World Rainforest Movement - Monthly Bulletin - Issue 170 - September 2011

Printable version | For free subscription | Previous issues also available in **French**, **Portuguese** and **Spanish**

OUR VIEWPOINT

TO THE MEMORY OF OUR FRIEND RICARDO

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF STRUGGLE AGAINST TREE MONOCULTURES

DEFINING FORESTS

OUR VIEWPOINT

- September 21: A tribute to Ricardo Carrere and to all those who struggle against monoculture tree plantations and in defence of life!

This past August 16, as many of you know, we lost our dear friend and colleague Ricardo Carrere. While Ricardo's passing has signified a huge loss for us, at the same time, he has left behind an extraordinary legacy.

This has become clear to us through the countless messages we have received from longtime colleagues and friends. But we have also been struck by the many messages sent by people who met

colleagues and friends. But we have also been struck by the many messages sent by people who met Ricardo only once or on just a few occasions. These contacts, no matter how brief, left a lasting impact on people, as is reflected in the article about Ricardo written by Julien-François Gerber and Sandra Veuthey, included in this issue.

In the editorial for this month's issue of the bulletin, devoted to the International Day Against Monoculture Tree Plantations, we thought it would be fitting to share some of Ricardo's own thoughts and reflections on this date, gathered from the books, publications and articles that he wrote and generously left us with, as a tribute to his life and work.

Every year, with the enthusiasm and commitment he was known for, Ricardo would devote himself to promoting this international day of struggle, established in 2004 at a meeting of communities affected by monoculture plantations in Brazil. We should mention that this date is particularly significant, since September 21 is National Tree Day in Brazil.

What, in Ricardo's view, was the purpose of the International Day Against Monoculture Tree Plantations? He tells us in his own words: "On this September 21 we therefore aim at providing visibility to the numerous peoples struggling against plantations, as a means of breaking the circle of silence and lies surrounding their plight. At the same time, our aim is to disseminate as widely as possible the evidence emerging from those struggles regarding the social and environmental impacts resulting from those plantations. Through this means, it is our aim to weaken government support to plantations and to expose those that either provide plantations with credibility or who misinform the public about the issue." (WRM Bulletin 134, September 2008)

Ricardo took a principled stand on the side of local communities affected by monoculture tree plantations. It was from these communities that he learned about and confirmed the serious negative impacts of these plantations, which he sought to communicate in a clear and direct manner: "Knowledge gained during the past decades, of the fact that plantations are established at the expense of local peoples' livelihoods and environment, has now reached such a level of certainty that it can no longer be ignored. In country after country, monoculture tree plantations have resulted in net loss of employment, forced or 'voluntary' evictions, appropriation of large areas of land by national and transnational corporations, depletion and pollution of water resources, biodiversity loss, soil impoverishment, destruction of local ecosystems – forests or grasslands – and in many cases in human rights abuses including repression, imprisonment and even death." (WRM Bulletin 110, September 2006)

One of the arguments that Ricardo used to justify the importance of the International Day Against Monoculture Tree Plantations was the fact that most people would consider planting trees to be a good thing. As he wrote, "many people – in the South and North – are totally unaware about the social and environmental impacts resulting from large-scale tree monocultures and believe that planting trees is always positive. They are also unaware of the fact that these plantations are not aimed at improving local peoples' livelihoods, but at feeding wasteful consumption in the North." (WRM Bulletin 134, September 2008)

Regarding the reasons for this, he added: "The above situation results from a combination of factors, among which the fact that the voices of local peoples' struggling against plantations are silenced through fear, repression or by being made invisible by the media. Both fear/repression and media invisibility result from the economic and political power of plantation companies, usually also involved in investments in the pulp, timber, palm oil or rubber industrial sectors." (WRM Bulletin 134, September 2008)

Ricardo also criticized the tactics used by corporations to invade these local peoples' lands, through empty promises and false scientific arguments: "The fact that none of these arguments has the slightest scientific foundation has not prevented their dissemination as 'scientific truths', not only by those who

directly benefit – corporations – but also by the technical-bureaucratic apparatus – national and international – placed at their service. In this process, local wisdom has been ruled out as 'ignorance' and true ignorance has been placed on the pedestal of 'science'." (WRM Bulletin 146, September 2009)

He summed up the situation this way: "Essentially, the establishment of these large-scale monoculture tree plantations amounts to a war on the peoples and on nature. The mighty green army invades, destroys and cracks down on local populations, whose only 'crime' is defending what is rightfully theirs from the invader." (WRM Bulletin 158, September 2010).

