their fuel use, holiday flight or online purchases, but also, increasingly, large companies who want to pretend to be doing something for their large-scale pollution and thus please their clients and investors.

In addition to Shell, automobile company Volkswagen and BNP Paribas bank also purchase carbon credits from the same reserve in Kalimantan. Worldwide, from Cambodia to Peru and from Zimbabwe to Guatemala, there are now hundreds of such projects.

Carbon Turning to Smoke

2019 was an extreme year of forest fires in Indonesia, which are closely linked to the expansion of oil palm plantations. The fires that raged between July and October transformed large parts of Sumatra and Kalimantan in areas covered with poisonous smog. Schools and hospitals closed, the local population walked around wearing masks, tens of thousands of people were evacuated and ten died.

The fires also reached the Katingan Mentaya reserve, which borders with an industrial oil palm plantation from the company PT Persada Era Agro Kencana. Fire easily spreads due to the fragile dry soil under these plantations. This oil palm plantation concession was given in 2013, despite a moratorium on forest-clearing agreed between Indonesia and Norway in 2011.The palm oil industry is a major cause of tropical deforestation, which generates a lot of carbon emissions and drains the peat soils. This is one of the reasons why Indonesia is the fourth largest greenhouse gas emitter. An estimated 2000 hectares of the Katingan reserve went up in smoke.

In November 2019, two Indonesian journalists - Gabriel Wahyu Titiyoga and Aqwam Fiazmi Hanifan - travelled to the reserve and saw that “the burnt area is huge.” Titiyoga said “I walked about two miles and still can’t see the end of the fire scar.” The journalists also encountered dozens of agricultural plots within the project area that on paper should not have been there. A wooden board reads, “This area is controlled by the Dayak”. Dayak villagers say that they have never been properly informed about the limits of the reserve. The individual plots are marked with wooden signs with the names of villagers. To cultivate their vegetables and rice, the indigenous Dayaks also use fire, but in a very different way, they use it in a controlled way. But the conflict over land and forest use in the area of the project goes back many years.

In 2014, the governor of Central Kalimantan promised every Dayak family five hectares of agricultural land. But they still had to sort out where this land would be located. During the provincial elections of 2017, a local politician promised them the same. The Dayaks use the

documents with this information to claim the promised land. But legally they do not have a leg to stand on.

There are about 40,000 people living in 34 villages around the project area. Five hundred villagers have been trained as firefighters under the project. To “avoid a fight”, the project offered communities 100 million rupiah (about US$10,000) a year for training and educational projects, aimed at getting them to work the land without using fire or chemicals. Four villages refused, saying the money was not enough.

But how can drivers in the global North still drive “carbon neutral” when part of the compensation reserve was burnt? According to the US-certifier company Verra, which issues the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) label and oversees the carbon trading of this project, even if the entire forest reserve was burnt down, Shell customers could still drive “climate neutral”. Each compensation reserve holds back a percentage of credits in an “emergency pot” for credits that are lost elsewhere. "It's like risk insurance," says Naomi Swickard, head of market development at Verra. That means that the amount of CO^2 lost from the compensation project in Indonesia would in turn be compensated through an insurance system with credits from a forest elsewhere in the world.

In consequence, the Katingan Mentaya reserve, which in theory holds the equivalent carbon that cars are meanwhile emitting in the global North, confronts threats of forest fires, large oil palm plantations and governmental agencies issuing overlapping permits. But nonetheless, carbon credits are being sold and highly polluting companies are assuring consumers that their emissions are compensated. The trees just need to remain standing forever somehow.

Forest compensation projects largely blame forest peoples and peasant agriculture for deforestation while not addressing the underlying political and economic causes of deforestation nor do they change the ongoing pressure on forests and land.

The Indonesian government aims to reduce its CO2 emissions by 29 per cent by 2030, based on its own efforts – while claiming it could achieve 41 per cent with international assistance. The 2019 fires are predicted to reduce that target to around 20 per cent. “We still have lots of work until 2030. The President has ordered that there must be no forest fires next year [2020]”, said Ruandha Agung Sugardiman, Director of the Climate Change Control of the Ministry of Environment. And in the case that the government needs additional carbon reserves for its national reduction targets, stocks from companies in the carbon market may be withdrawn or stopped to prevent them from being sold. This condition, according to Ruandha, is part of the companies’ contracts.

Since 2007, the year in which REDD+ started, the concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere has only increased. Governments and companies present their REDD+-type projects as a first step in their “actions” for climate mitigation and the world applauds. But, in practice, industries are getting a license to continue extracting oil, expanding plantations or deforesting, and consumers continue to drive and fly without concern. (Forest) compensation projects are not a solution for climate change since emissions need to be drastically reduced at source and not be compensated.

This article is a summary from the following journalistic articles:
Daphné Dupont-Nivet (only available in Dutch):
- De Groene Amsterdammer, Het klimaatbos gaat in rok op, December 2019

- *Trouw, Het CO2-compensatiebos van Shell: brandstichting en ruzie met de lokale bevolking, December 2019*
- *Investico, Branden en boeren bedreigen Shell-Klimaatbos in Indonesië, December 2019*
- Gabriel Wahyu Titiyoga's article, The Carbon Center's Staggered Walk, published in the Tempo Magazine (in English)
- REDD-Monitor's article, Indonesia's Katingan REDD Project sells carbon credits to Shell. But that doesn't mean that the forest is protected. It is threatened by land conflicts, fires and palm oil plantations, December 2019 (in English)
- Video reportage by Indonesian media, Narasi Newsroom (in Bahasa): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJ2Utsg6Uqg&feature=youtu.be

Gabon: Communities Facing OLAM's "Zero Deforestation" Pledges

Olam's checkpoint. Ph: Muyissi Environnement and WRM

"Zero deforestation" is one more idea in the list of voluntary initiatives created in the last 10-15 years to supposedly address the negative impacts of industrial agriculture commodity crops on forests. The name certainly gives the impression that companies committing to "zero deforestation" practices would stop cutting down and/or damaging forests. In the case of densely forested countries, the question then is, what loopholes have been created around the "zero deforestation" commitment to enable companies to continue expanding? How can oil palm, timber or soy plantation companies continue expanding without deforesting?

