



Faced with the Impositions of Capital, the Struggle Continues!



Our Viewpoint: The sowing of resistance and collective organization.....2
 The Coercion of the Indonesia’s New Capital City Mega-Project and the Neglect
 of the Balik People’s Voices..... 4
 Mega Pine Plantations in the Argentinian Patagonia: Territorial Invasion, Fires and Water
 Scarcity..... 10
 Arbaro Fund: A Strategy to Expand Industrial Tree Plantations in the Global South..... 15
 Industrial Tree Plantations Company Suzano’s agenda at the UN Climate COP26:
 Expansion, GE Trees and FSC Certification.....21

RECOMMENDED

'Decolonising stories' animation series..... 25
 The Feminist Economy: Learning with the Women Farmers..... 25
 Surveillance in the territories: Agriculture 4.0..... 25
 Total offset scam..... 26

This Bulletin articles are written by the following organizations and individuals: An Indonesian activist and journalist; the Aguayala collective, Argentina; REDD-Monitor platform; and members of the WRM International Secretariat

Faced with the Impositions of Capital, The Struggle Continues!

Our Viewpoint

The sowing of resistance and collective organization

We invite you to reflect with an activist who explores resistance processes and the challenges they face, based on her experience with struggles in Brazil. In this reflection, we also invite you to join the collective resistance from your own contexts and spaces of organization. The fight continues and the fight is one!

In its role of accompanying and supporting popular and grassroots struggles in defense of territories and forests, WRM has been listening and learning from numerous meetings, exchanges, dialogues and visits with our allies in different regions of the Global South and Global North. In this walk, we have a deep admiration for the countless and diverse resistance movements that rise up and are sustained, despite the most unimaginable difficulties.

Communities continue to resist despite the violence exerted upon their territories and lives, the immense pressure and multiple plans to further expand the extractive model under the slogan of “green solutions,” the sexual harassment and violence suffered by many women and girls who live in and around extractive concessions (in particular industrial monoculture plantations), the contamination of their soils, food and water sources, the intimidation and criminalization, the marginalization and structural racism, and so many other ills. Despite all of this, the struggles go on. Despite all of this, there is hope to be found.

We invite you to read a very powerful reflection from an activist from the Interstate Movement of Babassu [Coconut] Breakers. Rosalva Gomes depends on gathering babassu palm coconuts for her subsistence. She shared her experiences and lessons about resistance and its challenges at a meeting of leaders and representatives from communities affected by industrial tree plantations in Mozambique, Tanzania and Brazil.

“There is no ready-made recipe for resistance. It depends on each territory and the scope of each territory. It depends a lot on the internal strength of each territory and the specifics of each country, state and community. But there is a unifying strategy, because there is one thing we are sure of: if we do not strengthen and join forces, we will suffer very great impacts, even greater ones [than we currently experience]. We are already going through many difficulties. Unifying forces among communities and organizations is one of the paths of resistance.”

She shares the following, speaking of the Suzano Pulp and Paper mill in Imperatriz, Maranhão, Brazil. Since 2014, Suzano has produced around 1.65 million tons of pulp and 60 thousand tons of toilet paper annually. Along with the highways, the constant transport of wood and the massive influx of workers, this company has caused much devastation for populations in the area:

“In the community of Curvelândia (here near Imperatriz), which is a community composed of rural workers, the conflict began with the trucks transporting eucalyptus logs. In the past,

those trucks would go down a road behind the community, but now they wanted to go through the community. On the first day, the community organized, got together and closed the road. The police arrived with an air of superiority, wanting to protect the company. But the community closed the road. The company arrived, negotiations began, and the community demanded a meeting because they were not being heard. After much insistence, a meeting with Suzano took place; the community asked that the trucks no longer go through there. Meanwhile, supporting organizations were thinking of ways to communicate and warn about the case—because one thing that companies do not like is for their crimes to be made visible. We made a video telling the story, we prepared a complaint, and now we are sending it to the national council for human rights. The trucks have decreased in number. But the company tried to intimidate us; it was watching and sent the message of ‘we are on alert.’

How did the community achieve this? Everyone in the community participated: there were men, women, old people, and young people...the whole community. They signed a petition and filed a protocol at the municipality. They did not consult with anyone. It is a slow process. The uprising has to start from the inside out. There is no greater force than that. Supporting organizations help a lot, but that strength from within, that dedication, that constant warning, that knowing how to warn, how to send a message, how to get this or that person to participate...this path that we are on is much stronger, and it strengthens the forces that help us.

So we talk about resistance, resistance...but we need to find a way to face the situation, because many times we just endure it, right? But we have to face our situations, take our own contexts into account, and impose ourselves in some way.

The sowing of struggle and collective organization are two strategies, which vary according to the specificities of each region and country...and we see that they do work.”

Let us all be part of the collective resistance, from our own contexts and spaces of struggle!

The Coercion of the Indonesia's New Capital City Mega-Project and the Neglect of the Balik People's Voices

The Balik People will bear the impacts of the plans to build a New Capital City mega-project in Borneo, Indonesia. Government officials and business elites in the country are certainly among those who will enjoy the benefits. A Balik woman said, "No one wants to hear our voices," as she already feels the massive land and culture grab that this project will entail.

[*This article is also available in Bahasa Indonesia*](#)

Indonesia's government is planning to move its capital city from Jakarta in Java to the island of Borneo during the first quarter of 2024. The chosen location for this real-state megaproject is an area split between North Penajam Paser Regency and Kutai Kartanegara Regency in the province of East Kalimantan, in Borneo. The government plans to transform 200,000 hectares of forest into the country's new administrative headquarters. This project comes on top of the already existing mining, logging, and oil palm plantation concessions, which have taken a heavy toll on Borneo's rainforests and forest-dependent communities.

The Balik People live in the midst of the New Capital City project site. This article highlights their voices. The Balik People are spread around several villages, such as the village of Pemaluan with 64 families, the village of Sabut, Harapan Baru and other villages in the District of Sepaku. Their traditional chief, Jubain, predicts conflicts with the influx of migrants as masses of people move to the New Capital location, while massive land grabs have already started to be felt in their communities.

The Story of Jubain and the Balik People in Borneo

One morning, Jubain (56), a traditional chief of the Balik People, rushed to the city of Balikpapan. Together with some other community members, he went there in response to the invitation of Indonesia's President Jokowi for a meeting with community leaders in East Kalimantan. The meeting was planned on the sidelines of the President's visit to the candidate site for the New Capital City (IKN, *Ibu Kota Negara*) and the inauguration of the Balikpapan-Samarinda toll road on December 17, 2019. However, instead of being given the opportunity to communicate the views of the communities, Jubain and the other leaders were not even allowed to approach the meeting room.

"You couldn't even get close, let alone enter. So we just sat outside the meeting room," Jubain lamented. He later learned that there was no space for questions at the meeting and therefore the public did not have the opportunity to express any question or concern.

The Balik People's chief was unquestionably disappointed. "We live in the very location of the New Capital City, in ring one. If they want to take over our village, where will we go?" asked Jubain. "He [the President] is the big boss. If he does not want to listen to criticism from the public and the communities, we are all surely in big trouble," he continued.

Jubain's Balik community is in fact among those who will bear the impacts of the New Capital City mega project, while the government officials and entrepreneurs are certainly among those who will enjoy the benefits. Being aware of that, Jubain said, "If these people are elitists and businessmen, they will love the idea." Besides, Dahlia, a dancer from the Balik community who owns an art studio in Harapan Baru village, said that although the New

Capital City project has not yet been implemented, the problems can already be felt. “I can’t imagine what will happen when the project is ready to be implemented,” she said. “But it is nevertheless useless”, Dahlia continued, “No one wants to hear our voices. I want to cry and scream. I feel like being colonized even though we are in a free and independent country.”