And he also noted: "Finally, we wish to stress that the struggle against plantations is something that has been imposed on communities, who are in fact protecting their livelihoods and local environments against corporate greed. It is a struggle that needs to be staged in order to protects forests, grasslands, wetlands, biodiversity, soils, water and people, all of which are being affected by these vast tree monocultures. It is, in sum, a struggle for life." (WRM Bulletin 134, September 2008).

Finally, in the September issue of the WRM bulletin last year, Ricardo paid tribute to the local communities around the world who fight against monoculture tree plantations, saying: "That is why, this September 21, we want to pay tribute to all the peoples who are struggling to defend their territories, and launch a call to step up the efforts to support them in the just defence of their rights."

This September 21, 2011, we want to include Ricardo in that tribute. For WRM, supporting these struggles will continue to be a key priority.

Thank you for everything and *hasta siempre,* Ricardo!

index

TO THE MEMORY OF OUR FRIEND RICARDO

- En souvenir de Ricardo Carrere…

Ricardo Carrere passed away in the early morning of August 16, 2011. He had been suffering from lung cancer for some time but wished to remain as discreet as possible about the evolution of the sickness. Everything accelerated in a few days and the sad news took us completely by surprise.

We believe Ricardo Carrere will let an indelible stamp. First of all, for those of us who had the privilege of having met him, he embodied a rare combination of humility, generosity and kindheartedness. From him emanated a kind of juvenile freshness and an ability to listen to others. Two very rare qualities. He also always kept intact a form of contagious fervor about the worth of being an activist and a capacity to get indignant in front of any injustices.

Then, from a political viewpoint, the life of Ricardo Carrere was extraordinary. Its importance, perhaps without himself noticing it, will be seen as essential in the history of global environmentalism.

Early in his life, Ricardo was interested in politics. In the late '50s, Uruguayans suffered from a severe drop in the standard of living which led to student militancy, labor unrest and the emergence of the Tupamaros. As the police forces became more oppressive, social conflicts increased, and in 1973 the army took control over the congress and established a military regime. It is in this context that Ricardo was arrested and kept in jail for seven years, due to its membership of the communist party (Maoist). He didn't like to talk about this experience, but we've always thought that his extraordinary passion for life and justice was a result of these years spent in prison. After his release, he joined his daughter in London where he lived for a while.

Ricardo Carrere embodies this generation of socialist activists who discovered the environmental critique of capitalism and who, since then, couldn't act anymore as if they didn't know. We think Ricardo never lost the radicalism of his youth. He found in Southern socio-ecological movements a broad and neglected arena of contemporary struggles to which he decided to dedicate a lifelong support.

While he never sought to push himself to the fore, Ricardo is indeed best known for being the 'charismatic leader' of the World Rainforest Movement (WRM), although he was not its founder. Under his impulsion, the WRM arguably became the world's most influential activist network specialized on tropical forests. Created in 1986 and based in Montevideo, it developed into an international NGO with many ramifications and was involved in defending the world's tropical forests, securing the lands and livelihoods of forest-dwelling peoples, and promoting community-based forest management. The WRM is particularly well-known for denouncing – especially in his monthly bulletin – the impacts of commercial logging, dams, mining, plantations, shrimp farms, and other projects that destroy forests worldwide. The bulletin, in four languages, is a tool to give a voice to communities and groups suffering from these impacts, while at the same time disseminating in an understandable language information on forest and forest-related issues. Following this, Joan Martinez-Alier has suggested that Ricardo Carrere counts among the founders of the Global Environmental Justice Movement.