In September 2019, the Gabonese organization Muyissi Environnement and the World Rainforest Movement wrote an article for the WRM bulletin exposing some of the tactics being used by the agribusiness company OLAM to enable its business to continue while claiming "zero deforestation" practices. 89% of Gabon's territory is forest, and OLAM is currently Gabon's biggest industrial oil palm and rubber plantation company. It committed to "zero deforestation" in 2017 and it is viewed by the Gabonese government as a key corporate partner. The company reconfirmed its pledge when it declared in October 2019 that it was on track to have all its plantations certified by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) in 2021. RSPO reinforced its criteria about deforestation in November 2018, adopting also a "zero deforestation" policy.

In spite of the striking volume of documents, policies, criteria, plans and recommendations about "zero deforestation", what is largely absent is information on the experiences of communities living inside or adjacent to the plantation areas of companies with "zero

deforestation" pledges. In response to this, a field visit was carried out in April-May 2019 by Muyissi Environnement and the WRM in 18 villages in and around four concession areas used by OLAM in the province of Ngounié, Gabon. A report has recently been published with the findings and analysis.

Corporate Operations in Forest Areas with "Zero Deforestation"?

Three main tactics have been identified that are part of OLAM's "Zero Deforestation" strategy and which together create the conditions for OLAM to expand its plantations in Gabon:

- OLAM is in practice adopting **"Zero net deforestation"** practices. The word "net" is crucial to understand this loophole. It means that the total forest area within a given geography remains unchanged. This could be achieved by not destroying any more forest, but also by planting trees to compensate for any deforestation. In this way, a company can continue deforesting as long as it "restores" other "comparable" areas by planting trees. The idea of "zero net" is also at the heart of a mechanism called "biodiversity offsetting". However, it does not consider that each place is unique, has its own diversity, is rooted in a specific time and space, and coexists with and sustains the livelihoods of local communities. Hence, forests cannot be compared to or replaced by other forest areas.

- OLAM emphasizes that "Zero Deforestation" is about **conserving and creating more High Conservation Value (HCV) forests, including "High Carbon Stock" forests**. Creating more HCV areas ignores the importance of these forests for local communities, which confront severe restrictions on using these areas and constant surveillance. One major impact frequently mentioned in the field visits is the growing number of restrictions and obstacles imposed on people, making it difficult for them to access their own territory. Villagers say that this started around 2015 when OLAM created the HCV areas inside village territories – these represent 50% of OLAM's concession areas. It became worse, they say, from 2017 onwards, when OLAM adopted its "zero deforestation" policy. According to women from the Mboukou village, the guards supervising OLAM's concession said: "this forest no longer belongs to you, it belongs to the State and we [OLAM] are the State!"

  The communities visited did not report any significant destruction of forest areas by OLAM since the company committed to "zero deforestation" in 2017. They did, however, explain that OLAM has continued to expand its destruction of savannah areas in Lot 3 and in Lot Sotrader and that this is also putting their livelihoods at risk. The current RSPO rules allow destruction of vegetation types defined as "scrub" and "cleared/open land" – which includes the savannahs in Gabon - for industrial oil palm plantations, as these are not considered valuable enough to be protected. Conversely, researcher Boussou Bouassa G. revealed the importance of savannahs and stressed that the soil is a key water reservoir during dry seasons and the conservation of humidity allows for the fast re-growth of grassland, which is crucial for some fauna, such as the buffalo. Besides, women customarily use the savannahs to find and produce food.

- The Gabonese government (OLAM's business partner) proposed in 2018 to **modify the forest definition in Gabon**, which would create a dangerous precedent. While the current definition, guided by FAO's forest definition, only considers tree coverage, the proposed definition would set a parameter of a minimum quantity of carbon that a forest

area must contain. This would simply exclude secondary forests and those forests in a state of regeneration. OLAM could then convert those areas into plantations, claim “zero deforestation” and thus be able to maintain its RSPO certification. It would even allow the company to maintain its plans to obtain RSPO certification of all of its plantations.

In a press release from 2019, OLAM stated that “Our plantations are located only on areas of land that have been identified and mapped as grassland, secondary regrowth or degraded logging areas”. But communities living where OLAM is active in the Ngounié province claim that the company hired a logging company to cut the timber with commercial value inside the concessions, thus turning them into “degraded logging areas”. The revenues were shared among the logging company, the government and the communities. In the case of the communities, these revenues were shared in the form of community projects. After the logging, OLAM prepared the land to plant oil palm trees.

The Communities’ Voices: Surveillance, Pollution and Destruction of Water Basins and Livelihoods

When OLAM Palm Gabon arrived in the province of Ngounié in 2012, local consultations were carried out, but OLAM was able to strongly influence the process, knowing that the decision to implement the project was already taken by the Gabonese government - OLAM’s business partner.

During the consultations, communities were allowed to make a list of grievances, which resulted in “social contracts” signed by community chiefs from one particular lot or concession area and OLAM Palm Gabon. In practice, these are projects that the company promised to carry out in exchange for the communities’ territories, forests and savannahs.

Some of these projects were fulfilled. Others are still pending or are not functioning. A few examples: the dispensary in the Rembo community does not function because there is no staff or medicines available; the majority of the solar panels installed are defective; the water from the two water pumps in the Moutambe Sane Foumou village is undrinkable; and the list goes on.

OLAM has not even respected the sites identified as important for the communities’ livelihood or for their sacred status, even though the company promised to respect them in the “social contracts”. Villagers in Rembo, Doubou and Guidoma also report that the promised distances (buffer zones) between OLAM’s plantations and important sites for the physical and cultural survival of communities have not been respected either.

Representatives of departmental and municipal authorities disclosed that the oil palm plantations are being imposed by the government and OLAM, and that there is little or nothing they could do about the problems that communities face. Remarkably, they also have no information about OLAM’s project, not even an impact assessment.

Strangers in their own territories

For several years OLAM has been requesting people to carry a permit, issued by the company, for entering the concessions. Several villagers complain that they still do not have such permit and thus cannot access their own territory. And those that did get a permit

complain that they can no longer pursue their activities inside their territory during OLAM's working hours (08:00-16:00), including fishing in the few lakes that remain.

Villagers of Kanana and Ferra are also forced to use the only road available – the one crossing OLAM's plantations. This road has a checkpoint controlled by OLAM. Only people with permits can pass. The guards also search people's bags. Even though the Gabonese forest code allows people to exercise their customary rights, including the right to hunt, one villager comments that: "if a security agent of OLAM finds you carrying something you hunted or tools used for fishing, they will confiscate the meat or expel us from the places we traditionally use to fish".

