



Issue 109 - August 2006

OUR VIEWPOINT

[Excessive paper consumption: The impacts of injustice](#)

COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

[Papua New Guinea: Large-scale Logging and Human Rights Abuses](#)

[Colombia: The Bari people in defense of their territory](#)

[Commemorating the Mangrove Action Day on July 26th](#)

[Cultural links to the forest: The web of health](#)

COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

[Brazil: Pataxó, eucalyptus and the sustainability of Veracel Celulose](#)

[Chile: The people of Mehuin again oppose the Celco pulp company](#)

[Chile: The Nielol forest – witness to lies on forests and plantations](#)

[Uruguay: The Botnia pulp mill project intends to profit from climate change](#)

[Indonesia: From oil palm plantations, with repression...](#)

[Indonesia: Oil palm plantations encroaching on communities' traditional land](#)

[Peru: The Amazon forest threatened by oil palm plantation projects](#)

[Uganda: Oil palm plantations that brought high winds and low wages](#)

OUR VIEWPOINT

- Excessive paper consumption: The impacts of injustice

In the world of today, many millions of people's level of consumption does not even cover their basic needs. In plain language, these are millions of people – mostly children – suffering from hunger and misery. On the other hand, there are also millions of people – although much fewer – who consume too much, without this meaning that their basic needs – as human beings – are thus satisfied.

The result of this situation is not only an unjust world – which of course it is – but a world that is moving straight towards environmental disaster. Not precisely because of those who consume too little, but because of those who consume in excess. Although this is applicable to practically any product – from oil to shrimps – the consumption of paper and paperboard serves to exemplify the problem.

The annual per capita world consumption of paper and paperboard amounted to 52 kilos in 2004 (1). As with all

averages, this hides the disproportion between the big consumers and the small ones. In fact, citizens of the so-called "developed" countries consumed an average of 175 kilos per person, while those from the so-called "developing countries" consumed a scant 20 kilos. These averages also conceal the fact that in some countries of the North consumption is well above the average -such as in the cases of Finland (334 kgs), the United States (312) and Japan (250)- as well as the fact that a supposedly "low" consumption of 20 kilos may be perfectly adequate to cover basic needs for paper.

The issue at stake is that this excessive consumption generates serious negative impacts on the life of millions of people in the South. Paper and paperboard are made from pulp, and timber is needed to produce it. Increasingly pulp comes from enormous monoculture plantations, particularly pine, eucalyptus and acacia trees.

These monoculture tree plantations are established in regions fulfilling various conditions: rapid tree growth, access to vast areas of cheap and fertile land, low labour costs, availability of State subsidies and support, and scant environmental monitoring. Basically: the South.

The result is the same country after country: land falling into the hands of large and foreign corporate landowners, concentration of power, eviction of the rural population, net loss of jobs on a local level, depletion of soil and water resources, loss of biodiversity. Despite the promises of "development" accompanying plantations, the impacts only worsen as the area under plantation grows. This is easy to see in countries with millions of hectares of plantations such as South Africa, Brazil, Chile and Indonesia.

The problem becomes even more serious when mills producing pulp for export are established near the plantation areas with the consequent social and environmental impacts. Aracruz and Veracel in Brasil, Arauco in Chile and Argentina, Sappi and Mondi in South Africa and Swaziland, Advance Agro in Thailand, Asia Pulp and Paper in Indonesia are well-known examples of the serious negative impacts of this industry.

And all for what purpose? So that the paper industry can have abundant and cheap pulp to continue expanding its markets and increasing its profits with the permanent invention of new "needs."

The result – in particular in the North but increasingly replicated in the South – is the imposition of an excessive consumption of paper. Examples are abundant. An astonishing number of paper and cardboard throw away items such as drinking cups, plates, trays, napkins and even tablecloths are replacing – on a massive level- similar lasting articles. It is now usual when you purchase something - a toy, a watch, a pair of shoes – for it to come wrapped in paper, in a cardboard box and handed over to the buyer in a paper bag. People's homes are invaded every morning by non-requested correspondence consisting of advertisements printed on paper. Finally, everyone is forced to consume a daily dose of paper and paperboard that no-one ever asked for or wished to consume.

The issue therefore goes beyond the responsibility of the individual consumer and is framed in the wider context of the consumer society. Therefore, simply putting the blame on the individual cannot solve it; it is an issue that must be addressed at the level of society as a whole.

At this stage the societies of the North must understand that their life style – in which consumption occupies an exaggerated position – is affecting the possibilities for subsistence of people with the same rights in other parts of the world. They must also understand that this excessive consumption is leading the planet towards environmental disaster, which is already evident in climate change, water depletion and pollution and loss of biodiversity, among others.

The excessive and unnecessary use of paper and cardboard is only one example of many others but it may serve to trigger off the necessary debate – particularly in the North – regarding the limits that should be placed on consumption and identify mechanisms to bring this about. The wise words of Gandhi "There is enough in the world for everybody's

need, but not enough for anybody's greed" may serve to illuminate such a debate.

(1) World Resources Institute.- Resource Consumption: Paper and paperboard consumption per capita
http://earthtrends.wri.org/searchable_db/index.php?theme=9&variable_ID=573&action=select_countries

[index](#)

COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- Papua New Guinea: Large-scale Logging and Human Rights Abuses

PNG's social, political and economic histories have been moulded by its tropical forests. Covering 60 per cent of the PNG land mass and largely impenetrable, the forests have limited trade, defined customary laws and delineated life and culture. When the world thinks of PNG, they see its forests.

Now, the logging of these incomparable life systems is corroding PNG's society and politics, with only trivial economic benefit, and with alarming flow-on effects in the region.

The PNG logging industry is dominated by a handful of Malaysian companies, the largest of which is Rimbanan Hijau. It is an industry that is synonymous with political corruption, police racketeering and the brutal repression of workers, women and those who question its ways. Its operations routinely destroy the food sources, water supplies and cultural property of those same communities. They provide a breeding ground for arms smuggling, corruption and violence across the country. In return, the industry generates no lasting economic benefit to forest communities, considerable long-term cost and a modest 5 per cent contribution to the national budget.

This record is a far cry from fulfilling PNG's Fourth National Goal – set upon its independence in 1975 – that its “natural resources and environment ... be conserved and used for the collective benefit of us all, and be replenished for the benefit of future generations”.

The logging industry wields influence in PNG through political donations, public sponsorship, lobbying and media ownership. Or, companies simply 'buy' the rights to logging areas outright. Government ministers interfere with logging projects on their behalf. The industry's leverage over the PNG government extends well beyond forestry. One company – Rimbunan Hijau, controlled by billionaire Malaysian Hiew King Tiong – has interests in the finance sector, the media, information technology, property, retailing, commercial printing, travel and shipping. These interests span beyond PNG. The Tiong family holds media assets in China, Malaysia, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Papua New Guinea, Canada and the US, as well as a radio station in New Zealand. In Australia, Tiong investments include the Harbourside shopping complex at Darling Harbour in Sydney, and companies that account for 10 per cent of Australia's mango crop.

The reform of the PNG logging industry is a distant prospect without concerted international action. Within PNG, corruption has stifled the will to uphold existing laws against the interests of logging companies. Where legal action has been taken, those involved have been attacked, physically and commercially.

In PNG, the capacity and political will to uphold legal and human rights is being undermined, not least by the logging industry itself. Disturbing instances of human rights abuse include:

- Denial of due process in appropriating property. The process by which the PNG Government buys timber rights from landowning communities and then issues 'extraction' licenses to logging companies is seriously flawed and amounts to the illegal appropriation of forest lands by loggers.