Ricardo was indeed an internationalist. He never limited himself to national borders. Although he studied conventional forestry in Southern France, he became one of the fiercest opponents to 'green revolution' forestry characterized by the industrial tree plantation model. Expanding worldwide and particularly in the South, these plantations, promoted as 'planted forests' by the FAO, result in numerous negative social and environmental impacts on local communities. His critique of industrial tree plantations became world-famous.

Incidentally, the social conflicts generated by these plantations also became a topic of doctoral dissertation for one of us (J.-F. G.). In 2006, while we were carrying out research in Southern Cameroon on local resistance to oil palm and rubber monocultures, Ricardo wrote to J.-F. G. saying he wanted to have a closer look at what was going on there as he didn't have much experience of Central Africa he said. We thus organized a five-day trip for him in the area. This was the first time we met him. For us, a rich and unforgettable encounter. At the airport, he came with his little suitcase, a third of its volume being allocated to mate material (a traditional South American infused drink). His bright and soulful eyes stroke us.

During the day, we discussed with Bantu peasants, plantation workers and Bagyeli hunters-gatherers, and during the long evenings in Kribi, the three of us talked about politics, research and personal experiences. His humanity and ability to create a contact with persons from different backgrounds was unusual.

Ricardo was always quite skeptical about the value of science without any direct political involvement of the researcher. He told us he became aware of the impacts of industrial tree monocultures by reading Vandana Shiva's books at the end of the '80s. Together with Larry Lohmann, he then published a landmark book, 'Pulping the South' (1996), that turned into a classic of the environmentalist literature. This book contains the theoretical premises of the 'environmentalism of the poor', includes well-documented case studies from all over the world, and also displays a very practical-political side directly helpful to activists.

Two years after this publication, the WRM launched its campaign against industrial tree monocultures. This campaign aims at generating conscience on and organizing opposition to this type of forestry development worldwide. It also demands from the FAO to change its forest definition that considers industrial tree plantations as forests, with a very strong and, since the start of the campaign, widespread slogan: 'Tree plantations are not forests'. It urges governments not to include tree plantations as carbon sinks in the Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol. The campaign is also very critical of market-based certification, carbon markets and agro-fuels. Because this position is coherent, ethically

market-based certification, carbon markets and agro-fuels. Because this position is coherent, ethically solid, and based on first-hand local activist knowledge, several major international organizations such as the FSC, CIFOR or FAO cannot afford to ignore it. In that sense, the WRM's impact is surprisingly important in view of its 'anti-capitalist' political line. During the campaign, Ricardo wrote some memorable articles, notably his 'Ten replies to ten lies' (1999).

Since this field visit in Cameroon, Ricardo returned several times to Africa. We have constantly exchanged emails and texts and we met again in Johannesburg and Quito. He never lost his enthusiasm. He wrote to J.-F. G. last year how much he was learning from speaking to people about oil palm in rural Central Africa. To us, Ricardo exemplified the lucidity and humanity of 'activist knowledge'. He was one of the world's best political ecologists. His radical spirit will remain alive.

By: Julien-Francois Gerber & Sandra Veuthey

index

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF STRUGGLE AGAINST TREE MONOCULTURES

- Some hints on tree plantations

We live in times of warming. Perhaps the climate is the most obvious expression of an economic acceleration that has warmed up its engines, burning everything in its path. In just a few short decades, productivity has grown enormously. We have seen the emergence of economies of scale, an ever increasing accumulation of capital, a rising number of corporate mergers, the expansion of markets, globalization.

In this scenario, where power is increasingly concentrated and inequalities ever more heightened, national economies very often end up subordinated to the power of giant transnationals, leading to the prioritization, promotion and facilitation of forms of production that serve this model and, to an ever greater extent, financial speculation. Obviously, this means large-scale production, with high yields in the short term, involving large investments of private capital, corporate control, intensive use of technology, and access to large or medium-sized markets.