For example, Jubain explained that as soon as the government designated the district of Sepaku as a candidate for the New Capital City, land disputes started to appear. “The biggest problem is the land issue,” he said. Before the project arrived to the district, the village was safe and sound. “In the past, nobody thought that their land was very valuable. Now, for example, 15x20 square meter plots of land are already worth tens of million Indonesian Rupiahs. Before, the highest price was only eight millions [around 550 dollars],” he said. Now, when the land is certified, meaning measured and recorded by the government, its price could multiply into one billion Indonesian Rupiahs [around 69 thousand dollars] per hectare.

The communities from this district already had felt much suffering during the period of timber extraction by the International Timber Company Indonesia (ITCI) and PT ITCI Hutani Manunggal (IHM). The presence of the New Capital City megaproject is making things worst. Jubain sorrowfully added that “[the New Capital City] will form a barrier that will slowly destroy and wipe out the traditional culture of the Balik People.”

The New Capital City Concession Overlaps Balik Community’s Land

Jubain said that the New Capital City area is in the IHM and ITCI concessions. This area is part of the settlement of the Balik people. “The IHM concession is about 200 meters from my house”, he stated. “I spoke with the IHM company’s public relations officer and he said that the area that has been designated as the capital city has been guarded by the authorities,” he continued.

Not long after Jubain’s village was designated as a candidate for the New Capital, a group of people came to Pemaluan to measure and record the community lands. They have a program to certify 1000 plots for residents who live in the New Capital City project area. “I have about 5 hectares that are now in the concession area, it used to be our parents’ garden. We were here first. We’ve been here for a long time. How come there is suddenly a map with this concession?,” said Jubain. He criticized that people in Pemaluan were not even consulted about the plans for the New Capital City.

The history of this area shows that the Balik People have long inhabited it and have been carrying out their traditions and culture for generations. “We’re not in the company (area), it is the company which is in our people’s land.” Jubain declared.

In addition to the land that the government has locked in for the logging concessions, various parties are pressuring to make the land of the residents in Pemaluan available for this new project. “Now there are already several residents in Pemaluan who sold their land,” he lamented.

He also expressed his deep disappointment with the North Penajam Paser Regency government when the New Capital City project was determined for their area. There was no communication with the residents and the Balik community. “The regent immediately agreed

to release and clear the land for the project. Which land are they talking about? That's the problem. They don't know the problems inside and the impacts to the people," Jubain said.

The Tactics of the Traditional Villages' Heads

Jubain is officially recognized as the customary head from the North Penajam Paser Regency customary institution by the local government, and was officially elected by his community in 2017. Yet, in the village of Sabut, the customary chief was appointed by the city of Balikpapan. "No election", he said, "Suddenly, there is a village head. It is the outsider who decide and appointed the customary head". According to Jubain, there is obviously an interest to take advantage of this.

Jubain explained that he had been visited by people who claimed to be members of the Balik community. However, none of these people spoke Balik language. They claimed to want to help the Balinese to obtain their customary land. Jubain then politely refused, saying that he could not make decisions on his own because there are other customary heads in the regency level. If they said yes then Jubain would also agree.

Although he admitted that he had different views with the district traditional institutions regarding the presence of the New Capital City, he thinks it is necessary to pay attention to the impacts in the future. He is worried about the people from other places and cities who will come to their lands. "We are worried if those people are big businessmen. Our values, habits, culture, language, will be lost. If our lands are taken away and we are separated, we do not know where to go," said Jubain.

The Destruction Started with the Arrival of ITCI and IHM

The hustle and bustle of the company's operations of clearing the forests, Jubain explained, has also impacts on socio-cultural changes in the community. He remembers his childhood when the ITCI company started working in the late 1960s. ITCI started by building port facilities and roads. Now this company has a concession area of 173,395 hectares which is in ring two of the New Capital project. ITCI's president is the younger brother of Prabowo Subianto, the Minister of Defense. The company received a Timber Forest Product Utilization Business Permit (IUPHHK-HA) in 2012.

Sukanto Tanoto is another concession holder in the core area of the New Capital City project site. He acquire the concession from Hashim Djojohadikusumo in 2006. He holds a special permit to exploit timber from industrial plantations (IUPHHK – HT) of PT. International Timber Corporation Indonesia Hutani Manunggal (PT. ITCI HM). This concession covers an area of 161,127 hectares, of which 5,644 hectares overlap with the core area of the New Capital project site.

From 1972 to 2006, Jubain and the people in his village were forced to breathe in the dust that spilled from the highway which only stopped when it rained. "Day and night working hauling wood. It can be said that every 10 minutes their large fleet passes".

The highway created by the ITCI company divided Jubain's village. "There's nothing left there", he said. This company made an open storage area (*manampung*) in the port, which covers around 5 hectares. There they pile up large logs with the smallest diameter that they transport to the Sepaku District and its surroundings.

In Pemaluan Village, Jubain said, deforestation was rampant between 1984-1985. Logging trucks and wood clamping cars roared every day. The company people cut down the forest around the village without mercy. Along the sides of the paths, they would completely clear the forest. "Once the company entered our land, we lost our livelihoods, our forests, everything was bare because the trees were cut down," Jubain regretted.

Loss of Culture

Jubain explained how the Balik People used to live on the edges of the forests and rivers. His parents used to live from the forest. Daily activities were looking for resin, rattan and making wooden roof shingles. "The products were sold to the city of Balikpapan," he recalled.

The destruction of the forest also caused the *mulun* tradition (Balik medicine tradition) to be eroded or lost. He suggested that there is a close relationship between the medicinal traditions and the loss of the forests as living spaces. "The culture began to disappear when there was a lot of forest clearing happening here," he explained.

He also remembers the time when he and his late father lived from farming around the village. He himself witnessed deforestation when he was a laborer collecting wood twigs to be used as fuel for the company's plywood production.

According to him, the people from the company controlled everything. "We couldn't do anything because we knew that during the military era, the era of Suharto, the guards had security with the army in charge. We were afraid that between 1985 to 1986 we would no longer be allowed to work with wood, using chainsaw, unless you are a company man," he said.

Some village people however were attracted to join the search for wood that had not been taken by the company. "Some people from the village would be taken to the police for stealing wood in the company area," said Jubain.

Not only was their living space deforested, at that time the company didn't care about the Balik People, for example, in terms of education.

Jubain said that the ITCI company has its own school. Village children are not allowed to go to school there. Only people who are permanent workers in the company can receive education at ITCI schools. In addition to employees, you can enroll as long as you pay tuition and fees. Something that is obviously difficult for the villagers. The lives of village people and company people are inversely proportional. "The company people are wealthy and live a very comfortable life," he said.

Before he was chosen by the Balik community as the head of *adat* or customary, he had served as *wakar* or heavy equipment car guard at the IHM contractor company. He did this to make a living, something that was difficult due to the presence of the company.

According to Jubain, all of this started because people think that the Balik community does not exist in the forest area of Sepaku. "Helicopters flew by, it was said that they were making a map. But maybe because they saw it from the air, they didn't know that there were people living below, the Balik People," said Jubain. Moreover, he continued, "our parents' house

used to have thatched roofs. It's all green from above, therefore, the company people could not see that there are houses down here”.

After the ITCI company cleared all the forests in 2006, part of its concession changed to ITCI Hutani Mandiri (IHM), which planted acacia wood. “Acacia species will die after more than five years, so they harvest every five years,” said Jubain

This company took the land of the Balik People. The place where the Balik used to farm and grow fruit was suddenly inside the company's concession. “First came ITCI, then there was IHM, and there was nothing for us. Now another plan is added with the establishment of the New Capital City (IKN),” Jubain said. He believes it is a political atrocity.

Community-Owned Plants Cleared by the Company

On November 22, 2019, the Balik People were shocked to see a heavy equipment excavator belonging to PT ITCI Hutani Mandiri (IHM). The crops of the local residents, such as rubber plants, were cleared by the IHM company. The people's agricultural land near the Karnain River got destroyed. The Balik village has also been designated as part of the core area of the New Capital City project site.