- Arbitrary detention and physical brutality by police against landowners. Attempts to restrain this appropriation are being dealt with brutally, sometimes by police 'moonlighting' for logging companies. The documented atrocities include the bashing of villagers taking legal action, incarceration without charge, the torching of homes and crops, the shooting of domestic animals with M16s, and men forced at gun point to commit homosexual acts with each other.
- Intimidation and abuse of women. Women suffer the next round of this violence. Community 'big men' handle dealings with logging companies, and some regard logging royalties as 'free money' to be spent on alcohol and weapons. Sexual abuse by logging employees is documented, as are marriages of convenience between expatriate employees and local women.
- Contamination of food and water sources. Far from the promised benefits, logging is denying people their right to an adequate standard of living. Sediment from cleared forest and roads is polluting rivers, as are chemicals used to kill timber pests and preserve felled logs. Fish, crayfish, wild pigs, cassowaries, tree kangaroos and birdlife – all food staples for local communities – have left logged areas.
- The destruction of cultural sites, artefacts and grave sites. Compensation for such acts of desecration is rarely forthcoming. These acts deny the rights of communities to use their own land for cultural and spiritual purposes.
- Unjust working conditions. The appalling labour conditions in many logging camps are again exposed. In Gulf Province, workers have died and been buried on the job rather than the company going to the expense of returning their bodies home. Timber industry workers have not been paid, have lived in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, worked 7am to 7pm and, with company transport the only option, have been held at their work area beyond their willingness to stay.

Human rights abuses have flourished thanks to the physical isolation of the logging communities, and the corruption and inadequate resources of PNG's government. These same conditions have allowed international trafficking in guns, timber, and people. Regional security, not just PNG governance, is being undermined.

In PNG, it is local people who are most skilled in sustainable forest management. Yet these skills are locked out of the forestry process, contrary to PNG's National Goals and Directive Principles.

An immediate moratorium must be placed on the granting and renewal of all logging permits. The current model is not working.

Excerpted from: "Bulldozing Progress: Human Rights Abuses and Corruption in Papua New Guinea's Large-scale Logging Industry", by The Centre for Environmental Law and Community Rights and The Australian Conservation Foundation, 2006, http://www.acfonline.org.au/uploads/res_ACF-CELCOR_full.pdf

[index](#)

- Colombia: The Bari people in defense of their territory

The Bari people, a minority belonging to the Arawak family known as the Children of the Forest, inhabit the Catatumbo Basin in the north of the Department of Santander. The Motilon Bari have a language known as Bari-ara and their own internal and external political and social organization. Their supreme authority is the Autonomous Council of Chiefs, comprising 23 Caciques (Chiefs) from the 23 communities of the Motilon indigenous people. Their economy is geared towards self-sufficiency and therefore the defence of their territory implies the defence of the natural assets that are at the base of their existence.

Over the years, the Motilón Bari have suffered a constant loss of territory to powerful trade interests that have sought to profit from the wealth it contains. Their integrity was threatened once again when in May 2005 the Ministry of the Environment authorized ECOPETROL operations (see WRM Bulletin No. 106), in spite of the many deficiencies appearing in the Environmental Impact Assessment submitted initially.

However, violation of the Bari People's human rights does not cease there. To the military presence on their territory supporting this mega-project and affecting this people's freedom of circulation and the holding of cultural and subsistence activities, is now added their concern over the central government's intention to spray toxic chemicals in the area and even in places such as natural parks. This will affect the Bari territory, contaminating sources of water, subsistence crops and the animal species on which the Bari feed, finally affecting community members' health.

Faced by this situation, the Autonomous Council of Bari Chiefs, the Colombian Association of Motilon Bari Communities "Asocbari", will hold an open meeting on 12 October at Tibu in the north of Santander, under the slogan "We will pronounce ourselves in defense of our territory", with the aim of:

- "1. Convening State authorities and institutions to obtain their commitment to solve the Bari Indigenous People's problems and to demand explanations on the decisions they are taking that violate the Indigenous People's rights.
2. Giving visibility to the serious violation of the Bari Indigenous People's rights, by ignoring our presence at Socbacaira, our ancestral territory where the oil prospecting and exploitation project is being carried out (Alamo Well I).
3. Submitting to the authorities, institutions and Colombian State the following requests:
Recognition of the presence of the Bari People on their ancestral territories
Suspension of the implementation of the Alamo I project for oil prospecting and exploitation
Cancellation of Environmental Licence 0624 of 15 May 2005 to undertake prospecting of the Alamo I well, due to the irregular way it was granted, *inter alia*, certification by the Ministry of the Interior Division for Ethnic Groups that no indigenous communities existed at Socbacayra, known as Alamo I by ECOPETROL
That the Colombian State, Military Forces, ECOPETROL and civilian and military and security bodies fulfil their constitutional obligation to protect and guarantee the rights of the indigenous peoples, that they cease violating these rights and take the necessary steps to prevent this occurring in the future.

Call by Asocbari, e-mail: puebloindigenabari@yahoo.es and Corporación Colectivo de Abogados Luis Carlos Pérez, e-mail: paraquehayjusticia@yahoo.es, www.colectivodeabogadoslcp.org

[index](#)

- Commemorating the Mangrove Action Day on July 26th

In 2000, July 26th was first chosen as a day for the mangroves based on its great significance for the movement in Latin America led by Red Manglar (Mangrove Network). July 26th commemorates that day in 1998 when a Greenpeace activist from Micronesia, Hayhow Daniel Nanoto, died of a heart attack while involved in a massive protest action led by FUNDECOL and Greenpeace International. During this action the local community of Muisne joined the NGOs in dismantling an illegally built shrimp pond in an attempt to restore this damaged zone back to its former state as a mangrove forest. Since Hayhow's death, FUNDECOL and others have commemorated this day as a day to remember and to take renewed action to Save the Mangroves!

In 2003, MAP (Mangrove Action Project) and Red Manglar joined forces to encourage fisherfolk from around the world to join them on Mangrove Action Day to form cooperative flotillas to protest the destructive expansion of shrimp

farming in their areas. This call to action got positive responses from Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Ecuador, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Honduras, Nigeria, Senegal, Kenya, Europe and the USA.

Since then, every July 26th has become an annual global commemorative day for the mangroves. This year's theme is entitled "Mangroves, Our Natural Heritage". According to the Latin American Red Manglar based in Ecuador, "Mangroves are our heritage, our source of life, our livelihood, our place of work, our warehouse and our home".

However, from Mexico to Peru, there are daily news of pollution, deforestation and devastation of mangrove ecosystems promoted by hydroelectric, tourism and shrimp aquaculture mega-projects. The contamination of estuaries, dredging of their channels, civil engineering works planned in detriment of these ecosystems and the indiscriminate felling of the forests are a constant.

Red Manglar warns that "In those countries where the loss of protective barriers to confront natural phenomena was caused by the indiscriminate felling of mangroves, not even floods, tropical hurricanes and cyclones have been able to decrease the destructive spirit of industrial tourism, incapable of turning their eyes towards what happened in Asia just a year and one-half ago, when the terrible tsunami devastated magnificent tourist facilities and, of course, entire towns."