At the other end of the chain, completing a vicious circle, markets are created for excessive consumption. In some countries, with the largest consumer markets, the turnover of merchandise has

reached a dizzying pace. Everything is used, thrown out and rapidly replaced, everything comes packaged and ready to eat, from the most distant corners of the world to your supermarket shelf. There is an ever growing need for more iron, more wood, more pulp, more energy. The planet has been turned into an enormous impersonal market, without the enticing aromas and vendor-customer exchanges of a "bazaar"… Goods are produced by corporations, transported by corporations, sold by corporations.

Obviously, local economies, community management and collective ownership have no place in planning that prioritizes exports, macroeconomics and capital investments.

It would appear that nobody takes into account the "externalized" costs of the massive use of water, the loss of soil nutrients, the destruction of ecosystems, the voracious appetite for fossil fuels and resulting irreparable release of carbon, the social breakdown caused by the expulsion and marginalization of local communities, the loss of direction in the search for well-being or "Living Well."

The pulp and paper industry

The forestry sector has been no exception in this process. Since the mid-1990s, paper and paperboard consumption has rapidly grown, initially at the expense of tropical forests primarily, in countries like

Indonesia and Malaysia. The pulp and paper industry began to expand, and alongside it, the industrial forestry sector, basically dominated by companies from the North, where much of the world's pulpwood is produced and paper consumption is highest. But industrial plantations of fast-growing trees (mainly eucalyptus) with relatively short rotation periods (between six and ten years, depending on the region) have been established in the South and have expanded at the expense of different ecosystems, such as native forest in the case of Chile, or grasslands in the case of Uruguay and South Africa. Later, an increase in manufacturing capacity gave rise to the emergence of Southern conglomerates as well.

The expansion of the forestry industry has been facilitated by legal frameworks and the injection of generous direct and indirect state subsidies and tax exemptions, which have fostered the establishment of monoculture tree plantations in countries like Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, New Zealand, Indonesia, Vietnam and Kenya, to name just a few examples. In all cases, it is powerful private interests who have benefited – some have involved major national capital, others, foreign investment.

A number of other actors have played a fundamental role in the expansion of the forestry industry. FAO, in particular, has placed at its service not only the technological paraphernalia of the "Green Revolution", but also its influence, helping to disguise monoculture plantations as "forests" with its definition categorizing them as "planted forests".

Consulting firms like Pöyry of Finland have also contributed significantly through the promotion, research, planning and design of pulp and paper mills and tree plantations.

For their part, bilateral agencies (among which Japan's JICA stands out in particular), state investment and export credit agencies, and multilateral agencies have provided easily accessible financing both to plantation companies and the governments that subsidize them. Among the multilateral institutions, the World Bank has provided cheap finance for the establishment of millions of hectares of tree plantations. (1)

New actors: Speculative funds

And who owns the plantations? In addition to the previously mentioned pulp and paper companies, new actors from the financial world have now entered the scene, investing billions of dollars in the acquisition of land and the establishment of tree plantations. Seeking to diversify their investment portfolios, financial vehicles such as pension funds, Timber Investment Management Organizations (TIMOs), Timberlands Real Estate Investment Trusts (T-REITs) and hedge funds have set their sights on the industrial plantation sector. According to a report published by FAO (2), the total investment in tree plantations by these vehicles was estimated at about 50 billion dollars in 2007.
TIMOs, investment management vehicles based in the United States, accumulate funds from a number of institutional investors who may not want to directly buy and manage plantations, or may want to invest only small amounts of their funds. TIMOs tend to establish funds which invest for a period of ten years.

T-REITs, real estate investment funds geared specifically to the forestry sector, developed in the United States and have grown rapidly since 2000. According to the abovementioned FAO report, the largest private plantation owner in the world, Plum Creek, is a T-REIT. Since 2004, the investment assets of a number of forest product companies have been restructured into T-REIT vehicles, which are more tax efficient for stakeholders.

Up until now, these two financial vehicles – TIMOs and T-REITs – have invested in a relatively limited number of countries: Oceania, Chile, Brazil, South Africa and Uruguay, where the tree plantation sector is well established.