One resident of Pemaluan, Menyu, said that their area was evicted without prior notification. “Our agricultural land, covering an area of about 2 hectares with 600 rubber trees and ten palm trees and 20 coconut trees, was found razed to the ground,” said Menyu. There was no agreement. The company wanted to compensate with 2 million Indonesian Rupiahs [around 140 dollars], but the residents refused. “The area is currently being replanted [with industrial tree plantations] by the IHM company,” said Jubain.

Menyu explained that the Balik people have a deep farming tradition, like other people in Kalimantan. The system is based on the concept of rotating farming. After harvesting, the land is left for a few years, and when it is recovered and fertile, then the farmer would come and replant agricultural crops.

“When the land is left to recover, usually the residents would grow fruit, like *durian lai* and tamarind, or *payang* that looks like a baseball,” said Menyu. According to him, the fruit trees are a mark or symbol that the land belongs to the customary management area. “This is the sign of the legality of the Balik people,” he said.

Now, however, it is difficult to prove the legality of the area as the company has evicted everything. “This is in the Sabut area, on the left if we go to Sepaku, fruits are everywhere, everything is there durian lai, langsung, rambutan, hundreds of hectares, people now are trying to sue [the company for destroying their fruit trees]. The Mobile Brigade were sent down to intimidate us,” Menyu Said. The Mobile Brigade is Indonesia's militarized division of the police. Known as BRIMOB, they are one of the most equipped security apparatus at the moment in the country. The government has categorized the New Capital City project as a ‘national strategic project’ and thus, the BRIMOB is also in charge of its ‘security’.

The area was traditionally managed by residents long before Indonesia's independence. The land managed by residents is in the Pemaluan River ecosystem and its tributaries. However, “residents can no longer rely on these rivers, mainly because of the changes in water quality that are getting worse”. According to Jubain, that is related to the forest exploitation carried

out by the company. Likewise, "as soon as the company built the roads, residents moved up following the road," Jubain explained.

Jubain recalled that before the companies arrived they never lacked water because the rivers provided the clean water they needed. The disruption began to be felt since the 1990s.

The Balik people have been facing the impacts of mainly logging companies for decades, but despite the magnitude of the destruction caused by the logging operations, they managed to remain in their lands, survive and keep their culture alive. The plans of moving the capital to their territory are a serious threat to all the region and must be stopped before it happens.

*Abdallah Naem,
Indonesian activist and journalist*

Mega Pine Plantations in the Argentinian Patagonia: Territorial Invasion, Fires and Water Scarcity

The Argentinian government continues to subsidize industrial tree plantations, now as a policy against climate change as well. With 1.3 million hectares currently planted, most of which are pine plantations, the aim is to reach 2 million hectares in 2030. From dispossession and land appropriation, to deforestation and more forest fires, pine trees are devastating territories and communities.

March 2021 was hell for communities in the Andean region of the Argentinian Patagonia. Voracious fires raged across the territory, four people were killed, and hundreds of families lost their homes and livelihoods. From December of that same year, a similar situation is happening again. The region, located in the western part of Neuquén, Río Negro and Chubut provinces, lies on the Andes mountain range and borders Chile. Since 1970, the state's policy has been to **replace native forest with fast-growing exotic pine plantations**. The invasive nature of industrial plantations and their uncontrolled spread were not taken into account.

These monocultures were a pretext for the dispossession and appropriation of indigenous Mapuche community lands (1). A case that has gained relevance in recent months is that of businessman Rolando Rocco's pine plantations, near the town of El Bolsón, Río Negro. Since September 2021, the *lof* (Mapuche community) of Quemquemtrey has been working to recover their ancestral territory. Their action has been met with extreme violence: not only did the government establish an unyielding police blockade; but on November 21, **two young men from the community were attacked with firearms: one of them died and the other was seriously injured**. Two men associated with the plantations were arrested for this crime (2). The young Mapuche who was murdered was 29-year-old Pedro Elías Garay Cayicol. In that same place in 1993, Mapuche elder Lucinda Quintupuray was killed for refusing to sell her land; and later her son was killed. These crimes were never investigated (3).

"The so-called Forest Plan stripped several Mapuche families of their territory," says Mirta Ñancunao of the Mapuche Community of Las Huaytekas in Río Negro. "Those of us who still remain in the territory have clear evidence and experience related to the imposition, subjugation, abuses, dispossession, forced displacement, judicial processes, habitat modification, alteration of ecosystems and water sources, and loss of spaces to graze animals and to collect *lawen* [Mapuche medicine], fruits and firewood," she says. And she observes that 50 years later, they survive as "intruders" on small plots in a forest invaded with pine trees, and in legal conflicts too.

Despite these impacts, **the Argentinian government continues to subsidize industrial plantations, not only with the argument of alleged economic development, but also as a policy against climate change**. With 1.3 million hectares currently planted—of which 100,000 are in Patagonia—the aim is to reach 2 million hectares in 2030 (4).

Planting Pests

Pine trees replace native forest in a process that is virtually irreversible, due to the magnitude with which they reproduce, the speed with which they grow, and their regrowth after forest fires. Pine trees extinguish the biodiversity in the region: they inhibit the growth of other

plants due to the substances that they secrete and which dry out the soil. The ongoing invasion can be observed in numerous parts of the Andean-Patagonian forest. Seeds carried by the wind germinate even among tall plants, and in many cases, specimens have been found growing tens of kilometers away from the original plantation (5).

Pine Trees and Forest Fires

Fire spreads five times faster in pine plantations than in native forest, and thirty times faster than in steppe shrubs. Pine seeds resist fire and germinate very well after a fire. Each fire creates more fuel mass and leads to more voracious fires.

Climate change also causes more droughts, heat and extreme winds. In this context, continuing with the massive plantation program is equivalent to multiplying scenarios for upcoming catastrophes.

Pine Trees and Water

Several mountain cities in the Argentinian Patagonian have been surrounded by the ill-named “communal forests,” which are actually ponderosa pine plantations. For the most part, they have been planted with the argument that they would help to fix slopes and reduce the pressure on native forests, as well as supposedly generate a regional industry without relying on timber from the northern part of the country.

Meanwhile, in the last two decades, small springs of water that locals use have disappeared. Such is the case in the city of Esquel, in Chubut, where the community first thought this could be a consequence of climate change. They later noticed that **the water sources were drying up as the plantations grew.**

A growing number of investigations, and even more social and territorial problems, warn us about the enormous water consumption of exotic species (such as pine) as compared to native forest or steppe shrubs and pastures. A review of more than 500 river basins worldwide warned about the drastic decrease in water flow where there are plantations, especially in dry areas. With pine plantations, the flow of rivers decreased 40%; with eucalyptus plantations, 75% on average. It also showed that the enormous demand for soil nutrients alters the chemical quality of both surface water and groundwater (6).

To anticipate what might happen on the Argentinian side of the mountain range if the Forest Plan continues, it is appropriate to look at the impacts on the other side of the Andes, in the Gulu Mapu, where pine and eucalyptus plantations have grown to cover 3 million hectares.

In the south-central Chile, in the Gulu Mapu (Mapuche territory), researches and local communities alike warn that pine and eucalyptus monocultures contribute more to the reduction in river flows than climate change does. Imposed during Pinochet’s dictatorship, these plantations have currently reached a level of invasion that is impossible to stop.

Mapuche and peasant communities in southern Chile—surrounded by industrial-scale plantations when they are not invaded or expelled by them—were the first to suffer the impacts of this model.

“...The great scourge we face today is that of the forestry companies, which mercilessly destroy natural life with their exotic plantations in our Mapu. Thousands of hectares of pine and eucalyptus trees, which extinguish all native flora and fauna, are also irremediably drying up our nearest water sources,” said Rumian Lemuy from the community of Williche Kiyemtuaín in 2012 (7).

Plantations have completely transformed the landscape of southern Chile and are the main cause of conflict today; the government’s only response has been to militarize the region and declare a state of siege. In early November 2021, two Mapuche community members were killed by State forces (8).

Effects on the Chubut River

The Chubut river is born from numerous streams in the mountain range, and it runs through the Argentinian province of the same name from west to east, to the Argentine sea. The springs are on the border between the forest and the steppe, a 350-kilometer strip of land. In this region, the Italian group of the Benetton clothing brand, alone, has planted more than ten thousand hectares of ponderosa pine, and it continues to plant more.