In Bangladesh, on the Mangrove Action Day the Institute for Environment and Development Studies organized a discussion meeting. The speakers warned that destruction of mangrove forests would worsen increasing sufferings of the world's poorest people in the coastal areas, slashing their resilient power in the face of cyclones, tidal bores and tsunami. They said that "the destruction of mangrove forests exposes our ecosystems. Lessons from our experience of most recent Asian tsunami taught that mangrove forests protected Bangladesh and Indian South Eastern coast from the onslaught of the devastating Tsunami. Mangrove forests like the Sunderbans support life on earth and mangroves need protection and conservation more so because of ever increasing propensities of threatening tsunami, cyclones and sea-level rises."

Also the Centre for Coastal Environmental Conservation (CCEC), from Bangladesh, has undertaken a programme on the protection of southwest coastal ecosystems of Bangladesh particularly at polder 30 Batiaghata Upazilla (sub district) by forming a 51 member Mangrove Protection Society (MPS). They are planning to address the activity in polder 32 of Dacope, adjacent to Sundarban, the UNESCO declared World Heritage site

In India, COPDANET! held Art, Drawing and Painting competitions for school children emphasising Mangrove Action Day which was celebrated on a grand scale with rally, public meeting and prize distribution by senior Forest Officials.

As for Africa, the local NGO "Congo Nature Conservation" commemorated the international day receiving messages and phone calls to support the mangroves sustainable management program of Congo threatened by town planning, marine pollution by oil, bad fishing techniques, etc.

As MAP says, "Momentum is building globally to assume responsibility for the defense, conservation and recuperation of this severely threatened ecosystem, as it is a heritage of our nations and territory of traditional indigenous communities".

Article based on information sent by Alfredo Quarto, Mangrove Action Project (MAP), e-mail: mangroveap@olympus.net, <http://www.earthisland.org/map/map.html>

[index](#)

- Cultural links to the forest: The web of health

Many cultural systems are intimately interconnected with forested environments, whether the people live within the forest or on the forest fringe (including city dwellers and researchers studying culture). Forest based cultures have evolved within the forest environment, and their survival requires that that environment be sustained.

Cultural links to the forest include subsistence, income generation, medicinal plants, gender roles, knowledge and symbolic systems, and spiritual links. Fundamentally, this kind of intertwining between culture and forests creates important elements in the meaning of people's lives. Without the forest, such people can be set adrift. As the forest is destroyed, the related aspects of their culture are adversely affected. This in turn leads to both mental health problems and loss of forest-related knowledge systems. The effects are even more likely when forest loss is unplanned, uncontrolled, and/or initiated externally —leading to feelings of disempowerment, inferiority and impotence among local people.

People's mental health has been closely tied to the idea of cultural integrity: They live and die within a particular cultural and ecological context, and they derive meaning in their lives —a central component of human well being (and therefore, health)— from these contexts. When such contexts change —whether through accelerated rates of deforestation or exposure to alien cultures or other forces— people tend to suffer adverse emotional and stress-related physical effects.

Mental illness can destroy both motivation and capacity to manage remaining resources effectively. Loss of environmental knowledge can have a similar effect. A vicious downward cycle ensues, further adversely affecting the environment.

[There are a] variety of approaches to health and illness among forest peoples. Such cultural differences can explain forest dwellers' sometimes-negative responses to medical and public health approaches based on assumptions of the universality of human health care preferences, needs and beliefs. Trying to cure illnesses without understanding local interpretations of causation often results in ineffective treatment, lack of follow-through by patients, and misuse of medications. Attempts to address hunger may be ineffective if local concepts of hunger are not understood; a common error is providing culturally unacceptable foods. Maintaining human health requires attention to the holistic nature of culture and the interconnections among forest peoples, their cultures, and their forests.

The centrality of the forest-people-health links is clear, particularly among hunter- gatherers and many swidden farming groups. Other important issues include the degree to which health beliefs and practices are integrated with other parts of cultural systems (their embeddedness), the differing theoretical orientations and philosophical assumptions about health and health care, and the variety of approaches to health and illness that exist in the world's forests. Maintaining human health requires attention to the holistic nature of culture and the interconnections between forest peoples, their cultures and their forests. On a more global scale, protection of cultural diversity can serve as an insurance policy against overreliance on western cultural models.

Effective communication with forest peoples requires understanding of their world views and openness to learning about their perceptions. Indigenous knowledge about foods and medicines varies in its wider applicability and should be assessed but is likely to include useful elements for health and forest professionals. Wider recognition of useful indigenous knowledge can contribute to the self-confidence of forest peoples, with positive implications for mental health.

Rigidly adhering to a western-based view of health may in fact do more harm than good. The overuse and misuse of antibiotics is perhaps the best-known example, but others include the marginalization (or even criminalization) of traditional practitioners, which reduces access to any kind of health care; the promotion of western vegetables when more nutritious local vegetables are readily available; and the unwillingness of formal medical practitioners to acknowledge traditionally defined mental illnesses, resulting in the hiding of such occurrences. New medicines and

their uses may be interpreted differently and used inappropriately unless providers construct a bridge to local views about health, illness and treatment. As many authors have suggested, participatory approaches to health care may be necessary to improve health among forest (and other) peoples.

Excerpted from: "Forests and human health: assessing the evidence", Carol J. Pierce Colfer, Douglas Sheil, Misa Kishi, Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), 2006, CIFOR Occasional Paper; No. 45, http://www.cifor.cgiar.org/publications/pdf_files/OccPapers/OP-45.pdf

[index](#)

COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- Brazil: Pataxó, eucalyptus and the sustainability of Veracel Celulose

The case of Veracel Celulose is useful – as are so many others – in revealing the falseness of business discourse on "sustainability." Veracel is a modern company, owned in equal parts by the Swedish-Finnish Stora Enso and the Norwegian-Brazilian Aracruz Celulose. Veracel is the owner of 164.000 hectares of land, 78,000 of which have been planted with eucalyptus trees in the State of Bahia, where last year its gigantic pulp mill started operating, with an annual production of 900,000 tons of pulp for export.

In its web-page Veracel states that "Respect for the environment, the generation of employment and income, the fostering of a better quality of life for the population and providing returns to shareholders, following the principles of sustainability, are some of the project's commitments."

We do not have the slightest doubt that the company is seriously committed to "providing returns to shareholders." However, their commitment regarding "Respect for the environment, the generation of employment and income, the fostering of a better quality of life for the population" has been shown, under all lights, to be false.

In fact regarding the environment, this company has been found guilty of destroying areas of native Atlantic forest with chains, tractors and large-scale fires (see WRM Bulletin N° 102). That is, their responsibility as to environmental conservation comes under questioning.

Regarding the generation of jobs, it has been amply demonstrated that eucalyptus plantations are the worst option possible. In the cases of Aracruz and Veracel this has been documented in a recent research available at <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/fase.html>

Regarding social issues, "the fostering of a better quality of life for the population" is obviously not in line with the appropriation of land belonging to indigenous peoples. However, the fact is that the company continues to invade the traditional territories of the Pataxo indigenous people, as affirmed by the indigenous people themselves in the Final Document of the Fourth Assembly of the Pataxo Front for Resistance and Struggle, held in August 2005. There, the Pataxo people stated that "This company [Veracel] is damaging our environment, co-opting our leaders with the promise of distributing benefits with the clear objective of dividing us and continuing with the invasion of our territory." Co-opting leaders as a mechanism for division is antagonistic with the statement – also taken from Veracel's web page that it "bases its relationships on transparency and ethics".