Since 2005 another class of plantation investor has emerged: so-called "hedge funds", financial vehicles that operate with high-risk funds. The wealth of inexpensive credit available in the global financial system until mid-2007 enabled these funds to outbid forest product companies, TIMOs and REITs to acquire

large areas of tree plantations, which they generally resell.

A number of European private funds that invest in tree plantations in Europe and other parts of the world have also developed. Some have been formed specifically to invest in the potential carbon market, one of the false solutions to climate change created by the unwillingness of global economic and political power to attack the root of the problem of global warming: the release of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere resulting from the unsustainable consumption of fossil fuels (oil, coal, gas).

New problems with a "green" economy

This same unwillingness has led to the emergence of the supposed shortcut of biofuels, as a way to continue feeding the same voracious system of the globalized economy, except with a different kind of food. New problems. The biofuel demand in Europe has been catapulted by the 2009 European Parliament directive on renewable energy, which sets binding national targets for EU member countries to achieve a 20% share of energy from renewable sources in total energy consumption and a 10% share of energy from renewable sources in transport by the year 2020. This has spurred an avalanche of foreign investors grabbing up land in Africa, South America and Southeast Asia to establish plantations of oil palm and other trees to supply wood chips and pellets for biomass energy.

A briefing by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) (3) reports that in 2011 alone, five major pellet facilities went into production in Canada, Norway, Russia and the United States, with a total combined capacity of around three million tonnes. On the supply side, the spotlight is on Africa. Numerous companies are descending on the continent to establish plantations or replant existing ones for this purpose. Deals have been signed to produce wood chips for export to Europe and other markets by replanting old rubber plantations in Ghana and Liberia.

The briefing cites a number of cases of foreign investments in tree plantations that are wholly or partially for biomass energy, which involve not only private sector investment, but state participation as well. US acquisitions include 60,700 ha in Guyana, 5,000 ha in Ghana and 11,700 ha in India; European investment includes 126,000 ha in Mozambique; and South Korea has acquired 60,000 ha in Cambodia and 200,000 ha in Indonesia (the latter through an agreement between the two governments).

Biomass plantations have the flexibility to sell into different markets, depending on price fluctuations: if fuel prices fall, they can be used to sell timber or pulp, or even carbon credits. The IIED mentions the case of a Norwegian company, Green Resources Ltd. (see Mozambique, WRM series Nº 14 at http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Mozambique/book.pdf), which is acquiring land in Mozambique and Tanzania to establish plantations that involve all three economic activities, that is, supplying wood products and pulp, biomass energy, and carbon credits.

Among the new trends that could further contribute to an increase in plantations is the REDD+ mechanism (see WRM Bulletin 169), which views tree plantations as a strategy to reduce carbon emissions. The government of Indonesia has already announced that, for this very purpose, it plans to plant millions of hectares of tree plantations which it refers to as "new forests" – an absurd misnomer endorsed by FAO.

Another emerging threat is the field that has come to be known as "bioeconomy". It involves a plan to manufacture everything – from plastics to fuel to textiles – from trees and other sources of cellulose in place of fossil fuels. It would also entail the use of dangerous technologies like genetic engineering, synthetic biology and nanotechnology.

Finally, the Green Economy, a concept that will have a starring role at the upcoming Rio+20 Summit to be held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, is being interpreted in a way that will once again render any attempt at change completely spurious. There is a great deal of talk about the new business opportunities that will be opened up by the Green Economy, for investments in key resources like

water, renewable energy, biodiversity and forests (and this undoubtedly includes plantations), the mobilization of financial resources, the encouragement of private sector participation with the support of public spending. UNEP might talk about investing in "sustainable" reforestation, but we know very well that unless the large-scale monoculture plantation model – which is as profitable for big corporations as it is destructive to local communities and the environment – is challenged and opposed, it will all amount to nothing but empty words.

We are facing a crucial moment, a crossroads. Humankind can continue to be dragged to the edge of the abyss by the powerful forces of commercial interests that will not turn back on their own, or it can have the courage to alter the current course and reclaim the ethical principles of the collective interest, the common good, interdependence with nature. At WRM, this is the direction we are striving towards.