A recent study in that region showed that the transpiration of adult pine trees reached 73% of the total water flow; meanwhile in the shrub steppe it was only 10%. “All rainfall in the semi-arid Patagonia is evaporated through pine plantations, resulting in zero deep drainage and zero groundwater recharge,” the study concludes (9). These data show that if massive planting of pine trees continues in the headwaters of the basin, the flow of the Chubut River will decrease even more, due to decreased rainfall.

Why so Much Ponderosa Pine?

In the Andean Patagonia, 87% of the plantations are ponderosa pine, and in Chubut province the figure reaches 96%. Sawmills do not want ponderosa trees because they are over-abundant, and their wood is not valued in carpentry, nor is it good for posts, columns or firewood. So why is there so much ponderosa pine?

Ponderosa pine grows twice as fast in Patagonia as it does in North America where it is native. Seedlings are 100% viable even in dry years, which makes it possible to collect the state subsidy at the end of the first year of the project. Oregon pine on the other hand, with wood comparable to native cypress, does not withstand drought well—which means that it must be replanted for four years in order to complete the plantation. Only after that can the individual planting receive the subsidy. Therefore, **the motivation is to get money in as little time as possible**. This incentivizes massive plantations without even considering the end use of their wood.

But there are also other reasons. As has occurred in Chile, Uruguay and northern Argentina, **after pine plantations, come pulp mills and the water contamination effects they cause**—an issue generally silenced so as not to spark social resistance. Spokespeople from the industry emphatically state that cellulose pulp mills are excluded from the Patagonia Forest Plan. However, that was their stated purpose since the plantations began in the 1970s; the factories would be located on the Chubut River, near El Maitén (10). In a 2016 article published in the newspaper La Nación, they explain that the objective of the Tierras del Sur—Benetton Group company is precisely that: “When the time comes, they will produce much

better quality wood than that from the NEA (Northeast of Argentina), more suitable for pulp fiber” (11). With the Chubut River and at least one captive municipality on hand (such as Maitén, where the majority of the urban *ejido* [public land] is owned by Benetton, which also has the support of the political power), it is not hard to foresee what could happen in the coming decades, or who will be the first to be harmed by contaminated water.

Biological, Academic and Institutional Invasions

Replacing native vegetation with industrial plantations has multiple impacts, whose magnitude is impossible to visualize if not taken as a whole, or if their mutual interactions are not considered. Yet, neither academia nor different State departments communicate with each other to agree on goals that would not have regrettable impacts later. Even within State agencies, divergent views are rarely, if ever, openly debated. Thus, the policies on forests, protected areas, waterways, and public lands end up being defined independently from one another, by officials who are obeying the pressures of economic interests first and foremost.

The continuity of the Forest Plan was guaranteed by training “resources”: the name given to graduates of the Forest Engineering department of the National University of Patagonia. Human resources for forest resources. The Andean Patagonian Forest Research and Extension Center (CIEFAP, by its Spanish acronym) and the Forest Engineering department, with the support of the German agency GTZ and its operators in provincial governments, imposed the current forestry model of plantations and the necessary favorable legislation. Something similar occurred with the “pine-ocracy” in the province of Neuquén. This forestry “development,” imposed on a mega-scale, is just another form of land invasion and extractivism.

What To Do?

It is highly irresponsible to continue to promote plantations, even outside of forests in the intermediate area toward the steppe. The worst thing we can do is to “naturalize” this artificial landscape and not see everything that follows from it: more drought; accumulation of fuel for increasingly devastating fires; and the contamination of rivers by pulp mills in the near future.

As has been rightly said, **the issue is not the pine trees, the issue is the scale and dimension of the mega pine plantations.**

The planting of these pests must be stopped. The plantations that are truly necessary should follow only after prior and informed consultation with potentially affected residents (Art. 169 ILO) and the respective environmental impact study. The forestry policy must be integrated into a broader territorial policy which, first and foremost, should cease to expel people from the land, and should cease to criminalize communities that are recovering part of their ancestral territory.

The expansion of plantations is concerning to not a few Mapuche communities, as expressed in the Parliament for Water and the Chubut River, in El Maitén, in early 2020: “When we lack *kizungenewün* (the ability to decide for oneself), we suffer the consequences of the imposition of this capitalist extractive system. This is how pine plantations are imposed; and they cause droughts, destroy native trees, propagate easily and are highly flammable” (12).

It is urgent to stop the out-of-control proliferation of pine trees in many areas. Individual, neighborhood and collective actions are important to stop the propagation in areas that have not been invaded, or to recover other areas that have. ([This brochure](#) suggests simple actions to remove small pine trees or to dry standing specimens). Gatherings to halt the invasion, recover specific sites and promote recolonization with native specimens are of enormous educational importance. A proposed ordinance was recently presented in Esquel to gradually replace the ill-named “communal [pine] forests” that surround the city with native trees. A *rukatún* (community collective work party for the common good) is always an opportunity to create solidarity, community and awareness—of what belongs to everybody, of the commons and of mutual interdependence—and everything that creativity and love of the land suggests.

Aguayala, Argentina

Collective for research, dissemination and action on water as a common good, in Abya Yala, with special reference to the Andean-Patagonian region. It is composed of neighbors, Mapuche community members, scientists, employees or former employees of the forest sector, assembly activists, communicators and artists. Based in Esquel and the 42nd Parallel Region.

This article summarizes the content of the publication “**Bienvenidos a Pinolandia Agua, pinos, y territorio Efectos (hídricos) de la pinificación del territorio**” [Access the full publication here](#). There you may expand the information and find complete bibliographic references.

- (1) Afforestation as an instrument of dispossession, 2011. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/nos-oponemos-al-saqueo-de-los-recursos-naturales/la-forestaci%C3%B3n-como-instrumento-de-despojo/145023218900144/>
- (2) “El crimen privatizado”, Susana Lara, El Cohete a la Luna, 21 de noviembre de 2021 <https://www.elcohetelaluna.com/el-crimen-privatizado/>
- (3) Tierras robadas en Cuesta del Ternerero: el crimen impune de Lucinda Quintupuray y su hijo <https://argentina.indymedia.org/2021/10/09/tierras-robadas-en-cuesta-del-ternero-el-crimen-impune-de-lucinda-quintupuray-y-su-hijo/>
- (4) Strategic Forest Plan and Industrial Forest Argentina 2030 <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/publicacionforestales-versionfeb2020.pdf>
- (5) Patricio Segura. 2016. Plantaciones forestales: ¿La marea verde que amenaza a Aysén? http://www.patagonjournal.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3603%3Aplantaciones-forestales-ila-marea-verde-que-amenaza-aysen&catid=189%3Aclimate-change-series&Itemid=279&lang=es
- (6) Katheen A. Farley, Esteban G. Jobbágy y Robert B. Jackson. 2005. Effects of afforestation on water yield: a global synthesis with implications for policy. *Global Change Biology* 11(10): 1565-1576. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2486.2005.01011.x>
- (7) Rumian Lemuy. Comunidad Wiliche Kiyemtuaín. 2012. Desde la Cosmovisión Mapuche: El Agua de la Mapu está en grave peligro. *El Ciudadano* 22 de marzo de 2012. <http://www.mapuche.info/?kat=2&sida=3069>
- (8) Chile: Carabineros asesinaron a dos comuneros mapuches <https://www.notasperiodismopopular.com.ar/2021/11/04/chile-carabineros-asesinaron-a-dos-comuneros-mapuche/>
- (9) Mayra Milkovic, José M. Paruelo y Marcelo D. Nosetto. 2019. Hydrological impacts of afforestation in the semiarid Patagonia: A modelling approach. *Ecohydrology*: <https://doi.org/10.1002/eco.2113>
- (10) Susana Lara. El velo protector del Estado. Canilla libre para Benetton en Río Negro y Chubut. <https://www.elcohetelaluna.com/el-velo-protector-del-estado/>
- (11) Los Benetton, de la moda al pino ponderosa <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/economia/campo/los-benetton-de-la-moda-al-pino-ponderosa-nid1874419>
- (12) Proclama del Parlamento por el Agua y en Defensa del Río Chubut <https://www.biodiversidadla.org/Documentos/Proclama-del-Parlamento-por-el-Agua-y-en-Defensa-del-Rio-Chubut>

Arbaro Fund: A Strategy to Expand Industrial Tree Plantations in the Global South

The false idea that industrial plantations are a solution to the climate crisis is a golden opportunity for investment funds like Arbaro, which access scarce climate funding for expanding destructive monocultures. The result is more environmental and climate devastation while communities lose their lands and livelihoods.