Going even further, this year in the Final Document of the Fifth Assembly of the Pataxo Front for Resistance and Struggle, the indigenous peoples and organizations supporting them, demanded the "End of eucalyptus plantations on our lands under the domination of Veracel Celulose, which continues to cause damage to our environment."

That is to say, this company which affirms that it is committed to principles of sustainability continues to retain in its power lands belonging to the Pataxo people and to plant them with eucalyptus trees and is being accused of continued aggression to the environment. Perhaps the word "sustainability" should be redefined to adapt it to Veracel's practices as, in its most accepted meaning, the use they are making of it is clearly a deception.

Article based on the Final Document of the Fifth Assembly of the Pataxo Front for Resistance and Struggle and on Veracel's web-page: <http://www.veracel.com.br/en/>

[index](#)

- Chile: The people of Mehuin again oppose the Celco pulp company

The coastal village of Mehuin is located in the Northeastern zone of the Province of Valdivia, on the borders of the ninth and tenth regions of Chile. It is a small bay, fed by the river Lingue, and surrounded by the mountains of the coastal cordillera. It has a population of approximately 1,700 people, but co-inhabits with 13 communities comprising some 3,000 Mapuche-Lafkenche indigenous peoples who come down to the village to sell their products and to get supplies. Some very well defined sectors also exist in Mehuin, with their own cultural characteristics. One of these is that of the artisan fisher-folk who inhabit the sector of the village known as "la Caleta", near the Lingue River, where most of the daily life of the village takes place.

Some 10 years ago, the Chilean Pulp Company, Celco S.A. began to carry out some secret studies with the idea of installing a mill and building a pipeline to take 900 litres per second of liquid industrial effluents to the bay. The project was approved in May 1996 and the environmental resolution granted Celco the possibility of choosing between two alternatives for its effluents: dumping them in the river and installing a more modern system or, dumping them in the sea some 35 kilometres away.

For the company, the cheapest alternative was to dump its effluents in the sea, but there they came across opposition to the project from the community of Mehuin. Right from the start the people of Mehuin opposed the implementation of the necessary studies, convinced that they would only ensure the approval and implementation of the project and consequently pollute the sea. A campaign was organized to reject the use of the sea as a dump for polluting chemicals, known as NO TO THE PIPELINE.

Faced by this opposition, Celco reacted with the same arguments that had been used in other conflicts in the country. The first thing was to impose the project as something already decided by the authorities and to try to frighten the community by telling them that opposition was a crime. Abuse of power and authoritarianism were used as strong and valid tools by the company. The second step was to convince people of the benefits of the project, discrediting any argument or group opposing it, particularly environmental groups that were accused of being terrorists and manipulators. The third step was to offer money, an easy task for a project investing US\$ 1,400 million. A new school was offered, working implements to the fisher-folk, even a wharf to cover the pipeline as it entered the sea. The company also offered money for some of the leaders if the conflict was ended. Furthermore, Celco relied on the power of some of the media aligned with the company and the Valdivian local newspaper became the strongest defender of the project.

The government attempted to impose the project as a decision taken by technical teams and any opposition by the community had to be made in the framework of existing legislation. For the government, what was important was to reaffirm its policy of economic growth and this meant supporting all private investments and the forestry/pulp model was part of this process.

Celco attempted entry by land and by sea into Mehuin in order to carry out the studies, but found an organized

community that had managed to make a major part of public opinion aware of the issue. The Government's action was laid open to the country and part of the international community, which looked on with concern at what was going on in the environmental and indigenous conflicts and that was able to witness the strong repression carried out in some Mapuche areas. Faced with imminent defeat, the company and the Government negotiated a way out of the conflict: to approve the project with the initial alternative proposed in the first project, that of discharging effluents into the River Cruces using a more modern treatment that would ensure minimal pollution.

However, shortly after the pulp mill started its activities, the Valdivians started smelling dreadful odours, which led to a series of complaints. Worse still, a silent threat descended down the River Cruces. It was a chemical mixture comprising heavy metals, sulphates and organochloride compounds, fed daily by one million litres of liquid industrial waste, flooding the waters of the Carlos Anwandter Nature Sanctuary (30 kilometres down river from the pulp mill), causing the death and migration of thousands of black-necked swans.

The environmental crisis was brought to the attention of thousands of inhabitants of the province and of the country. After months of mobilisations, the then President of Chile, Ricardo Lagos, suggested the "solution" to the crisis: dumping the effluents from Celco into the sea.

Once again, – having won the first hand over the country's most powerful economic group and over the idea of national development which, in a simplistic way, considers that the country's growth requires the sacrifice of a few, although this may imply the death of some of the country's small ecosystems – the inhabitants of Mehuin are ready for resistance. Their objective is still that of avoiding pollution of their waters and thus saving their sole source of subsistence. They are convinced that the submission of an Environmental Impact Assessment by a large economic corporation such as Celco, is enough to achieve its approval, and therefore they are prepared to prevent it being implemented in their area. The principle of prevention and the possibility of reversing a decision taken by the authorities using mechanisms of citizen participation are nil. Historically, only 4 per cent of the projects submitted to that management instrument have been rejected and of those approved, only 25 % are submitted to very minor control. It is therefore not overbold to conclude that Environmental Impact Assessments only contain declarations of intention that in most cases will not be fulfilled.

It is in this context that the community of Mehuín awoke on 17 August with the siren set off by the observers on the hills, announcing the arrival of the vessels to the place where Celco was to start its studies. Two tugs hired by the company arrived in the proximity of Punta Chanchán, escorted by the patrol vessels "Chiloé" and "Antofagasta" of the Chilean Navy and a warship, with over one hundred marines on board and among them, some hooded men and zodiac boats, ready for action.

Twenty minutes later the fisher-folk's boats had arrived at the site to face this threat. Thirty more launches from Queule, at the south of the Ninth Region also arrived, opposing the pipeline. The public agents shot at the fisher-folk's boats on several occasions, all of which has been duly recorded on film. In the afternoon, following the staunch opposition of the fisher-folk, the two tugboats retreated to the north and the Navy ships returned to Corral and Valdivia.

The president of the Mehuin Fisher-folk's Association, Joaquín Vargas, stated that they were defending the source of employment of over 400 families who were making a living from fishing. "We are defending the right to work in a pollution-free environment. As is set out in the Constitution, the State is responsible for safeguarding the heritage of all the Chilean people."

According to Vargas, the environmental impact assessment does not involve any guarantees for the fisher-folk as the State always ends up by approving it. "Where pulp mills are in operation with Environmental Impact Assessments, the results are there for all to see. Nearby we can see this in Valdivia in the Cruces River. There, there used to be swans that could fly, we fisher-folk do not have wings to fly."

Article based on information from: "El conflicto de Mehuín", José Araya Cornejo, <http://www.wri-irg.org/nonviolence/nvse23-es.htm>; and information sent by Vladimir Riesco Bahamondes, Acción por los Cisnes, e-mail: riesco@surnet.cl and by Lucio Cuenca, Observatorio Latinoamericano de Conflictos Ambientales, e-mail: "Segundo intento de la empresa por iniciar estudios en la zona. Con presencia de buque de guerra y marinos encapuchados Celco no pudo iniciar estudio para ducto al mar", Eliab Viguera, OLCA.

[index](#)

- Chile: The Ñielol forest – witness to lies on forests and plantations

The Ñielol hill located near the city of Temuco in Chile's Ninth Region, is a faithful witness to the numerous lies circulating both in this region and in many others in the country as well as in other countries, regarding forests and plantations.