By Raquel Núñez Mutter, WRM, raquelnu@wrm.org.uy

(1) "Pulping the South: Industrial Tree Plantations in the World Paper Economy", Ricardo Carrere and Larry Lohmann, http://www.wrm.org.uy/plantations/material/PulpingSouth.pdf

(2) "Corporate private sector dimensions in planted forest investments", D.A. Neilson, ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/011/i0627e/i0627e09.pdf

(3) "Biomass energy: Another driver of land acquisitions?", Lorenzo Cotula, Lynn Finnegan and Duncan Macqueen, The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), August 2011, http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/17098IIED.pdf

index

- No to the WWF New Generation Plantations Project!

On this International Day Against Monoculture Tree Plantations, the Latin American Network Against Monoculture Tree Plantations (RECOMA), a network of Latin American organizations with the basic objective of coordinating activities to oppose the expansion of large-scale monoculture tree plantations on a regional level, with representatives from several Latin American countries, in conjunction with other social organizations and activists, is launching an open call for opposition to the so-called New Generation Plantations Project (NGPP) promoted by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), an international conservation organization.

The call for opposition to the project states:

On its New Generation Plantations Project (NGPP) website, the WWF claims that "we need the commodities and services from tree plantations" and then proposes to "improve models of forestry that keep the commodities flowing, respect the rights of local communities (…) and contribute to protecting and restoring natural forests." In order to achieve these goals, all that is supposedly needed is better plantation management.

But it is the current trade in commodities and, more broadly speaking, the current model of production and consumption that is at the root of the problems that humankind is currently suffering. And at no time does the WWF criticize this model or propose changing it. It wants to believe, or wants to make others believe, that the contradictions inherent to industrial tree plantations will somehow magically disappear: the concentration of land ownership, the evictions of local communities and exclusion of other productive activities, the exhaustion of water resources and soil.

The social and environmental impacts of plantations – which increase alongside the profits of the plantation corporations – are directly related to the industrial-scale monoculture "forestry model" to which the WWF refers. This is why these large corporations have always used every possible strategy to

greenwash their activities. And the WWF's NGPP perfectly fits the bill for this purpose. It would seem that the organization's only concern is to maintain and expand the plantations' current markets.

In addition, the NGPP is largely aimed at opening the doors to the carbon and energy markets for tree plantations, thus paving the way for even more fertile lands on which millions of people in Latin America depend for their survival to be occupied by big corporations.

The NGPP initiative involves a number of forestry sector corporations – CMPC/Forestal Mininco, Masisa, Fibria, Mondi, Portucel, Sabah Forest Industries, Stora Enso, Veracel, UPM-Kymmene – as well as the State Forest Administration of China, the Forestry Commission of Great Britain and the Forest Initiative of Sweden.

The project website showcases a series of examples of industrial tree plantations around the world that have contributed to "biodiversity conservation". Of the nine case studies presented, five correspond to tree plantations in Latin America owned by UPM (case study in Uruguay), Veracel/Stora Enso and Fibria (two case studies in Brazil), Masisa (Argentina) and CMPC/Forestal Mininco (Chile). Each and every one of these companies has a record of denunciations aimed against them by local communities, which the WWF has obviously chosen to ignore.

These denunciations range from violations of the rights of indigenous and traditional communities to their territories and illegal land occupation to the destruction of valuable ecosystems and water sources and the replacement of farmland for raising food crops with tree plantations, among others.

We at RECOMA and the other undersigned organizations and activists denounce these types of manoeuvres as a means of serving the commercial interests of corporations that have no qualms about violating the rights of the local communities on which they impose their monoculture tree plantations. At the same time, we call on other social movements and organizations to join in our opposition to this WWF project.

We are issuing this statement as part of the actions to mark the International Day Against Monoculture Tree Plantations, and in memory of Ricardo Carrere, who during his life and work with WRM and RECOMA tirelessly supported and promoted the struggle against tree plantations and their negative impacts, demanding respect for the rights of local communities and indigenous peoples over their territories.