Launched in 2018, the Arbaro Fund was established by two companies based in Germany: Finance in Motion and Unique. The Fund invests in tree plantation companies operating in the global South and has already received millions of dollars for its plans to expand these monocultures.

The false claim that planting tree monocultures will help prevent climate chaos is increasingly popular. And this false claim is helping Arbaro Fund's managers and founders to generate high profits. Funds making similar claims and operating in similar ways include the Althelia Climate Fund and the Permian Global Fund. Althelia Climate Fund's effort to generate profits is largely focused on investing in projects from which they can sell forest carbon credits. Likewise, the Permian Global Fund is mostly focused on selling forest carbon credits. (1)

It is important to understand how these Funds work and what hides behind their climate-friendly propaganda. One reason for this is that more such Funds will emerge as part of the new trend of so-called 'Nature-based Solutions'. Like REDD+, this latest trend falsely considers industrial tree plantations as forests and as a solution to the climate crisis. This is a golden opportunity for investment funds like Arbaro, which can access climate funding for expanding destructive monocultures while millions in profits go to their own pockets. In reality, these Funds are facilitating the expansion of a vicious model of land-grabbing, violence, pollution and dispossession... and in consequence, they generate further climate chaos.

On March 2020, more than 100 civil society organisations including WRM signed an Open Letter to the Green Climate Fund (GCF)'s Board to oppose Arbaro's request for finance. (3) The Board ignored the serious concerns and approved an investment of 25 million US-dollars in Arbaro that same month. Arbaro presented plans to the GCF to invest in industrial tree plantations in seven countries: Sierra Leone, Ghana, Uganda, Ethiopia, Peru, Ecuador and Paraguay. Arbaro hopes to secure even more money in the future and establish another 75,000 hectares of industrial tree plantations.

Arbaro's management team invested 4 million US-dollars of their own funds into the Fund. They also secured pledges for 196 million US-dollars from funds and banks including the European Investment Bank, Development Finance Institutions (such as FMO from the Netherlands and GIZ from Germany), a few private investors, and the Green Climate Fund. (2)

The Private Equity Strategy: More Money For The Owners!

Arbaro is a so-called 'Private Equity fund', which means that its funding is made up of investments for which the investors become part-owners. These funds bring together money from external investors, together with a small amount of their own, to invest in other companies, the so-called 'portfolio companies.'

In the case of Arbaro, the focus of the investments is on tree plantation companies in the global South. It buys into these companies, using the money provided by the GCF and other investors (and the 4 million US-dollars that Arbaro's management team put in). To finance the expansion plans of the companies, funds like Arbaro often take out new bank loans, usually through the portfolio companies, rather than using the Fund's own money. The assets of the portfolio companies are usually used as security in the loans from the banks.

By having to take on large new loans and thus, having to make large interest payments, the near-term profitability of the portfolio companies is significantly reduced. This debt-fuelled strategy minimizes the company's taxable profit. It means minimal tax revenues for the state in which the plantations are set up and maximum profit for the Private Equity Fund investors. This strategy is also supposed to ensure that investors like the Arbaro Fund get maximum returns, but significantly increases the chances of investments going wrong, since the portfolio companies are burdened with very large debts.

The Arbaro Fund application to the GCF suggests that the underlying portfolio companies will be loaded with debt, as they estimate that their corporation taxes will be very low.

The Arbaro Fund is set up to exist after 15 years. In that time, the external investors hope that the investments in the portfolio companies can generate profits. Meanwhile, the payments that Arbaro's founders will receive from the Fund do not depend on the financial success of the portfolio companies.

Arbaro's application to the GCF says that if the company were to receive its intended 200 million US-dollars investment, the fund managers will get 26.7 million US-dollars in guaranteed fees for 'managing' the fund and its investments, regardless of the profitability of the companies they invest in. (4) This suggests guaranteed payments of somewhere between 570% and 660% in comparison to the fund managers' 4 million dollars investment (570% if the 4 million were lost and 660% if the investments end up being at least even). Arbaro's management team may also charge other hidden fees to portfolio companies for extra services.

After the 15 years of the Fund's life, neither Arbaro nor its investors will have any saying about what happens to the established plantations – or to the carbon 'stored' in them. Interestingly, Arbaro's carbon accounting is based on maintaining a "long-term average" carbon stock, which relies on keeping trees standing. This accounting runs for 24 years, with most of the carbon sequestration taking place in the last nine years. That's exactly the period after the investment period ends. (5)

Expanding Industrial Plantations

The project presented to the Green Climate Fund is described as a 'Sustainable forestry fund'. They claim that "Sustainably managed forests help protect the environment in multiple ways, including sequestering CO₂, combating deforestation, and preserving biodiversity." (6) However, the reality is that their business is focused on expanding industrial-scale monoculture tree plantations. Many experiences with similar industrial tree plantations in the global South, including in Arbaro Fund's target countries, provide evidence of the many detrimental results of such investments on communities' life spaces and livelihoods. The Arbaro Fund states that its plantations will be certified by the Forest Stewardship Council

(FSC). That is no guarantee given the dreadful record on FSC-certified plantations involved in land conflicts. (7)

Arbaro's 2020 Annual Report states that its focus for 2021 has been on bringing in new projects. (8). Until now, Arbaro has made investments in three countries: Ghana, Sierra Leona and Paraguay. The Fund is currently preparing an investment in Ecuador. In early 2020, Arbaro and the government of Ecuador, represented by the Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, signed a letter of intent to facilitate Arbaro's investment of up to 25 million US-dollars in industrial tree plantations in Ecuador. (9) Moreover, in October 2021, Arbaro presented a proposal to the Green Climate Fund to add two new countries in which it may invest in industrial tree plantations: Colombia and Guatemala. This means that Arbaro could now use the GCF funding also to expand in those countries.

Miro Forestry in Ghana and Sierra Leona

In Sierra Leone and Ghana, the Arbaro Fund is already involved in industrial tree plantations, through a partnership with a British company called Miro Forestry Developments. Like Arbaro, Miro has been funded with large amounts of public money, mostly from European Development Banks, including FinFund from Finland, CDC from the UK and FMO from The Netherlands. In 2018, Miro received 20 million US-dollars from the Arbaro Fund – the Fund's first investment.

Miro's companies in Sierra Leona and Ghana do not own any land, but hold leases instead. Some of the leases contain variable terms so that lease payments to landowners are linked to whether profits are made from selling timber. (10) In 2019, the group actually made a loss on its "biological assets" (trees) after losses to fire, drought and community disputes. (11)

According to Arbaro's 2020 Annual Report "As plantations expand and mature, the company [Miro] has started its industrialization phase" Moreover, it states that, "In 2020 the first trials of its forestry smallholder scheme were established, with approximately 50 ha planted." (12) The company does not specify in which plantations or regions these trials took place.

In Sierra Leona, the company's Yoni plantation covers over 21,000 hectares of land located in the Tonkolili District, adjacent to the country's major highway into Freetown, the country's capital. The plantations are mostly of eucalyptus and acacia trees. Due to the proximity to Freetown, and substantial deep-water port facilities, Miro has convenient access to timber export markets.

WRM recently received information from the ground that the land leases with communities are for 50 years, and that the money that communities receive for giving up their lands for five decades is outrageously low: 2 US-dollars per hectare per year. This does not only represent a complete abuse and exploitation of communities, it also makes their survival as community a serious challenge.