OLAM also has a damaging impact on the region's water basins, including rivers and lakes. According to one villager of the Nanga village, most of their lakes are now "closed off" to them. Women also complain about the water pollution caused by the run-off of agrotoxins as well as plantation workers defecating in the small lakes where women traditionally fish. They say that after OLAM workers finish applying the chemical products, they empty what's left into the lakes.

According to one woman from the village of Boungouga, "the water is not good quality anymore, the body itches and we do not eat [the fish] any longer just like this; we prepare it by boiling it and when we fish, the fish [caught] has no flavour or a nice taste anymore, and this has been happening since OLAM's activities started on our lands".

In consequence, women need to walk longer distances to find drinkable water. To make things worse, the company now plans to irrigate its plantations due to the ever-longer dry periods that affect the region. In Bemboudie village, women complain that OLAM wants to set up irrigation reservoirs for its plantations along the Ovigui river, which flows through a dozen villages.

Above all, in the villages most impacted by OLAM's plantations, the only way to cultivate food is in small plots located around the houses. The soil is usually far less fertile than in the fields they used before OLAM arrived. A woman from Mboukou village, one of the most heavily affected communities, said: "All the forest has been destroyed; they built their accommodation facilities inside our forest and destroyed our lands". Women in Kanana and Sanga complain that if and when the crops mature, the harvested products rot more quickly. They attribute this to soil pollution.

Women. When everything changed…

Before OLAM arrived, women could find food and plants in the forest to care for the health of their families. The sale of products from their farming plots, along with what they hunted and gathered in the forests and savannahs, allowed people to keep their children in school. Children were also taught traditional activities. The forest and savannahs enabled villagers to reproduce the way of life on which they base their culture. The soil was fertile. Women note that they did not need a refrigerator because food was fresh and diverse.

After OLAM arrived, everything changed. Now, almost all the food is purchased. The food quality and diversity has drastically reduced to basically chicken, rice and canned food. Food prices are increasing, which makes things even more difficult. The money comes from those employed by OLAM, whose wages, according to the women, are miserable.

"Zero deforestation" pledges have facilitated the advance of industrial plantations over the savannahs, imposing more access restrictions on villagers, which in turn make traditional activities unfeasible. OLAM's industrial plantations onto savannahs infringes even more on the ability of families to sustain themselves and maintain their mode of living.

The major conservation NGOs, banks and consumers need to wake up to the loopholes that companies and their allies are creating to continue expanding their business and profits. Policies such as "zero deforestation" are often defended with arguments such as protecting tigers, elephants, gorillas and other animals. But when these policies hit the ground, they make communities more vulnerable. Peasant agriculture is blamed for deforestation, and thus, it is argued that these forest areas need to be protected. This takes the attention away from the fact that it is the companies in the first place that are driving large-scale forest destruction.

What is urgently needed is that communities get back the control over their territories. This is crucial to ensure that both, communities and the forest can survive, now and in the future.

This is a summary of the publication launched by Muyissi Environnement, Gabon, and WRM. Download the publication here: https://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/communities-facing-zero-deforestation-pledges-the-case-of-olam-in-gabon/

Smurfit Kappa in Colombia: Chronicle of a Death Foretold

Ph: Diariolibre.com

Part of this title is taken from a literary work by Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez, who is known as one of the exponents of magical realism—a literary movement characterized by the telling of unusual, fantastical and irrational events within a realistic context, where the supernatural is part of ordinary reality. This specific article is not intended in any way to be part of a literary movement, but simply be a narration of unusual events, with fantastical and mostly irrational tales—within a realistic context. The consequences are from tragic realism, due to results that occurred in a place in Colombia, which will be shown. In this place, ordinary reality has been transformed by the multinational corporation, Smurfit Kappa Cartón de Colombia (SKCC), perhaps with the complacency and collusion of those who should have prevented it.

Restrepo, Valle del Cauca, Colombia, South America, is a small municipality that was founded in 1913. It has a population of about 17,000, divided equally between rural and urban inhabitants. It has five public education institutions, one of which has an agricultural emphasis.

Restrepo was traditionally one of the most important coffee-producing areas in the country. This crop employs several workers per hectare in the planting, maintenance and harvesting seasons—which includes two harvests, the main one and the secondary one. The owners of these lands used to be locals for the most part. They would also plant banana and other fruit trees for shade, and when the coffee was newly planted, they would use the area to plant legumes. There was sufficient water of good quality for all necessities, and most of all, there was a wealth of flora and fauna. The traditional peasant market, which is still held on weekends, used to be exuberantly rich in the quantity and variety of products. There was a lot of supply and many buyers, which made for rich and nutritious household diets. All of this strengthened a healthy local economy, where a good amount of money circulated.

The Unusual Events

An Irish company that was founded in 1934 to manufacture cardboard boxes and packaging for the Irish market was acquired by Jefferson Smurfit in 1938 and took his name, In 2005, after several mergers, it became Smurfit Kappa Group, which has a presence in several countries in Latin America and Europe. It is currently **one of the largest producers of paper-based packaging in the world**.

In 1957, the company, Celulosa y Papel de Colombia S.A. was created (Pulpapel)—composed of the Institute of Industrial Development (IFI, by its Spanish acronym), Cartón de Colombia, and the Container Corporation of America (CCA, bought by Jefferson Smurfit in 1986). Cartón de Colombia acquired both companies in 1994, and Smurfit Cartón de Colombia company was established. In 2005 it became Smurfit Kappa Cartón de Colombia (SKCC).

The Irrational Events:

In 1959, the Law of National Forest Economy and the Conservation of Renewable Natural Resources came into effect. Through 18 articles, this law facilitates "**the development of the forestry economy.**" It declared "Forestry Reserves areas to fallow lands located in river basins that provide or can provide water for domestic consumption, electric energy production and irrigation." The Law also stipulates that "the Government will regulate logging in public and private forests, as well as patents for sawmills and the granting of concessions" (1).

With this new provision, zoning in Colombia was carried out, establishing areas designated for forestry use. This is how the municipality of Restrepo came to be included in areas designated for this use, **starting a process of change in the use of the territory—which went from being an agricultural area to a forestry area**. It is important to highlight that, upon establishing the forestry use of "protection," Congress unveiled laws and decrees that "declare[d] industrial cultivation" of conifers as species that conserve soil, water, flora and fauna. It also unveiled proprietary incentives to "reforest," such as, for example, the well-known **carbon credits** of today (2).