September 21, 2011

index

- Indonesia: debt, plantations and resistance

Industrial tree plantations have often expanded through direct land expropriation and through manipulative land purchase. But there is a third kind of mechanism by which such expansion indirectly occurs, a mechanism that is somehow less-known although it is probably as important – if not more – than the two previous ones: debt relations. This short article intends to shed some initial light on this mechanism with special reference to commercial tree crops in Indonesia.

At the level of the small planter

In Indonesia, as elsewhere, many peasants got into debt for establishing small-scale tree plantations (oil palm, rubber, acacia, coffee, cocoa, etc.). About one third of Indonesia's oil palm plantations, for example, are managed by smallholders holding less than 5 hectares. This represents about 2.5 million hectares and much of the expected future expansion will occur as a consequence of smallholder production.

What lies behind these apparently inoffensive facts? And why peasants took a loan in the first place? As a matter of fact, peasants need some cash for health care, schooling and for buying certain goods (cloths, soap, fuel, etc.). They therefore plant some cash crops. But land preparation (drainage canals, terracing), machines, seedlings, fertilizers and pesticides are costly. Few peasants can afford that and are therefore forced to take out loans, often through regional plantation companies. The smallholder ends up contractually linked to a given company to which his or her production must be delivered at specific prices. Such arrangements include the various forms of private or state-run nucleus-smallholders schemes. They are sometimes limited to the supply of credit by the company, but they usually also involve the sale of seedlings and agrochemicals.

In such schemes, companies are officially presented as the heroes of development. Such 'subcontracting' credit programmes are said to provide a decisive assistance to smallholders – which is in some particular cases true – but they also represent a powerful mechanism of control and discipline. In many cases, such schemes are in fact nothing else but an expansion strategy, perhaps even the most prominent one today in Indonesia. Unable to attain their financial objectives, smallholders end up selling their remaining land to the company. As Karl Marx (1867) noted a long time ago, "the credit system, which in its first stages furtively creeps in as the humble assistant of accumulation, […] is finally transformed into an enormous social mechanism for the centralisation of capitals" including land in this case.

It is important to realize that once a smallholder has entered a credit contract, he or she is not free anymore. Under a form of constant stress, the debtor is obliged to "do well", that is, he or she must produce enough to ensure the timely reimbursing of loans and the payment of interest. This is no minor matter. Every indebted household is little by little brought to prioritize its needs and to make sometimes painful choices between socio-cultural expenditures and productive investments. Many of them have to work more and even to engage in temporary or part-time wage-labour elsewhere in order to secure timely repayments. If they fail to do so, they may lose their lands which represent their unique means of production. Companies have obviously very well understood the advantage of having smallholders trapped into debt. Accordingly, they try to remain as long as possible in the creditor position, sometimes resorting to dishonest practices (e.g. hiding the remaining amount to be repaid or convincing peasant to take another loan).

More fundamentally, such rural indebtedness has contributed to change customary ways of life. A researcher reported that village conversations "rarely failed to raise statements bemoaning the decreasing cooperation between villagers" and stressed the fact that "people in the village are becoming increasingly calculating (*berkira*) in their approach to money matters" (quoted in Scott, 1985). Regarding the effect on the community, there is a pressure against customary common lands because credit is impossible unless portions of the community's land are used as collateral. Besides such socio-cultural impacts, peasant indebtedness has also created new pressures on the environment. Wilson (2010) writes that "if peasants have access to credit, particularly at high interest rates, increasing annual productivity becomes vital to their ability to repay their loans" – which also involves increased pollution and further ecosystem simplification.

At the level of the plantation company

Companies may also end up trapped into debt. The heavy debts of plantation companies are notorious in Indonesia. Perhaps the most famous example of this is Asia Pulp & Paper (APP), the country's largest paper producer. Its plantations were established during the mid-1980s and 1990s on a concession of 300,000 hectares. With debts of US$ 13.9 billion in 2006, APP is subject to an extraordinary financial and legal pressure to expand operations regardless of ecological or social costs. Matthew and Gelder (2001) note that "APP's process of resolving outstanding debts to foreign creditors has been linked to further expansion of their processing operations. APP has for example financed its growing debt in part by raising more finance to support new expansion of its pulp and paper facilities. Such a vicious circle of

debt-driven destruction has directly led to forest destruction".