The first lie refers to the fact that the intention is to confuse people by speaking of forests when in fact it is monoculture tree plantations that are involved. The forestry companies, the most interested parties in this confusion, use various expressions: forests, planted forests, artificial forests, production forests. However, the difference between forests and plantations is evident to any person who, after visiting the region's monoculture pine and eucalyptus plantations, reaches the Ñielol forest.

On observing its beauty and biodiversity, one is able to confirm the fact that this is a forest. Numerous species of native trees can be found such as Quillays, Oaks, Coihues, Lumas, Temus, Nirres, Lleuques, Raulís, Cinnamons, Maiténs, Hualas, Hualos, Olivillos, Peumos, Boldo and Copihue (the national flower), which in turn harbour an infinity of other plant species and animals.

At the entry to the Ñielol forest we find further proof of the major difference between a forest and a plantation. A notice indicates that fire hazards in this forest are low. Generally the notices near plantations announce the contrary: High fire risks. The reason for this difference is that forests by generating water are able to store humidity from the ecosystem and therefore tend to eliminate the possibility of fires. On the other hand, plantations, that are well known for their capacity to deplete water resources and dry up soils, increase the possibility of fires and this has been demonstrated on numerous occasions.

The Ñielol forest is also a testimonial for the inhabitants of Temuco and for all those who visit it (at least for those who can pay the entry fee), of all the wealth that is no longer at community disposal, despite the fact that it is precisely the communities that have known how to use it, preserving it for future generations.

Forestry companies usually affirm that it is they with their plantations that alleviate existing pressure on forests. Nothing is further from the truth. The local people affirm that it is not true that the plantations have lessened deforestation; on the contrary, deforestation has been stepped up. One of the reasons is that the timber from the plantations is expensive and inaccessible for domestic use; firewood supplies are made at the expense of the scant forest areas that have not yet been destroyed by the forestation companies to install their plantations.

This means that the plantation companies are not only directly responsible for past deforestation but that they are also responsible for present deforestation. In fact, the local people say that when the companies are "cleaning the forest" to replace it with plantations, they do it quickly and with heavy machinery. They are able to make hundreds of hectares of forest disappear in a short while. One person affirmed that he had seen this happen in the commune of Cunco, near to Temuco. This is not an exception, it has taken place and been denounced since 2003 by various organizations. Most of the complaints in this region are made against the Forestal Millalemu Company. It is therefore hard to believe that this company has been certified by FSC and nominated as a candidate to a prize by the Regional Advisory

Council of the National Environmental Commission, CONAMA.

For their part, various social organizations from different regions of the country gathered on 28 July in the city of Temuco. Aware of the fact that the Chilean forestry model is being promoted in many other Latin American countries and in the rest of the world as an example of development, in an open letter they describe the negative impacts caused by monoculture tree plantations to the communities in their territory:

“Our rich forests, where our communities obtained food and where they lived for hundreds of years, have been replaced in their great majority by monoculture tree plantations that do not provide benefits to the communities.

Monoculture tree plantations have affected the water level of our rivers and streams and have led to a reduction in tree species and in associated flora and fauna. They have also caused other environmental damage, such as erosion and soil degradation, the appearance of pests and diseases and brought health problems to communities from the use of poisons to counteract them. Research on transgenic trees already being carried out in these regions will only worsen negative environmental impacts.

Monoculture tree plantations have not increased sources of employment. Nor have they improved the standard of living of the neighbouring communities as promised by the promoters for decades, but have increasingly impoverished them, generating high risk slave labour, increasing labour instability and rural to urban migration. The two most forested regions of the country have the highest poverty rates.

Most of the community lands have fallen into the hands of large transnational corporations and powerful economic groups that have benefited from Decree Law 701 subsidising tree plantations, promulgated in October 1974, a year after the installation of the military dictatorship and still in force today. To this subsidy were added special credits for plantations and the elimination of taxes both on land and on plantations. The total liberation of the market for forestry products further promoted the expansion of these projects as it eliminated quotas, duties and standards that established minimum requirements for exports of such products. For some years now the companies have achieved new strategies so that State bodies have even more public funds available to involve small farmers in tree plantations. Furthermore, the population permanently subsidises the companies, as the State must take on economic costs related to highways, roads and bridges, social costs related to health deterioration, more excluded communities and increased delinquency and the socioeconomic costs derived from the elimination of native forests, changes in traditional land use and food deficiencies.

The installation of pulp mills in our territory has generated greater socio-cultural, environmental and economic problems in the communities where they have been installed.

The Chilean forestry model has also left a trail of hundreds of people arrested, prosecuted and sentenced, dozens of people injured, thousands of people mobilized, seeking to recover their encroached on territories – in their great majority the Mapuche people – and attempting to curb monoculture tree plantations and installation of pulp mills.”

At the top of the Ñielol a big poster transcribes two poems by Selva Saavedra. In one of them called “Ex-trees”, already in the last century the Chilean poet asked, “Logging ... until when?” It is a very good question. We should add “Tree monocultures ... until when?”

By Ana Filippini, World Rainforest Movement (WRM), e-mail: anafili@wrm.org.uy. You can see this article in Spanish with photos at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Chile/Nielol.pdf>

[index](#)

- Uruguay: The Botnia pulp mill project intends to profit from climate change

The Finnish company Oy Metsä-Botnia Ab (Botnia's trade name) established in 1973, is the second largest pulp producer in Europe. It has four subsidiary companies, two of which are located in Uruguay: Compañía Forestal Oriental S.A. (FOSA), that has eucalyptus plantations; and Botnia S.A. established in 2003 to implement the project to install a pulp mill producing one million tons per year.

The installation of the mega-mill – involving all the facilities and related chemical factories, plus the plantations supplying eucalyptus – are, not only for Botnia but for Finland as a country, the largest private industrial undertaking abroad in its history. For the company, this guarantees the availability of large amounts of cheap, short fibre pulp, obtained from timber from its vast eucalyptus plantations. The generous Uruguayan soil ensures rapid growth and enables the trees to be cut 7 or 8 years after plantation.

The company found very advantageous conditions in Uruguay: cheap land and labour, plentiful direct and indirect subsidies for the establishment of eucalyptus plantations, enormous benefits ensured with the concession of a free trade zone – exempting it from taxation – and the unlimited and totally free use of much fresh water required to grow eucalyptus trees and process pulp. To this is added the fact that the Uruguayan state ensures upkeep of the necessary highway facilities to transport timber to the mill at no expense to the company.

The prospects for Botnia making a profit in Uruguay are therefore most auspicious, although its presence in the region is very controversial as reported in WRM bulletins 75, 83, 91, 94, 95, 100, 102 and 103, which show that actions against its installation go back to 2003.

However, the company's imagination to increase its profitability would seem to be unlimited. The most recent news is the submission of a project to take advantage of the mechanism set up in the framework of the Kyoto Protocol of the United Nations Convention on Climate Change for the reduction of greenhouse effect gases, known as the "clean development mechanism" (CDM). As we have already discussed in 2000 (see WRM Bulletin 37), this instrument authorises those who pollute to "compensate" their releases by investing in countries of the South, in projects supposedly reducing the release of greenhouse effect gases.

The fact is that Botnia presented its CDM project this month at the Faculty of Engineering of the University of the Republic of Uruguay through two consultant firms: the Uruguayan Carbosur and the Finnish Poyry. It is important to note the presence of Poyry (previously known as Jaakko Poyry), as this consulting firm has played an essential role in the promotion of fast growing monoculture tree plantations and of pulp mills all over the world. Of course, in every case they have recommended the use of Finnish technology and advisory services.