In 1978 the Pulpapel company—now known as SKCC—started purchasing land in the department of Cauca, in order to introduce and expand pine tree cultivation in this territory. Some of these properties were in the process of being reclaimed by indigenous paeces communities, who consider this to be ancestral territory. These claims had been ongoing since the 1960s. **The indigenous people occupied these properties in order to expel the multinational corporation from their territory. This was also to prevent the expansion of this monoculture**, given that in a short amount of time, the multinational company had installed eucalyptus trees in an area of approximately 1000 hectares. These communities witnessed the **destruction of native forests** and their replacement with timber plantations (eucalyptus and pine).

As an immediate result, the **indigenous people were evicted by the Army**, leading to violent acts, the filing of criminal lawsuits, imprisonment of some indigenous leaders, as well as some murders. Despite these events, **the communities continued with their mission to recover their territories several years later** (3).

Despite the "positive appearance" of the 2nd Law of 1959 on paper, new laws and regulatory decrees continued to favor the industrial planting of conifer monocultures. However, in the municipality of Restrepo, there is not a single peasant or legal entity—with the exception of the multinational company, SKCC—that makes a living or benefits from this forestry activity. This situation is repeated throughout the country.

The Fantastical Events

At almost the same time that industrial plantations in Cauca were set up, coniferous trees began to be planted in the municipality of Restrepo. This was presented as incentivizing job opportunities in the region, with the seeming benefits of being linked to a multinational company. The peasantry saw Cartón de Colombia as an opportunity to improve the municipality's economic development and therefore their quality of life.

In 1983, several residents of Restrepo spoke at a municipal council meeting, lodging the first complaints about the changes in flora and fauna and the deterioration of lands. This became the **first action in a very long chain of complaints, with no response,** before the municipal administration and the Autonomous Corporation of the Cauca Valley (CVC, by its Spanish acronym)—the legal environmental authority.

In 2007, **Colombian social and human rights organizations brought this case before the Permanent Court of the Peoples, Colombian Chapter** (TPP Colombia, by its Spanish acronym). SKCC was accused of destroying rainforests, Andean forests and other ecosystems; of destroying the social fabric and the traditional and cultural means of production in the communities; of exhausting and contaminating water sources; of influencing the development of governmental policies in the country and pressuring state officials to favor the multinational's interests to the detriment of local communities; of hiding information related to the company and manipulating regional and national media; of using false postulates, false information and false advertising to justify its activities and cover up the impacts it caused; and of using false arguments to criminalize those who decried its wrongdoings (4).

The Realistic Context

It is 2015. The Restrepo area is affected by an intense summer. Some political administrative divisions of the municipality have no water for almost three months. The ACUAPALTRES rural aqueduct serves that area; one of the springs that feeds into it is located on the top of the mountain, and it has already been affected by the nearby planting of conifers. ACUAPALTRES representatives, along with community leaders from the municipality, launch working groups to reconcile with the municipal administration, the environmental authority and the multinational company—without reaching any agreement.

The main issues the working groups focus on are: the substantial decrease in water capacity; the high turbidity caused by desertification in planting and harvesting; the planting of conifers less than a meter from both springs and the intake channel of the rural aqueduct; the fact that horses should not be used to collect logs in areas near the channels, so as to avoid contamination from their feces; and the little- or non-intervention of the environmental authority, CVC, to control compliance with the regulations and issue sanctions when they were called for.

After not reaching any agreement, **the people decide to initiate a popular action**; that is, a constitutional and legal tool that seeks to defend fundamental rights.

In the process of gathering evidence, the multinational company requests an expert opinion from a Colombian university of their choosing. So the investigation is not carried out with the University of the Valley, which is in the region and has enough expertise on the issue. There are 26 annexes of documents, photos, videos and analyses—80% of which are issued by some kind of authority on the water issue.

January 2019. **The highest court of the Cauca Valley issues a ruling that is favorable to the community.** It includes the operative part of eleven mandates, largely accepting the plaintiff's petitions. Number 5, in particular, says: "The Regional Autonomous Corporation of the Valley—CVC—is ordered to carry out a **new investigation on Smurfit Kappa Cartón de Colombia S.A. within one (1) month, regarding the improper use of pesticides** (herbicides, insecticides and others) on existing planted forest in the protected area." And Number 11 says: "Smurfit Kappa Cartón de Colombia is ordered to observe the protocols established by the Forest Stewardship Council-FSC, regarding the use of pesticides in planted forests; and must observe i) application far away from springs and waterways, ii) minimal use of these products in aqueduct catchment areas and downstream use, and iii) adequate provision of packaging containers for agrochemicals."

Ordinary Reality

In Colombia it is no secret that politico-family and economic groups are the ones who manipulate decisions about land and its monopolization in the country. The people who took power on July 20, 1810—the alleged date of our independence, more aptly called "relieved of masters"—are the same ones who remain today. Not surprisingly, Colombia has one the most corrupt political classes on the planet.

The trite development that was intended to convince people in Restrepo turned out to be the opposite of what was promised. Employment got worse; the amount of money circulating diminished; the lands—being as they were not productive—were sold to large

investors. The jobs that SKCC offers are of the lowest status, and people are not directly employed but rather contracted through third parties. There are very few positions per hectare and with planting cycles of eight-years.

SKCC has appealed the sentence, which is now before the Honorable State Council. The multinational company is mostly focused on trying to prove that all of its activity is protected by law. But what the popular action sought was for them to comply with the law, to comply with the regulations in protected areas and with the protocols of the FSC—an entity whose existence was known in the expert report.

Therefore the question is: How real is the FSC seal, which "certifies" good practices? Is it false advertising? Institutional deception? A corporate campaign to improve its sales in other markets?

The "Tragic Realism" is still a held in a bit abeyance. We are certain that the Honorable State Council will ratify the first court's judgement (a favorable sentence for the community). And then we will be able to say that it could become "Magical Realism,"—when the modern version of David and Goliath is repeated.

Once the judgement is ratified—and because it is "erga omnes"—its applicability will be "with respect to all," or "against all" actors who cause damage to water resources in similar circumstances.

The End

The popular action was the last tool, after having exhausted all legal and conciliatory means —not only with the multinational corporation, but also with the CVC and the municipal administration. However right now, peasant communities across Colombia unfortunately do not have the economic, administrative and legal resources to effectively defend their basic rights. Still, their struggles go on.