Broken Promises

According to community members, Miro had promised the construction of hospitals, wells for safe water drinking, community town halls, scholarships for their children to be educated, a school transport service for the children, machinery to improve the communities' farming practices, as well as training and employment for their older children. These have all

remained empty promises. At the end of the day, people are barely surviving with the extremely low annual lease rent. Furthermore, community members are forbidden to enter the company's plantations, which prevents access to some rivers and small roads. Access to water is a big concern for them. They explained that even the chiefs are not allowed to enter the company areas uninvited because the area is well protected by guards.

According to a contract between Miro and a community council, Miro commits to pay 5 per cent of its profit into a Community Development Fund to improve the conditions in the community. However, based on how these companies organize their financial matters, Miro is very likely to hide or significantly reduce the profit they make, and therefore also avoid paying this amount to the communities.

In Ghana, Miro's Boumfoum Plantation covers over 10,000 hectares and is located in the Ashanti Region. A 2017 report by the Ghanaian NGO Civic Response exposes that Miro obtained a 5 thousand hectares concession in the Boumfoum Forest Reserve without consulting communities, which resulted in conflicts with small-scale farmers. The report explains that communities only found out about Miro's tree plantation plans when the company told them to remove their property from the area. Miro claims that the small farmers were occupying the land illegally, and cleared farms, food crops, and about 13,000 trees. Evicted small farmers were not paid any compensation and several have subsequently taken Miro to court. (13)

Paraguay

Arbaro's two investments in Paraguay are Forestal Apepú S.A. and Forestal San Pedro. The Green Climate Fund approved their plans for expansion in December 2020. Arbaro has fully owned Forestal Apepú since 2019, and the company will establish 6,059 hectares of eucalyptus plantations in the department of San Pedro, which has one of the highest rates of deforestation in eastern Paraguay and the nation's highest rates of poverty and extreme poverty. Arbaro established Forestal San Pedro in 2021, and the company manages 6,270 hectares of eucalyptus plantations, with plans to establish another 1,730 hectares on leased land, mostly in the department of San Pedro.

A field investigation by Centros de Estudios Heñoi in May 2021 exposed the damaging effects of these industrial plantations. (14) A resident near Apepú's main plantation said that, "now the eucalyptus comes in, and they say that is going to be advantageous, but on the contrary not a single person here has benefited, [there has been] no benefit at all for the poor or for the community. They say they are going to help the community grow, but it is just harm; instead of helping, they want our land."

Residents highlighted how land tenure insecurities compound the economic difficulties they face. Another resident explained, "There used to be more people here, all this was village (...) with a little money, they bought people out. Before, the community was larger, now it's all occupied [by plantations]. Lots of people left, they sold for a little money or in exchange for a cow, and that's it."

Plantation companies take advantage of the difficult conditions that peasants confront, and lead small-scale producers to believing that eucalyptus monocultures can be an opportunity to improve their income. Another key problem is how companies infiltrate and divide communities. One strategy they use is contract farming or 'out-grower' schemes, whereby

producers plant eucalyptus to be sold to the plantation company on their own land. A woman said: “The big companies surround you, they are all around you, and if you plant manioc, it’s no good anymore, and they come and say they’re going to buy you out, they corner you. And they chase the peasants off with money.”

Unique, one of Arbaro Fund’s co-founders, is also running a large-scale eucalyptus tree plantation project in Paraguay, through an investment in a company called PAYCO. This company uses eucalyptus plantations to support the intensification of highly unsustainable livestock production (in part through selling carbon credits) and produces wood-based fuel, which is likely for drying one of PAYCO’s other products, genetically-modified soybeans. There have also been reports of violent conflicts with Indigenous Peoples and peasant communities over PAYCO’s operations. (15)

Final Remarks

Arbaro’s investments are accompanied by discourses of forest restoration and climate change mitigation, and they are backed by international and public climate finance. Its structure and design are done in such a way that the management team can access scarce climate funding sources while generating astronomical profits for themselves, at virtually no risk to their own meagre investment in the venture. All these climate-friendly discourses hide a more disastrous reality that communities confront where the plantations are set up.

The Arbaro Fund is a case in point. Their management team is securing enormous profits while leaving the financial risks to external investors. Meanwhile, impacted communities are not only losing their lands, livelihoods and ways of life, but they are also being deceived to sign abusive contracts, such as that from Sierra Leona of 2 US-dollars per hectare per year. The industrial tree plantations that are being set up with these investments are also expanding a model of destruction and pollution which only exacerbates climate chaos.

Investment funds like the Arbaro Fund are thus strengthening colonial, racist and violent structures of dispossession as well as environmental devastation and climate change.

WRM International Secretariat

- (1) Re:common and Counter Balance, Banking on forests, 2014, <file:///Users/Usuario/Downloads/briefing-banking-on-forests.pdf> ; and REDD-Monitor, 2019, Indonesia’s Katingan REDD project sells carbon credits to Shell. But that doesn’t mean the forest is protected. It’s threatened by land conflicts, fires and a palm oil plantation, <https://redd-monitor.org/2019/12/12/indonesias-katingan-redd-project-sells-carbon-credits-to-shell-but-that-doesnt-mean-the-forest-is-protected-its-threatened-by-land-conflicts-fires-and-a-palm-oil-plantation/>
- (2) Arbaro GCF application, page 27, Section C: Financing information
- (3) Open Letter to Members of the Green Climate Fund Board, https://wrm.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Open-Letter-GCF-Board-Arbaro-Fund_-final-w-signatures.pdf
- (4) Arbaro Funding Proposal GCF April 2020, page 28, Section C.2: Financing by Component
- (6) <https://redd-monitor.org/2020/03/10/the-green-climate-fund-must-reject-arbaros-industrial-tree-plantations/>
- (7) Arbaro Advisors, Investing in Sustainable Forestry, <https://www.arbaro-advisors.com/>
- (8) FSC-watch, <https://fsc-watch.com/>
- (9) Arbaro Fund, Annual Sustainability Report, 2020, https://www.arbaro-advisors.com/fileadmin/user_upload/Arbaro_Fund/Arbaro_Fund_-_2020_Annual_Sustainability_Report_LR.pdf
- (10) Arbaro Fund, Arbaro and Ecuadorian Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock sign letter of intent promoting sustainable forestry development, <https://www.arbaro-advisors.com/news-press-old-page/article/arbaro-and-ecuadorian-ministry-of-agriculture-and-livestock-sign-letter-of-intent-promoting-sustainable-forestry-development/>
- (11) Miro Accounts 2019, Page 38, Note on right of use assets
- (12) Miro Developments Accounts 2019, Post balance sheet event, page 40, note 10
- (13) [Idem \(9\)](#)

- (14) Civic Response, 2017, Assessing Community Consent in Large Scale Land Investments in Ghana, <http://civicresponsegh.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/CR-Land-Use-for-web.pdf> and REDD-Monitor, 2021, How the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative is promoting the expansion of industrial tree plantations, <https://redd-monitor.org/2021/09/24/how-the-african-forest-landscape-restoration-initiative-is-promoting-the-expansion-of-industrial-tree-plantations/>
- (15) GFC, The Arbaro Fund and monoculture tree plantations in Paraguay, 2021, <https://globalforestcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Arbaro-paraguay-summary.pdf>
- (16) Idem (15)

Industrial Tree Plantations Company Suzano's agenda at the UN Climate COP26: Expansion, GE Trees and FSC Certification

Suzano was present at the 2021 UN climate negotiations for one main reason: to promote tree plantations as a 'solution' to climate change, under the name of 'nature-based solutions'. From biomass energy, plantations for carbon sequestration, to GE trees, Suzano aims to profiteer ever more from the so-called climate policies.