Botnia's CDM project is based on a rationale that is more complicated than usual in projects of this type. The company will generate electricity by burning black liquor from the timber pulping process. This electricity will be used in its production process and will generate an excess of 32 MW of electricity that Botnia will sell to the public electric network (the State owned UTE). According to Botnia, emissions from burning black liquor will be nil as they involve "renewable biomass material" (eucalyptus plantations). They affirm that "combustion of black liquor does not produce the release of greenhouse effect gases because it is part of a cycle implying its restitution due to new biomass growth" (of the eucalyptus trees). So how does the CDM fit into this? Again according to Botnia, "with this process the release of greenhouse effect gases through substitution of electricity generation from fossil fuel [by UTE] will be reduced by generation from renewable biomass" [by Botnia].

If this project is accepted by the CDM, Botnia will obtain additional profits from the sale of "carbon credits" on the "carbon market" where many polluting states and companies are eager to "compensate" their polluting activities with these bonds that enable them to continue business as usual. For Botnia it is a thoroughly good business: it sells its excess electricity while at the same time selling carbon credits.

However, even within the CDM rationale, many questions still remain, in particular those referring to the so-called “additionality factor.” In fact, to avoid carbon credits being granted to projects that would have been carried out anyway, the Convention on Climate Change establishes rules to ensure project “additionality.”

To take advantage of the system it is essential for the project to demonstrate that the mitigation of greenhouse effect gases achieved is due to the implementation of the project and that such mitigation would not take place without it. However, if the project is considered as a whole (from logging the trees to pulp exportation), what is most probable is that – as will be seen further on – total releases of greenhouse effect gases by Botnia will be higher than those that would have occurred in the country without its presence.

Another aspect taken into account to assess the “additionality factor” is whether the project requires, in order to be commercially viable, the allocation of carbon credits. In the case of Botnia, this is clearly not the case as the project submitted for approval of the pulp mill already included burning black liquor for power generation and not only was it economically viable but, in the words of Metsä-Botnia’s CEO Erkki Varis, “I expect the factory to be very competitive, with estimated production costs of about half of those of modern Finnish pulp factories.” (Helsingin Sanomat, 8 March 2005)

Furthermore, Botnia affirms that the decrease in emissions will not be made at the mill but by the State electricity company, stating that “future demand for electricity in Uruguay will have to be satisfied by increasing generation from fossil fuels (oil and natural gas), which release greenhouse effect gases.”

Why is it so sure that the 32 MW of electricity that UTE is to purchase from Botnia would have necessarily been generated from fossil fuels, when UTE has three hydroelectric dams of its own in operation and another one shared with Argentina? It also has the possibility of developing other energy sources such as wind energy, bio-fuels or solar energy.

Furthermore, the calculation made by Botnia regarding emissions is totally simplistic. In fact, Botnia maintains that releases from burning black liquor will be nil because it “compensates” for them by growing eucalyptus plantations. However, even assuming this was true, it “forgets” to mention the releases generated by the project as a whole. On the one hand, it omits to mention the considerable emissions arising from the construction of the factory. On the other hand, it also forgets to mention releases resulting from project operation as a whole. That is to say, the emissions from the factories producing chemicals associated to pulp production; the consumption of fuel by forestry machinery; timber transportation by trucks to the factory – a major operation (calculations involve one truck every 2.5 minutes, 24 hours per day every day of the year); port movements; and fuel consumption by ships taking pulp to paper factories in Finland and China, etc.

Summing up, what is needed, in first place, is to establish the greenhouse effect gas releases base line before starting the mill’s construction. This would allow a serious examination of the net balance of greenhouse effect gas releases resulting from the installation and operation of the Botnia factory. If this were to be done, the result would surely be – on the level of Uruguay – that the release of such gases has substantially increased, which is precisely what the Convention on Climate Change is trying to avoid.

However, in this fictitious scenario, where pollution is transformed into a merchandise and carbon release into current accounts, the fact that the web of life does not operate in this way is totally left out. In theory, releases could be considered as “nil” and “compensated” by growing eucalyptus trees, but in practice they will be released every day by the chimneys. The effects of pollution will be suffered by ecosystems and people – Uruguayans and Argentines – who live close to the gigantic Botnia factory, which will not only release carbon dioxide but also many other chemicals such as sulphurs and even dioxins, potentially affecting the health of the neighbouring inhabitants.

In spite of this, this perverse mechanism “greenwashes” these projects, activities and undertakings in Third World countries, condemning them to continue dependant on an unjust world order where inequality is rising, natural goods are exploited unlimitedly and where poverty and social exclusion are of less importance than market needs. In this context, even climate change itself, one of the planet’s most serious environmental problems, ends up by giving rise to yet another business – carbon trade – from which Botnia now intends to profit.

In Uruguay, Botnia’s CDM project is another step forwards in strengthening the interests that want to place the country – in the words of the well-known Uruguayan writer, Eduardo Galeano – “in the purest Colonial tradition: vast artificial plantations that they call forests, converted into pulp in an industrial process that dumps chemical waste into rivers and makes the air impossible to breath.”

[index](#)

- Indonesia: From oil palm plantations, with repression...

Extensive cultivation of oil palm and the resulting oil extraction have always been linked to repression. Plantation cultivation was originally established by colonial regimes. The rapid expansion of plantations in Asia following the Second World War was encouraged in connection with forest clearing and was used as a weapon in combating Malay rebels.

The growth of plantations has not been accompanied by increased rights for palm-oil workers. The job continues to be hard and dangerous. Production techniques have hardly changed over the past 150 years. The wooden hook used to harvest the fruit has been replaced in some plantations by a sharper metal alloy hook. And now abundant amounts of toxic herbicides are applied by unprotected workers spraying from leaking backpack containers. Accidents are common and life expectancy is short. Unions are very often brutally repressed.

To dismantle a newly-formed trade union, Musim Mas – the world’s largest palm oil refinery, based in Sumatra, Indonesia – fired over 1,000 trade union members in retaliation for a strike. The company evicted workers from their homes and their children from their schools and also arranged for the arrest and prosecution of 6 union leaders. These six young men are presently serving prison terms ranging from 14 months to 2 years for the “crime” of attempting to exercise their collective rights as workers.

The International Union of Food workers (IUF) had been consolidating world trade union support for a considerable group of these workers who had been resisting the company’s efforts to make them hand in written resignation of their rights and their trade union membership by accepting compensation for their dismissal. This phase of the struggle came to an end when on 7 June the trade union reported that some 200 workers – who had been resisting – accepted financial compensation for the loss of their jobs. In exchange they were pressured to drop all legal claims against the company: meaning that the collective dismissals cannot be contested through an appeals process. Compensation amounts to some 123 dollars per worker, the equivalent of 6 weeks wages. The six prisoners were also obliged to renounce their right to appeal against their absurd criminal convictions which have been denounced by Amnesty International and other human rights organizations for criminalizing trade union activities. Hunger is a powerful weapon in the hands of a strong and ruthless corporation.

The company praised the “mutual agreement” by announcing that “This matter was resolved in accordance with Indonesian labour laws and in compliance with all the country’s regulations. We are committed to proactively engaging our stakeholders, both in Indonesia and abroad, to promote a sustainable oil palm industry.”

The Government, under accusations at United Nations ILO for serial violations of international Conventions on trade union rights, praised an agreement, which “will contribute towards more positive industrial relations in the palm oil

industry.”