Author: The New David

(1) Congress of Colombia (January 27, 1959) *Sobre Economía Forestal de la Nación y Conservación de Recursos Naturales Renovables* (Law 2 from 1959).
(2) *Colombia: legislación a la medida de Smurfit*, WRM Bulletin, February 2001, https://wrm.org.uy/es/articulos-del-boletin-wrm/seccion1/colombia-legislacion-a-la-medida-de-smurfit/
(3) Analysis of Smurfit Kappa Cartón Colombia, 2011, http://pifmairakappa.blogspot.com
(4) Permanent Court of the Peoples. *Colombia hace frente a la problemática de la destrucción de la Biodiversidad. Grave violación a los derechos humanos,* Grupo Semillas, 2007, http://www.semillas.org.co/es/el-tribunal-permanente-de-los-pueblos-colombia-hace-frente-a-la-problemtica-de-la-destruccin-de-la-biodiversidad-grave

A Voice from Tanzania: Promoting Monoculture Tree Plantations for Firewood is a False Argument

Industrial plantation companies often argue that it is the local populations who are destroying the remaining forests, particularly in places where people depend on firewood and/or charcoal for their cooking and energy needs. Therefore, the argument goes, tree plantations are needed to "sustainably" provide for this wood. But this is not true. Local vegetation, if well managed, can attend perfectly the local needs, as it has been the case for generations. **The thousands of hectares of monoculture plantations that have been established in Tanzania are in fact one of the causes of large scale deforestation, soil and water pollution as well as conflicts with communities due to land enclosure and grabbing**.

This is the testimony of Frank, who is active in supporting forest-peoples struggles in Tanzania for over 20 years.

I am Frank Luvanda, born, raised, and currently living in Tanzania. I work at SUHODE Foundation, a small but active Non-Governmental Organization working in addressing various environmental and social challenges in Tanzania, including disseminating the truth on the negative effects of monoculture plantations in Tanzania. I have been working with various organizations for more than 20 years. I have had the privilege to conduct several visits in various places in the country: from the Southern Highlands and Northern areas to the Eastern and Western parts of Tanzania. Among other things, I have witnessed **the imminent expansion of monoculture plantations promoted by some multinational companies, such as Green Resource Limited (GRL), and many others**. Most of these monoculture tree plantation companies prefer planting exotic tree species, mainly Eucalyptus and Pines.

Most of the lands that have been taken by monoculture plantation companies were once very important to communities, as they offered lots of benefits, such as water, firewood, animal feeds, provision of weeds used for making traditional baskets and specific soil variety used for making traditional pots. Some of the lands taken or enclosed by these companies were rich grasslands, with many benefits for communities and crucial for specific animals. Besides, for many years, before these companies deceitfully took these lands, communities were able to get better and probably the best firewood for cooking, lighting, and heating at household levels.

I want to start by categorically denying and opposing the wrong claim done by monoculture plantation companies that they plant monoculture tree plantations for firewood; that is wrong! **More than 90% of households in Tanzania are using firewood from native trees or forests, and not exotic trees, such as Eucalyptus and Pine**. According to Tanzania's Sustainable Energy for All Action Agenda of 2015, "In terms of primary energy consumption, biomass represents 90% of the energy consumed in Tanzania. Electricity represents 1.5% and petroleum products represent 8% of the energy consumption in the country. Solar, coal, wind and other sources represent around 0.5% of the total energy…" Furthermore, when it comes to energy for cooking, the same Sustainable Energy for All Action Agenda shows categorically that 90.2% of rural households in Tanzania uses firewood for cooking and heating while 62% of households in urban areas use charcoal for cooking and heating. The biomass referred to in this Agenda document is not biomass from tree plantation companies in Tanzania!

It is true though that there is a low percentage of households in Tanzania who cook using firewood from exotic trees and crop residues. But this is common only in semi-desert areas, where native forests have been degraded. In these semi-desert or semi-arid areas, communities still use their self-planted exotic trees and not trees from plantation companies! **It is therefore wrong and misleading for such companies to claim that they plant exotic monoculture plantations to help local communities to meet their firewood needs.**

Most communities in Tanzania use firewood in a sustainable way by harvesting only branches and self-dead trees or branches found in most healthy forests. **Other communities nowadays plant their own native tree species, such as Acacia Tortilis or Acacia Nilotica**. Communities know precisely which specie is good for cooking, and thus, they do not collect any specie. For example, you will find no community collecting dead wood from trees such as Erythrina Shliebenii, Faidherbia Albida or Afzelia Quanzensis. Communities in Tanzania largely know how to live in harmony with nature. **Whenever there is excessive deforestation for energy demands, in the form of charcoal and firewood, then, for sure, such deforestation is connected to individuals outside those communities who, through bribes, harvest firewood and make charcoal to sell them in urban areas**.

According to my experience, through my work with SUHODE Foundation, **there are no communities who are willing or would choose to destroy the forests adjacent to them, as they heavily depend on these for various aspects of their lives**, such as provision of energy (firewood), water, medicine, honey, etc. SUHODE has been working to facilitate village governance structures to put in place local by-laws for sustainable management of their forests, including using best practices in harvesting/collecting firewood.

Most communities prefer native tree species over exotic tree species due to the fact that some native tree species have better calorific value per meter cubic (Kcal/m3) in comparison to most exotic trees. But some communities do plant their own exotic trees specifically for firewood or charcoal making. Meanwhile, **there is no monoculture tree plantation company in Tanzania assisting communities to get firewood from their excessively huge monoculture tree plantations**.

Promoting monoculture tree plantations for supplying firewood to local populations is a false and misleading argument, which only aims at **perpetuating systematic land grabbing for their own businesses and profits** and never for the aim of supporting communities to have

access to firewood. As far as I know, there are very few tobacco farmers in some villages in the Iringa Rural District, namely Kidamali, Kiwere, Mfyome, Mlangali, Luganga, Mapinduzi, Nzihi and Kitapilimwa, involved in tobacco farming who buy such pieces as energy sources for drying their tobacco leaves and not as firewood to be used at the household level.

Monoculture plantation companies in Tanzania and elsewhere need to stop their treacherous approaches to get land, including but not limited to **'unfilled and wrong promises'** to local communities. **They must stop expanding their plantations and let communities protect their land, including forests and grasslands**. It should be noted that monoculture tree plantations are not forests, as they are aimed at the production of one single raw material, such as rubber, pulp, palm oil, timber, etc. Supporting monoculture tree plantations is equal to supporting green deserts**,** whereby biodiversity suffers more and means for community livelihood radically diminish.