People arriving at Glasgow train station in November 2021 to attend COP26, the UN climate meeting, were handed copies of the *Financial Times*, with a front-page advert from Suzano, the Brazilian pulp and paper giant. "We support a regulated carbon market to deliver the Paris Agreement," the advert states. (1)

In a series of bullet points, Suzano, the world's largest producer of eucalyptus pulp, argues that rapid decarbonisation requires "building a truly global regulated carbon market". Suzano describes itself as a "carbon negative company" that has "demonstrated that positive change is achievable today".

And the company announces its goal of achieving "a net removal of 40 million tons of carbon from the atmosphere" by 2025.

At COP26, Walter Schalka, CEO of Suzano, told the 'Business for Nature' coalition that, "Biomass is going to transform the future." (2) Schalka argues that his company "can be part of the solution of the climate change, because we are on both sides of the equation. We are absorbing carbon on one side, and on the other side we are replacing fossil materials."

The reality is that the burning of biomass to produce electricity is booming in part at least because the UN considers biomass as a carbon neutral source of energy. This allows nations and companies to burn biomass without having to count the emissions, thus helping them meet their carbon reduction targets. But the expansion of industrial tree plantations and the burning of wood pellets are highly detrimental for the climate and for forest dependent communities.

Moreover, Suzano is responsible for a massive land grab in Brazil, including of Indigenous Peoples' territory. The company is hoping to continue expanding its monoculture plantations under the guise of 'nature-based solutions'. Another key tactic for Suzano to keep expanding its eucalyptus plantations, is to market itself as a company that practices 'conservation' and 'restoration'. This conceals its disastrous track record related to forest and forest-dwelling people.

Suzano and Eucalyptus Monocultures

In 2019, Suzano Pulp and Paper merged with Fibria to form Suzano SA. (3) Fibria was a company that resulted from a previous merging between Aracruz Celulose and Votorantim Celulose e Papel. Aracruz was one of Brazil's most controversial pulp and paper companies. (4)

Suzano has an annual production capacity of 11 million tons of pulp and 1.4 million tons of paper. Its annual exports amount to US\$4.5 billion. The company has a total of 2.4 million hectares of land in seven states in Brazil (Espírito Santo, Bahia, Maranhão, Ceará, Pará, Mato Grosso do Sul, and São Paulo). About 1.5 million hectares of this land consists of fast-growing eucalyptus monocultures.

The impact of Suzano's vast plantations on communities and their environment is serious. The plantations have dried up streams and watercourses. Working conditions on the plantations are terrible. (5) The plantations in the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo that Suzano took on when it merged with Fibria were established on land belonging to the Tupinikim and Guarani Indigenous Peoples. After 40 years of struggle, the Indigenous Peoples managed to take back 18,070 hectares of their land (6). The plantations also took the land of quilombola [descendants of escaped enslaved people] communities. Suzano also took over Fibria's 50% share in Veracel, becoming co-owner, with Stora Enso, of plantations established on the lands of the Pataxó Indigenous People in Bahia.

On its website, the company states that it is "looking into possibilities of generating carbon credits by forestry (eucalyptus and native) and engineering projects". (7)

Suzano claims that in 2020 its industrial tree plantations removed a net total of 15 million tons CO₂ from the atmosphere. The company states that these figures have been verified by a 'third party', but gives no details about how the figures were calculated. Suzano fails to explain how much biodiversity, soil and cultural destruction these plantations have caused; how much pollution was created due to the large amounts of agrotoxics used in the plantations, the heavy machinery for cutting and transporting, as well as the pulp factories and the related infrastructures; how much violence the plantations have created for Indigenous, quilombola and other traditional communities.

The fact that Suzano was at COP26 promoting carbon markets illustrates how much of a business opportunity tree plantations have become in the new 'climate package.'

Suzano and GE Trees

In 2010, Suzano bought a UK-registered company called FuturaGene, which is carrying out research into genetically engineered (GE) trees. (8) A company called Suzano Trading Ltd, registered in the tax haven of the Cayman Islands, owns FuturaGene. (9)

A FuturaGene corporate brochure explains that "FuturaGene obtained, in 2003, the H421 event genetically modified eucalyptus, developed to increase biomass accumulation." (10) The company claimed that this genetically engineered tree would be 20% more productive. In 2015, Brazil's Technical Commission on Biosafety (CTNBio for its acronym in Portuguese) approved Futuragene's application for the commercial use of the H421 eucalyptus tree.

While Suzano argues that this will make its industrial tree plantations more efficient, the reality is that faster growing trees will use even more ground water. And more profits for Suzano, along with its ambitions of expanding into biomass production as well as pulp and paper, will mean a major expansion in the area of the company's plantations. The company continues to expand. Suzano is constructing another huge pulp mill with an annual production capacity of 2.3 million tons in Mato Grosso do Sul. This will result in yet more land converted into monoculture tree plantations in and around this state.

So far, however, FuturaGene is losing money. In 2019, FuturaGene made a loss of £13.3 million (around US\$17.6 million). The following year, the loss was £8.9 million (around US\$11.7 million). In total, FuturaGene has cost Suzano SA about £121 million (around US\$160 million).

A 2016 [interview](#) with Stanley Hirsch, CEO of FuturaGene, illustrates the ambition of his company. (11) Hirsch talks about a “major opportunity for industrial bio-tech”. And he reveals the gigantic land grab that his company is aiming for:

“I think part of the solution is analysing where we have degraded lands. There is about two billion hectares of degraded lands, agricultural and forest land worldwide. 75% of that is in Africa. That is a huge opportunity, both in terms of economic opportunity and in terms of maintaining the sustainability of the planet.”

While COP26 in Glasgow was taking place, in Brazil, CTNBio approved the 751K032 event genetically engineered eucalyptus for “its release into the environment, its commercial use and any other activities related to this GMO and any progeny derived from it”. Suzano applied for approval of this new glyphosate resistant GE eucalyptus to CTNBio.

The use of agrottoxins is already a major problem where monoculture plantations are established. Soils, water, biodiversity, workers, and communities suffer the contamination. Glyphosate resistant GE eucalyptus will lead to an increase in herbicide use in Suzano’s monocultures. The contamination impacts will also increase.

Suzano and the Forest Stewardship Council

Despite the environmental and social impacts of Suzano’s operations, the company’s plantations are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council as well managed. (12)

FSC’s standards prohibit the use of genetically modified organisms. But FSC managed to wriggle its way out of confronting the fact that Suzano has invested large sums of money in genetically engineered trees, with the clear intent of using them commercially. (13) FSC argues that,

“The permission to commercially deploy the GM clone does not bring Suzano into conflict with FSC rules as long as they do not make use of it. However, should Suzano proceed with planting GM trees for commercial purposes, FSC would initiate a formal process under our Policy for Association, leading towards disassociation from the company.”

Suzano has been lobbying FSC to weaken its position on GE trees even further to allow certified companies to plant GE trees. FSC recently held a consultation on weakening its policy on genetically engineered trees. The Global Justice Ecology Project set up a petition opposing the proposed changes. (14)

In its 2019 Annual Report, FuturaGene explains that (15),

“Because of continuing issues with obtaining certification of Genetically Modified Organism (“GMO”) products from the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC), it is considered unlikely that there will be major commercial deployment of the product before 2022.”

But in its 2020 Annual Report, Futuragene does not mention FSC and states simply that,

“Commercial deployment of H421 (the technology developed by the company’s subsidiaries) has now commenced.” (16)

Suzano’s plantations remain FSC-certified.

Suzano is getting ever closer to commercial plantations of genetically engineered eucalyptus trees. This, then, is what ‘nature-based solutions’ are going to look like. Vast areas of genetically engineered monocultures, grown for corporate profit.

For industrial tree plantation companies, COP26 was an opportunity to lobby for accelerating the ‘low carbon economy’ by planting more trees! Carbon markets and greenwashing tactics perpetuate the exploitative relationships and discrimination that are inherent to industrial-scale production. The people that live in and depend on the territories sacrificed for this industrial so-called ‘low carbon economy’ is left to carry the heaviest burden.