The situation in Indonesia can be summed up in one sentence: one thousand workers were fired from their jobs and evicted from their homes, a union was dismantled and 6 union workers are in prison, but compliance with national law was achieved by paying out 123 dollars and extracting a “peace agreement” from the prisoners, in which they renounce their rights.

IUF affiliates around the world responded to our appeals with messages to the company and the government and generous financial support (now going to assist the families of the imprisoned trade unionists). The fact that our campaign is beginning to gain ground is shown by the company’s newfound willingness to meet with an organization that they had previously refused to recognize and tried to destroy. In a number of key companies, unions linked to the food processing industry called on their managements to examine their palm oil sources and in particular, their relations with Musim Mas. In one case IUF intervention succeeded in bringing one transnational retailer to temporarily suspend its use of Musim Mas as a producer of its brand products. The FNV in the Netherlands exhorted the Government to cease financial support to the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), the industry’s “socially responsible” public relations mechanism, which includes “multiple interested parties,” among them Musim Mas as an Executive Board member, together with the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Oxfam. Public scrutiny of social conditions underlying palm oil production continues and will not be easily suppressed.

The campaign was working and lessons learnt should not be forgotten, for palm oil continues to grow as a sector built on brutal exploitation. Musim Mas is hardly unique among palm oil producers in its eagerness to crush rights in the search for profits. The use of palm oil as a biofuel means that its price is now linked to the rising cost of fossil fuels, inciting even more greed. It is being encouraged as an alternative to banana-trees in Latin America and promoted as a healthy alternative (which it is not) to trans-fats in processed foods. The plantation areas are wildly expanding, posing a threat to the environment and to workers.

IUF no longer has an industrial dispute with Musim Mas. However, an even greater problem still exists with the company and with the lawlessness and barbarism of the sector as a whole. The World Bank, through its private sector funding agency, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), is increasing its support to expand oil palm cultivation. The RSPO, through its privileged relationship with the World Bank provides it with a “sustainable” cover to fund the kind of social destruction that Musim Mas inflicted on those who produce its profits.

Trade unions in food processing should continue to question their companies’ sources of palm oil and other inputs derived from indefensible practices. Supporters of justice for oil palm workers should look closer at how NGOs risk – even in good faith – fronting for companies such as Musim Mas. WWF and Oxfam, while playing their roles on the RSPO Executive Board, need to make a careful analysis of their own positions relating to palm oil workers’ rights. The Dutch unions are right: government support for the RSPO and the NGO palm oil activities, while taking us further from urgently required solutions, is a scandal that must be stopped. The RSPO should also be challenged and asked to explain Syngenta’s participation in the Roundtable. Syngenta manufactures paraquat, the most toxic herbicide on the planet. Paraquat is responsible for the death of tens of thousands of rural workers every year and is liberally applied on oil palm plantations. The Musim Mas union endeavoured to negotiate a safer application of toxic chemicals and was crushed. The company, whose product kills palm oil workers, has now applied for membership in the RSPO with full voting rights.

Public relations will not bring sustainability to an industry based on the suppression of human rights. The only alternative is organization and binding and enforceable instruments to ensure rights are respected. Brutality and denial of rights underpin the palm oil chain. The case for organizing workers in this sector is self-evident. The IUF is committed to ensuring that organization.

By IUF, e-mail: iuf@iuf.org, <http://www.iufdocuments.org/cgi->

- Indonesia: Oil palm plantations encroaching on communities' traditional land

The environment in West Kalimantan has changed radically over the past 25 years. Much of the forest that supported communities' livelihoods has been cut down and the land allocated to companies that clear it to make way for oil palm plantations. Even forest traditionally set aside for future generations (*hutan cadangan*) is prey to "forest conversion", since the government regards land left fallow under traditional cultivation systems as "neglected" or "critical".

Now, indigenous people have lost their livelihoods and no longer have a ready source of timber or fish, nor can grow their own rice, vegetables and other crops any longer; they must buy food. So the introduction of oil palm plantations has made local communities poorer.

Plantations also obscure the natural boundaries between the customary units (*kampung*) leading to more conflicts between communities. Under the so called "plasma" system –commonly used to refer to the area cultivated by smallholders that supplies the "nucleus" processing plant-, people may be allocated plots of oil palm on customary land (*adat*) belonging to another community or even in another sub-district. So people no longer have control over their customary lands and this weakens the whole *adat* system.

When *adat* land is incorporated into a oil palm plantation as part of the main body of an estate, it would likely imply for the family to become a wage slave on their traditional land.

Regional autonomy has made matters worse, denounces Pak Cion Alexander, a peasant farmer from Sanggau, West Kalimantan, who also has a law degree and is a community activist in the organisation Gerakan Rakyat Pemberdayaan Kampung (GRPK). The local authorities are keen to bring oil palm plantations into their areas on the grounds that they increase local revenues, create employment, provide roads and make communities better off. There are now nearly 40 plantation companies in Sanggau alone.

As Pak Cion Alexander says: "It is true that Sanggau district assembly passed a local regulation on village governance (*Perda* No 4/2002) providing us with the chance to go back to our traditional system, based on the *kampung*. For generations, *adat* formed the basis of highly democratic, independent communities which had control over the natural resources within their customary lands. Decisions were taken by the whole community, not by an elite. The standardised system of village governance introduced by Suharto's regime in 1979 changed all that. But we wanted our *adat* system to be acknowledged. So we pressed for the new regulation as soon as regional autonomy was introduced."

But the problem is that "companies misuse traditional governance systems. The government is complicit in this because it sets up its own, officially approved '*adat*' organisations and appoints the leaders. It is these people who the companies approach to sign away community rights."

"It is vitally important that indigenous rights are recognised in national legislation and are further strengthened through local regulations. The right to free, prior and informed consent is part of this, so we can choose to accept or refuse a plantation on our land. We also need to map the extent of our customary lands, so that companies cannot take it from us so easily. Plantations in Parindu, Kembayan, Tayan Hulu, Tayan Holir and Kapuas should return customary land to indigenous communities because the land procurement procedures violated national and *adat* law."

- Peru: The Amazon forest threatened by oil palm plantation projects

Oil palm plantations are expanding in South America: Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela and now Peru have joined the commercial thrust. The companies find profitable opportunities at the expense of the invaluable Amazon forest and of the lives of peasants who are displaced from their lands where they obtain their means of livelihood.

In the year 2000 the Ministry of Agriculture prepared the National Oil Palm Promotion Plan 2000-2010. With a market approach, the plan seeks to promote "clusters" in the departments of San Martín and Loreto until the consolidation of 50,000 hectares is achieved in the Amazon region which – according to draft Law 9271-- "has vast and rich lands where the palm oil industry can be developed."

In this context, complaints have been made that 30,000 hectares of tropical forests located in the valleys of the Caynarachi and Shanusi subsidiary basins, located right in the Amazon plains and part of the cloud forest, in the district of Yurimaguas, Loreto region, will be allocated to the plantation and industrialization of oil palms by the Romero group, a powerful joint conglomerate involving Industrias del Espino S.A. (INDESA) and Palmas del Espino y Subsidiarias (PALMESA). Before the results of the project's environmental impact assessment have been made public, it is reported that deforestation of 2,000 hectares in the Shanusi area has already started.