Frank Luvanda,
SUHODE Foundation, Tanzania

The Agrochemical Used on Tree Monocultures that Pollutes Forever

One of the latent dangers, generally invisible, that comes with the establishment of monoculture plantations is the high use of agrochemicals. Agrochemicals are synthetic chemical products used to control pests and diseases, which simultaneously **support the profits of plantation companies and their financiers.** Agrochemicals cause serious contamination of soil and water sources, the emergence of resistant pests and the poisoning of people and animals that live around these plantations.

One of these dangerous agrochemicals, used in bait to control leaf-cutter ants on tree plantations, poses a threat to aquifers and the health of exposed workers and communities. It is **sulfluramid, an extremely persistent ant killer that can take hundreds of years to degrade—and whose use should be banned.** Nonetheless, the use of this agrochemical has increased in Latin America due to the **expansion of eucalyptus, oil palm and pine tree monocultures;** although it is also used on various agricultural crops, on fruit trees and even for domestic use. Sulfluramid used to control ants and termites goes by the following trademarks: Mirex, Atta Kill, Fluramin, Grao Verde, Dinagro-S, Forisk AG, AgriMex, Mix-Hortall, among others.

Brazil has become the main producer and exporter of sulfluramid in Latin America and the world, since the agrochemical was taken off the market in the United States, Europe and even China—which was also a major user and exporter. Industrial production of sulfluramid in Brazil grew from 30 to 60 tons per year from 2003 to 2013. This production was for domestic use and for export, mainly to Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Venezuela—although there is also data on exports to Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay (1).

In Brazil, sulfluramid is used mainly in the states of Minas Gerais, Saõ Paulo, Mato Grosso do Sul, Espírito Santo and Bahía. **The resulting contamination of aquifers has been documented in states with large areas of tree monocultures.** The tree plantation industry has reached almost eight million hectares nationally. The expansion of this industry in Brazil and in other countries of the region—and therefore the increasing use of sulfluramid—is putting aquifers at risk for future generations and is leaving a legacy of soil and water pollution. Meanwhile, the plantation agribusiness makes millions in profits from this activity. Urgent measures must be taken to curb and eliminate the use of this agrochemical.

What is Sulfluramid, and What Are Its Impacts?

After being applied, sulfluramid turns into an extremely persistent compound, PFOS (perfluoroctane sulfonate), which is also toxic and can bioaccumulate. That is, it can move from an agricultural environment to other living organisms in the food chain. For example, **PFOS can move from the roots of certain crops (corn, wheat, vegetables, for example) to humans when food is ingested, bind to proteins in the blood and liver, or accumulate in other land animals.** In the case of monoculture plantations, PFOS filtration occurs through aquifers, and therefore can affect other **aquatic and marine organisms and be carried over long distances**.

Sulfluramid is freely available in the region and is sold in commercial products with a green or blue band. It is labeled as slightly toxic, considering only its short-term effects. However, this hides the much more persistent impact with chronic long-term toxic effects: the transformation into PFOS, which inevitably occurs once it is in the environment. PFOS also can cause damage to fetuses during pregnancy, is a risk factor associated with weight loss, affects the liver, causes cancer—according to tests with laboratory animals (and there is some evidence that it causes cancer in humans)—and affects human beings' defense system, among other effects.

Because it is persistent, bioaccumulable and toxic, PFOS is subject to international controls aimed to eliminate or restrict it globally. These international controls are part of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants—an environmental treaty that most countries in the world have signed onto.

Sulfluramid belongs to a chemical group of compounds, called PFAS, that have long chains of fluoride and carbon that make them very stable and persistent. These substances have been used as non-stick agents in numerous products, including stain-resistant furniture, firefighting foams and fast-food packaging. The most famous product was Teflon, which was used in various cooking utensils and introduced to the market by US companies 3M and DuPont. These companies, which manufactured various compounds from the group of PFAS in the United States, have been taken to trial by affected workers and communities. US

journalist, Sharon Lerne, reports how even though DuPont knew it was harming the health of employees and polluting the water, it hid this information and continued to produce Teflon (2).

The Stockholm Convention and Agribusiness Lobbies

The Stockholm Convention bans the use of sulfluramid for urban and garden use. However, the substance is sold in many Latin American countries with no regulation, which takes advantage of the fact that there are not yet tools to sanction non-compliance with this mandatory international agreement. The Convention only **permits sulfluramid for agricultural use—including for tree monocultures—**to control two kinds of leaf-cutter ants of the Atta and Acromymrex genera. As yet, no deadline has been set to end its use globally.

This exception for unlimited time was enabled due to acceptance of the recommendation of the New Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee expert group. This subsidiary body makes recommendations to be approved by the plenary of countries that are party to the Stockholm Convention. The Review Committee accepted arguments presented by officials from the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, in alliance with the Brazilian industry that produces this agrochemical. They fabricated evidence claiming that it would not be possible to effectively control these kinds of ants with another product or measure. In fact, the industries that produce this agrochemical (Atta-Kill, Unibrás and Dinagro) formed the Brazilian Association of Insecticide Bait Manufacturers (ABRAISCA, by its Portuguese acronym), which participated as an observer in the Review Committee alongside officials from the Ministry of Agriculture. Within ABRAISCA, the company Atta-Kill stands out, seeing as it belongs to the Agroceres Group—a powerful group linked to the Brazilian Agribusiness Association (ABAG, by its Portuguese acronym).

Possible Alternatives

Despite statements made by ABRAISCA and certain Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture officials, in Brazil itself there are alternative products to sulfluramid, which are authorized for organic agriculture—such as the commercial product, Biosca, which has botanical ingredients. Furthermore, various biological control agents (entomopathogenic fungi such as *Beauveria bassiana* and *Metarhizium anisopliae,* and plant extracts) have been successfully used to control leaf-cutter ants both in Brazil and other Latin American countries—such as Cuba, Mexico and Colombia. These products are made by hand or on a commercial scale.