Chris Lang

<https://REDD-Monitor.org>

- (1) Lauren Gifford, The Financial Times, with a laminated pro-compliance market cover advertisement from Suzano, being handed out to COP26 attendees at the Glasgow train station. November, 2021, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/LaurenGifford/status/1457639752316948481>
- (2) Business for Nature, COP26 Nature's Newsroom: Walter Schalka (CEO, Suzano), November 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AnsZsJM0_0o
- (3) Suzano, <https://www.suzano.com.br/en/suzano-is-born-from-the-combination-of-suzano-pulp-paper-and-fibria/>
- (4) Brazil: Aracruz – Sustainability or business as usual?, 2005, <https://chrislang.org/2005/10/28/brazil-aracruz-sustainability-or-business-as-usual/>; Brazil: Quilombolas protest against Aracruz Cellulose, 2005, <https://chrislang.org/2006/02/27/brazil-quilombolas-protest-against-aracruz-cellulose/>; and Brazil: Worked to death by Aracruz, 2005, <https://chrislang.org/2005/11/28/brazil-worked-to-death-by-aracruz/>
- (5) Brazil: Worked to death by Aracruz, 2005, <https://chrislang.org/2005/11/28/brazil-worked-to-death-by-aracruz/>
- (6) <https://chrislang.org/2005/10/28/brazil-aracruz-sustainability-or-business-as-usual/> A Struggle Lasting More than 40 Years, World Rainforest Movement Bulletin 258, December 2021. <https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/learnings-of-tupinikim-indigenous-leaders-from-brazil-about-the-recovery-of-their-territories-a-struggle-lasting-more-than-40-years/>
- (7) Suzano, Indicators Center 2020, <https://centraldeindicadores.suzano.com.br/en/long-term-goals/even-more-climate-positive/>
- (8) Futuragene Limited, Overview, <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/04001406>
- (9) Futuragene Limited, People, <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/04001406/persons-with-significant-control>
- (10) Futuragene, Innovation is Action, https://www.futuragene.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/8_FuturaGene-3.pdf; and International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications, Event Name: H421, <https://www.isaaa.org/gmaprovaldatabase/event/default.asp?EventID=395>
- (11) GlobalBiotechRevolution, GapSummit 2016 - Interview with Dr Stanley Hirsch, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JO4I935ByKs>
- (12) FSC certificates – Suzano: [https://info.fsc.org/details.php?id=a0240000005sSqIAAE&type=certificate](https://info.fsc.org/details.php?id=a0240000005sSqIAAE&type=certificate;); [https://info.fsc.org/details.php?id=a0240000005uzwTAAQ&type=certificate](https://info.fsc.org/details.php?id=a0240000005uzwTAAQ&type=certificate;); <https://info.fsc.org/details.php?id=a0240000008fRYJAA2&type=certificate>; <https://info.fsc.org/details.php?id=a02f300000jmYnSAAU&type=certificate>; and <https://info.fsc.org/details.php?id=a024000000H4SozAAF&type=certificate>
- (13) FSC, Application of Suzano for commercial use of genetically modified trees, <https://fsc.org/en/newsfeed/application-of-suzano-for-commercial-use-of-genetically-modified-trees>
- (14) The Campaign to STOP GE Trees, FSC Petition Demands Strong GE Tree Ban, <https://stopgetrees.org/new-fsc-petition-demands-strong-ge-tree-ban-sign-by-dec-14/>
- (15) Futuragene, 2019, <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/04001406/filing-history/MzI3MzI0MTc5MGFkaXF6a2N4/document?format=pdf&download=0>
- (16) Futuragene, 2020, <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/04001406/filing-history/MzI5ODQ0NzY2NGFkaXF6a2N4/document?format=pdf&download=0>

RECOMMENDED

'Decolonising stories' animation series

The Gaia Foundation and other founding members of the African Earth Jurisprudence Collective- SALT in Kenya, AFRICE in Uganda, and EarthLore in Zimbabwe and South Africa, have produced three animated stories that explore the revival of land, water, seed and Earth-centred cultures by Indigenous and traditional communities in Uganda, Zimbabwe and Kenya. These decolonising stories demonstrate the immense value of Indigenous knowledge and practices and are living alternatives to the dominant industrial growth economy. As the producers affirm, these stories are a testament “That the damages and losses suffered since colonisation can be healed.”

Watch and share the animations (only available in English):

* Grains of Hope. The revival of seeds, land and culture in Bikita, Zimbabwe,

<https://spark.adobe.com/page/TCTrBeg6TZTXN/>

* Land of the Bees. Turning the tide on a history of loss in Tharaka, Kenya,

<https://spark.adobe.com/page/Kb9sull88Sp9U/>

* Custodians of Life. How the Bagungu People are reviving sacred custodianship in Uganda,

<https://spark.adobe.com/page/hDcRWPfEkMORC/>

The Feminist Economy: Learning with the Women Farmers

This video is produced by SOF Sempreviva Feminist Organization, in partnership with RAMA - Agroecological Network of Women Farmers of Barra do Turvo, from Brazil.

The video presents the Feminist Economy as a daily construction in women's lives and as a political project to be pursued to organize society as a whole, articulating the dimensions of the work in agriculture, agroecology, community organization, food sovereignty, reproduction of life and the feminist movement. In the video, women farmers talk about the transformations that collective organization has caused in their lives. The video is available on SOF YouTube in Portuguese, Spanish, English and French.

PO: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkUbORBmqk4>

EN: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a99zGQqHtRw>

ES: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_d6l59y_DM

FR: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=avtlayPkDnc>

Polluters and Plunders. The Roots of Africa's Crises

The WOMIN African Alliance released the first in a series of animated short films. This animation tells the story that rural, peasant and working-class communities across the African continent have confronted from the start of colonisation to the present neoliberal capitalism. This is a story of lives and livelihoods disrupted and destroyed, of environmental catastrophe caused by unfettered extractives industries, of the violence perpetrated upon Brown and Black people whose lives are consistently devalued, and of the exploitation of women's labour of care and violence perpetrated on their bodies. But, it is also a story of resistance led by women and communities as they rise to defend people and nature, and put forward a different vision of Africa and their ideas for a different life for its peoples freed from plunderers and polluters. See the video in English here: <https://youtu.be/IAqj-iSSvuQ>

Surveillance in the territories: Agriculture 4.0

Get to know the threats of Agriculture 4.0. and the possible resistance of peasant women. As the technological titans come to the countryside—with robots, mapping, data extraction, persuasion and espionage—they meet the peasant resistance: wisdom, experience, exchange and respect for nature. An animation by Red Tecla, together with the Global Women's March, the ETC Group and REDES—Friends of the Earth Uruguay, tells us this story. See the video in Spanish and Portuguese.

SP: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OjufHbW5WUo&t=1s>

PO: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VoSw1uulw4>

Total offset scam

Offsetting scams are the new climate denial... and it has dangerous consequences. Greenpeace International released this short video to highlight how French oil giant Total claims they're committed to a clean energy future, but they are trying to drill for oil in a pristine forest in the Republic of Congo - home to many indigenous communities. See the video here: <https://youtu.be/eYScY6QQBSM>

Articles of the Bulletin can be reproduced and disseminated using the following source:

Bulletin 259 of the World Rainforest Movement (WRM): "Faced with the impositions of capital, the struggle continues!" (<https://wrm.org.uy/>)

[Subscribe to the WRM Bulletin](#)

The Bulletin aims to support and contribute to the struggle of Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities over their forests and territories. Subscription is free.

Did you miss the last issue of the WRM bulletin "Communities Resist Land Grabbing and Tree Plantations - 2021 Climate Summit will cause more of both"?

[You can access all the past issues of the WRM bulletin at this link](#)

Bulletin of the World Rainforest Movement

This Bulletin is also available in French, Spanish and Portuguese

Editor: Joanna Cabello

Editorial Assistants: Elizabeth Díaz, Lucía Guadagno, Jutta Kill, Winfridus Overbeek and Teresa Pérez

WRM International Secretariat

Av. Bolivia 1962 Bis, CP 11500 Montevideo, Uruguay

Phone/Fax: +598 26056943

wrm@wrm.org.uy - <http://www.wrm.org.uy>