The State authorities (the National Environmental Council-Peru - CONAM and the National Natural Resource Institute - INRENA), have made no objections to this project not only degrading the habitat of thousands of forest species, but also carried out at the expense of the territorial rights of numerous peasant communities. In many cases the communities inhabiting the project's area of influence since 1941 or 1961, have been unable to obtain ownership deeds for their communal lands because of the high costs involved in the process. Furthermore, obtaining deeds which takes from one to three years for a peasant or native community, has only take three months for the Romero Group and today the company has managed to obtain ownership of the peasant families' lands.

Over 40 families living in lands that they have occupied for six years now feel that the bodies responsible for issuing the deeds have deceived them as at the beginning they promised to grant the deeds for their plots, but now tell them that as the lands are within the area requested by the Romero group company, it is no longer possible to continue with the formalities. The Upper Shanusi Agrarian Farmers Association "Centro San Isidro" reported that their members started legal formalities in 2005 and that the PETT (Proyecto Especial de Titulación de Tierras – Special Project for Land Title Deeds) measured up the plots, and therefore they are very surprised and upset by this decision.

The peasants of the area know that similar monoculture oil palm plantation projects in Colombia and Ecuador have led to the destruction of the environment, mainly as a consequence of the use of agrochemicals and of their impacts on water, soil, flora and fauna and have also displaced thousands of peasants. They say that social aspects do not look good either as the project will affect activities such as firewood gathering, hunting and fishing, among others.

For its part, the Board of Directors of the Agrarian Farmers Association "Centro San Isidro" – APACSI from the lower Shanusi – Yurimaguas, facing the invasion of oil palm plantations, has issued a declaration in which it makes a denunciation against the authorities for having keep silent over PETT's refusal to grant land ownership deeds for the lands they have occupied and worked for more than six years at the same time caring for the primary forest in the San Isidro Lower Shanusi sector.

They also regret that a wide sector of the press "is not giving coverage to this problem which grows bigger every day and which will surely end in serious and nefarious consequences for our ecology, with deforestation of a vast territory... and with it the destruction of thousands of species of flora and fauna. All this for the miserable objective of planting oil palms for the profitable business of vegetable oil for the new 'ecological engines' that the Romero group is certainly considering selling in our country. It should be noted that this palm only grows where there is sun and water, that is to say that all the vegetation that does not serve their purpose will be destroyed and with it the beings that inhabit it. Furthermore, it is not true that this investment will bring development to the population in this area that has been obliged to sell their lands in order to implement this eco-suicidal project that is merely a temporary palliative to the hunger and misery of our long-suffering peoples." (see the complete declaration in Spanish at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Peru/Declaracion_Yurimaquas.html).

Article based on information from: "Arbitrario posesionamiento del grupo económico Romero en tierras protegidas de selva virgen de Yurimaquas", (The Romero economic group arbitrarily takes possession by of protected lands in the virgin forest of Yurimaquas) declaration made on 9 July 2006 by the Board of Directors - APACSI from the lower Shanusi; "Paralizan titulación de tierras de más de cuarenta comuneros del Alto Shanusi" (the granting of land ownership deeds of over forty community members from the Upper Shanusi has been paralyzed) Giovanni Acate, Radio Oriente, <http://www.ideeleradio.org.pe/look/ideeleradio/article.tpl?IdLanguage=13&IdPublication=7&NrIssue=27&NrSection=50&NrArticle=8898>

[index](#)

- Uganda: Oil palm plantations that brought high winds and low wages

The accelerated destruction of rainforest and indigenous woodland in Uganda, making way for palm oil and sugar production, follows an all too familiar pattern that has been seen in other parts of the world, especially South Asia.

Widely reported (in the local media) was the government release of five thousand hectares of protected woodlands from its statutory care to BIDCO, a palm-oil producing firm that originates in South Asia, in 2001. These forests, on the Ssesse Islands in Lake Victoria were then removed in short order.

Currently, there is a new storm brewing over a proposal to hand seven thousand hectares of virgin forest to the east of the capital to a sugar manufacturing outfit that already owns thousand of hectares of plantations nearby.

Uganda straddles the Equator in the heart of the Great lakes region, and holds a natural extension of the rich Amazon-like biodiversity of the Congo to her west. Her long periods of state-inspired political violence have given her a mixed legacy. On the one hand, there remains a pervasive sense among the elite and political class that the 1966-1986 period of war and insurgency as well as subsequent disturbances have left the country "backward" and faced with a responsibility to "catch up" with the rest of the world.

This has given rise to a particularly pernicious form of self-righteous economic planning-by-*diktat*, where anyone questioning the grand scheme for development is immediately dubbed "unpatriotic"; being secretly enamored of the previous brutal regimes; and/or just plain stupid.

In my own experience, I recall our President Museveni retorting "Are you a romanticist? Do you want to go back to Nature?" in response to my probing about the philosophical basis of his "development" plans for the country.

That was back in 2001, in a radio interview during the then presidential elections. Unfortunately, the quality of official public discourse around the issue of the environment has not evolved much further since then.

Dr Margaret Kigozi, head of the Uganda Investment Authority (the principal agency for attracting foreign capital), is on

record as having dismissed opponents of the hydroelectric dam project being planned for our river Nile as being “obsessed with frogs and butterflies”.

More recently, the Government Minister for Investment asked angrily “aren’t Palms trees?” in response to my repeated questioning, in a bruising radio interview, of the wisdom of the decision to give BIDCO a free hand in hacking down large areas of ancient woodland to make way for their palm plantation.

On the other hand however, Uganda was actually “left behind” in the scramble by global capital to convert the natural assets of the poor Southern countries into “investment” fodder. The country remained relatively more green (a situation similar to the Congo and Southern Sudan, all of which is now under threat) than other parts of the South that were deemed at the time “stable” enough for rapacious foreign investment. This is an enduring irony of the situation we find ourselves in.

And so we are really only at the beginning of this process. There is plenty of eco-wealth to be ravaged and plundered by these international short-termists, and there is plenty of avarice, ignorance and self-righteousness at government level to make access to it incredibly easy.

A few brave souls in the Uganda forestry department opposed these developments from the start. They even found allies in unexpected quarters (such as DFID, the UK development arm), when they argued that the promised jobs were virtual “slavery” and therefore no fair exchange for the loss of these forests. They were ignored.

There is nothing new in this process of destruction. The workings of the globalised financiers are not new anymore. The only issue therefore, is what can be done before it is too late, or before the cost of potential restoration is too high?

The answer lies in the strengthening of activist’s voices that are trying to first of all access and publicize all new information related to these scandals; to be able to work together on a forum that enables actions (such as court injunctions, demonstrations, media education campaigns and community education) that will politically raise the cost of such policy-making.

This will take organized people pooling their skills and information. Already, we are starting with a media expose on how the Ssesse Islands are being destroyed by high winds and low wages since the forests of the Bwendero Peninsula were cut down. BIDCO have reportedly requested another three thousand hectares of the remaining forest. They say they were promised a total of ten thousand hectares, and keep the Ugandan government jittery by threatening to pull out if this promise is not fulfilled. The threat to the forests is only growing larger.

It is important to learn that we are not alone in these efforts, and what we can learn from the efforts of others faced with the same challenge.

By Kalundi Serumaga, e-mail: kalundi@panoseasternafrika.org.ug. Kalundi Serumaga spent many years as a community activist, and now works as a media columnist and radio talk show host in Uganda. He produced and presented a weekly environmental programme on national television throughout 2003. His ancestral burial grounds were part of the land recently taken over by a large-scale palm oil plantation on the Ssesse Islands.

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