Controlling leaf-cutter ants poses a big challenge in the case of large-scale tree monocultures. However, the solution is not to compare sulfluramid with another chemical or biological agrochemical, but to integrate a set of control measures and modify plantation management. The fact is that, ultimately, **the large-scale plantation model is in itself unsustainable and toxic.** In one way or another, **it contaminates and destroys biodiversity, forests, soil fertility and water sources; and it seriously affects the communities that live in and around these industries.**

Therefore, the discussion and evaluation of possible alternative measures (interspersing strips of native forest, planting repellant plants, using botanical or biological control agents, among others) should be part of a transparent discussion process—wherein regulating organizations prioritize public over private interest. Organizations of producers, peasants, and civil society should participate in this discussion process, as well as technicians who

have no conflict of interest with the chemical industry, current governments, agribusiness or the plantation industry.

The expansion of tree monocultures that use sulfluramid is creating an environmental debt that must be averted and remediated in the region. Plantation industries and agribusiness in general—which have caused the problem—should grant funds to pay for the costs of evaluation and remediation of the environmental and social damages already caused. Damage to public health associated with exposed workers and populations should also be evaluated through effective monitoring systems. Non-agricultural uses of sulfluramid should be banned immediately. A deadline must be set to end the use of sulfluramid for agriculture, including for tree plantations. Furthermore, the exchange of successful experiences among farmers should be promoted—opening a process with the full participation of workers' organizations, communities, and civil society experts and organizations.

Fernando Bejarano G
The Action Network on Pesticides and Alternatives (RAPAM, for its Spanish acronym) / IPEN focal point in Latin America and the Caribbean
On the IPEN website www.ipen.org, one can see a pamphlet in Spanish and Portuguese that details the scientific information used for this article; a report about alternatives; and memes that can be used to raise awareness among consumers and peasants, and prevent the purchase of this agrochemical.

(1) Gilljam JL, Leonel J, Cousins IT, Benskin JP (2016) *Is Ongoing Sulfluramid Use in South America a Significant Source of Perfluorooctanesulfonate (PFOS)? Production Inventories, Environmental Fate, and Local Occurrence*. Environ. Sci Technol 50 (2): 653–659. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.1021/acs.est.5b04544
(2) The Intercept, 2015, *The Teflon Toxic*, https://theintercept.com/2015/08/11/dupont-chemistry-deception/

Women, Territories and Land Ownership. Reflections from Women in Mexico on Why We Want Land

Women and Access to Land in the World

Peasant agriculture produces up to 80% of the food in non-industrialized countries, and women produce 60-80% of this portion. Women also have a crucial role in conserving forests and biodiversity on our planet. Despite this fact, **only 30% of rural women own agricultural land, and they do not have access to the means of production** (1). The capitalist and patriarchal system organizes and regulates the work of women and men under a sexual

division of labor, taking advantage of the unpaid and invisible care work of women in their homes and communities. Most women assume social reproduction tasks—such as defending land and territory and taking care of water and biodiversity,—and at the same time they participate in, or are responsible for agricultural or forestry production, management and/or transformation (2).

Rural women are responsible for more than half of food production worldwide. However in terms of land ownership, they are clearly at a disadvantage compared to men. Institutional or kinship mechanisms have deliberately put men in place as those capable of managing the family and dealing with the demands of agriculture and livestock. Of the total credits that go to the countryside, women receive between 10% and 15% of the technical assistance for this sector (3).

Women in Latin America

The FAO's Atlas of Rural Women in Latin America and the Caribbean provides an overview of how we continue to place **rural women in a situation of political, social and economic inequality.** It recognizes that the percentage of land owned by women is low. In Brazil this percentage is 12.7%, in Mexico 15.7% and in Argentina 16.2% (4).

Furthermore, there is an **expansion of extractive cutting projects** such as tree monocultures, mining and the agribusiness model, among others. **The implementation of these projects is tied to processes of violence, militarization and paramilitarization in territories, and in particular on women's bodies**. Extractive projects clearly jeopardize women's ways of production and reproduction of life; and women often fight different battles in defense of their territory and in their struggle for recognition of their land rights. The combination of these factors limits women's autonomy and further impoverishes them. Often the inclusion of women through job creation in extractive projects allows companies to comply with a gender "quota" required under corporate policy. This ignores the enormous benefits to companies in territories who profit from from the plunder of common goods, women and their bodies.

As exploitation and control of capital in territories increases, exploitation and control over the work and lives of women increases. These two "resources" are at the same time indispensable, and considered to be infinite and flexible in the process of profit accumulation (5).

This extractive approach **intensifies the invisibilization of care work and the lack of access to land**. This in turn has a particularly negative impact on women, as decisions about territory and common natural assets are directly tied to land rights or land ownership. This is vitally important, in light of the expansion of extractive projects throughout the world.

Even within communities with forms of collective property, there are patriarchal structures that often do not recognize the role of women in collective work and the reproduction of life. Nor do they allow the effective participation of women in decision-making spaces, despite the fact that women are the ones who actively participate in sustaining the struggles to defend their lands from the influx of extractive projects.

Mexico and Land Tenure

In Mexico, this is no exception. Although in terms of land ownership and forest tenure, for example, 80% of forests are in the hands of ejidos (collective lands) and indigenous and peasant communities, the patriarchal organization system that exists in these communities generally favors men when it comes to land access (6).

Furthermore, when women access land and become agrarian subjects by inheriting land or obtaining it after purchase or a years-long lawsuit, **they face dispossession by their own family members, assemblies or neighbors.** For example, figures from 2015 obtained by the Center for Women's Rights in Chiapas in the southern part of the country reported more than 100 cases of dispossession complaints for that year (7).

The destruction of collective ownership in Mexico began in 1992 with the reform of constitutional article 27, which **encouraged privatization of social and collective property through the promotion of agrarian certification programs.**

To this effect, programs such as PROCEDE (Program for Certification of Rights to Ejido Lands), FANAR (Support Fund for Agrarian Nuclei without Regularization) and RRAJA-FANAR (Program for Regularization and Recording of Agrarian Legal Acts), **make individualization of land through obtainment of property titles a condition for communities and ejidos to access rural government programs.**

Women and Land Tenure. Why Do We Want Land? Some Reflections

Women have developed age-old knowledge as well as holistic forms of management of common natural assets, including forest and agricultural lands, water, seeds, uses and transformations. We are also **active political subjects in the struggles to defend our territories**; it is inaccurate to say that we only participate in managing them.

There are many experiences in Mexico that suggest that communities become stronger in the collective and participatory exercise of their land rights. These are the communities who defend their land and territory best. However, there is still a long way to go to stop reinforcing structures where men make decisions, structures which perpetuate the system of inequality over territories and women's bodies. **Strengthening assemblies that recognize women's land ownership rights creates more robust decision-making processes in territories.**

Local experiences in Guerrero, Chiapas and Oaxaca in southern Mexico shed light on the **alternatives that communities are building to recognize women's land rights.** One example is the creation of assemblies with mixed commissions in charge of writing chapters on women's rights. These aim to recognize people's social and collective ownership, and they are opposed to privatizing projects that dispossess (8). Likewise, an initiative designed to support family ownership of land promotes women's and men's equal rights to be recognized as members of the communal collectives and ejidos, as well as the recognition of land as family property. This initiative points to the need for women—beyond recognized rights—to be able to have a voice and make decisions in their communities, in order to strengthen political control in the face of the onslaught of privatization processes wanting to set up in territories.

Lorena Cabnal of Guatemala offers some reflections from a community feminism perspective that also enrich this struggle. She says, “I do not defend my land-territory just because I need the natural goods to live and to leave a decent life for other generations. In considering the recovery and historical defense of my body-earth territory, I assume the recovery of my expropriated body, in order to give it life, joy, vitality and pleasures, and to build liberating knowledges for decision-making. (…) From this perspective, all forms of violence threaten existence, which should be complete” (9).

The survival of life depends on social spaces of production and reproduction. These initiatives reaffirm forms of ownership where communities continue to protect their access to land through models of collective ownership. This is in the face of the wave of projects that not only wish to restrict rural investment public policy; they also compromise models that are defending the “life project” from the imposition of privatization and projects that dispossess.

As Gladys Tzul Tzul of Totonicapan Guatemala says, (2014) “as indigenous and peasant women, we do not just seek recognition of land access, we seek full participation: Our stories are part of a long succession of collective events that have built political paths of struggle, wherein the material means of reproduction are at the center of the debate. (…) If our social relationships produce community, then we must think seriously about organizing and creating forms of responsibility and shared work between women and men; because care work does not have to be at the expense of women’s health. We also have to create ways in which we fully participate, not only in the use of communal lands, but also in decision-making processes about the collective” (10).

Thus, the quest for recognition of land rights begins with not allowing a privatization model to advance upon territories. But it must take place under the precept of absolute recognition of the land rights of women and our role in the reproduction of life and creation of community; as well as recognition of the strength of our memories, and the bravery of our daily lives. This means guaranteeing women’s rights to full participation in the social, political and economic life of communities, as well as guaranteeing access to water, seeds and the means of production and marketing with autonomy and freedom.

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RECOMMENDED

Bioenergy in West Africa: Impacts on Women and Forests

The September 2019 Forest Cover newsletter from the Global Forest Coalition focuses on the bioenergy developments and use in West Africa and how they are impacting women and forests. From bioenergy produced in large-scale, requiring huge areas of land to provide the raw materials, to the ubiquitous household and community-scale energy needs, where wood is collected mainly by women. Clean cookstove projects are increasingly being tied to commercial tree plantations that produce "clean charcoal", and eucalyptus trees are being planted on a large-scale purely to burn in a power station. Women must spend long hours and undertake physical effort to gather fuelwood, which is made worse by deforestation, besides the health impacts due to exposure to smoke.
Read the newsletter in English here:
https://globalforestcoalition.org/forest-cover-59/#fc5905

A People's Climate Report: Voices from India

The People's Climate Report, from the People's Climate Network, is designed to offer a perspective on climate change from the bottom up. It aims to understand how communities across the world experience the changing climate. This report offers a glimpse of experiences and voices from communities dealing with a changing climate in West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh, parts of India where waters and forests are increasingly under threat from climate change, deforestation, and lop-sided development.
Read it in English here:
https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d5fb260c9f6643738624dd8b89abb8ba/print

Uruguay: The fraudulent campaign of the Finnish multinational UPM is unmasked

Social organizations from Uruguay, Finland and other countries, together with well-known professionals, presented the results of scientific research carried out over the past 15 years on the impacts of monoculture tree plantations on grasslands, refuting the "green washing" of UPM company, which presents itself as a leading global corporation in the fight against climate change, the defense of biodiversity and the sustainable water management.

The main business of the Finnish multinational is the production of cellulose from its eucalyptus plantations, which replace the prairie ecosystem with industrial monocultures of exotic trees. In addition to the displacement of rural populations, these plantations affect local productions (food sovereignty), soil (acidification and loss of organic matter and minerals,

among others) and water (scarcity in areas adjacent to plantations and pollution due to the use of pesticides).

Read -and adhere to- the open letter that is being presented to different authorities of Uruguayan and Finnish governments as well as to United Nations agencies, where the UPM fraudulent campaign is denounced. http://wrm.org.uy/actions-and-campaigns/sign-on-this-letter-denounce-the-fraudulent-campaign-of-the-finnish-multinational-upm/

UK must prosecute British companies violating human rights in Liberia

The NGO Traidcraft Exchange released a report on January 2020 focused on the Equatorial Palm Oil, which is listed on the Alternative Investment Market (AIM) of the London Stock Exchange. The report entitled "Our Land: Land Grabbing in Liberia and the Case for a New UK Law" found Equatorial Palm Oil's industrial plantations violated local people's right to their land and are pushing them further into poverty and have not been made to account for it. The company enjoys the economic and legal stability and access to investment that comes with being registered in the UK. The report concludes, "If UK companies are acting with impunity overseas, they should be tried in UK courts for their human rights violations," and this should be legally regulated. Read an article on the report in English here: https://frontpageafricaonline.com/county-news/charity-calls-on-uk-to-prosecute-british-companies-that-violate-human-rights-in-liberia/ And here: https://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/29434

Dutch bank ING accused of contributing to palm oil plantation companies abuses

On January 2020, the Dutch National Contact Point for the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) declared a complaint from three Friends of the Earth groups (Milieudefensie -Netherlands, SDI -Liberia and WALHI -Indonesia) against the ING bank, admissible. Oslan Purba, from WALHI highlights that deforestation and land grabbing are systemic in the palm oil sector, "What matters to us is that we have been presenting case after case for 20 years, yet European financial institutions continue financing palm oil companies." According to the complainants, this complaint demonstrates once again that the Corporate Social Responsibility policy or any other voluntary guidelines do not work and that we need binding legislation to put an end to dubious investments and operations. Read about the complain in English here: https://en.milieudefensie.nl/news/friends-of-the-earth-groups-complaint-against-ing-group-admissible-declares-oecd-201cing-has-been-ignoring-abuses-in-the-palm-oil-sector-for-years201d

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