While it is estimated that APP's activities have resulted in one million hectares of rainforests being lost since the beginning of its operations, the company apparently continues today to rely heavily on wood harvested from natural forests – often prior to convert them into pulp plantations. Trapped in these debt-driven dynamics, APP is also known for violating the rights of local forest-dependant villages. Barr (2004) estimates that 60,000 hectares of its plantations are subject to claim by neighbouring communities. Since Suharto was forced from office in 1998, members of previously powerless communities have begun to openly protest the loss of their customary land and livelihoods, sometimes resulting in violent conflicts (HRW, 2003).

Practices of international creditors are obviously an important root of the problem. APP's heavy borrowing was based on the assumption that repayment would be possible because of its access to an unlimited supply of cheap wood from natural forests and pulpwood plantations – something that was indeed possible in the past through military backing. The important point here is to understand the connection between corporate indebtedness, socio-ecological destruction, and social conflicts.

Conclusion

At the household level, in many parts of Southeast Asia including Indonesia, debt relations have been a central mechanism fostering the concentration of land in a few hands. It has thereby stimulated social differentiation processes by which smallholders lost their land and became tenants or wage-labourers. Such processes are still on the march today in the Indonesian plantation sector. It is not always easy to observe as it may take different forms, sometimes very informal ones.

At the company level, debt also plays an important role. It forces companies to aggressively increase production in order to repay creditors, often from industrialized countries. It thereby encourages the expansion and intensification of plantations. At a larger scale, such pressures are comparable to what happens at the household level. In any case, the financial sector – whether local, national or global – is able to control and discipline its customers and turns out to be the key winner.

By Julien-François Gerber, email: JulienFrancois.Gerber@campus.uab.es

References

Barr, C., 2004. Risk analysis and impact assessment for pulp and plantation investments: the case of Indonesia. Bogor: Center for International Forestry Research.
Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2003. Without remedy: human rights abuse and Indonesia's pulp and paper Industry. New York: HRW.
Marx, K., 1976 [1867]. Capital. Vol. 1. New York: Vintage.
Matthew, E. & J. van Gelder, 2001. Paper tiger, hidden dragons. London: Friends of the Earth.
Scott, J., 1985. Weapons of the weak. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Wilson, B., 2010. Indebted to fair trade? Coffee and crisis in Nicaragua. Geoforum, 41(1): 84–92.

index

- India: Tribal women of Kaimur plant native trees to protest JICA-funded government tree plantation drive

Hundreds of trees of native species used by local communities – such as neem, lemon, sehjan, amla, jamun, mango, chironji and mahua – were symbolically planted in the District Court headquarters in Robertsganj, capital of the district of Sonbhadra in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, on July 4, 2011 by tribal women to protest the tree plantation drive being undertaken by the Forest Department,

with funding from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

This action forms part of the community tree planting programme being carried out on a massive scale under the banner of the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers and the local organization Kaimur Kshetra Mahila Mazdoor Sangarsh Samiti, on all the lands that have been reclaimed by tribal people in the Kaimur region of Sonbhadra, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar in recent years.(1)

The Kaimur region is known for its rich forest and mineral resources. In 2006 the government of India enacted a very revolutionary piece of legislation, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest

Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, to recognize the rights of forest peoples denied to them since colonial days and remedy the historical injustices inflicted on them. Since the passage of this act, there has been a growing movement to challenge the dominant control wielded by the Forest Department.

The major emphasis of the Forests Rights Act (FRA) is to enforce the rights of communities to their lands and to management of their forests. However, there is a direct conflict between the people and the Forest Department, which is unwilling to allow them to claim the ownership of the land that they inherited from their colonial masters. In order to prevent the proper implementation of the FRA, the Forest Department, through the Ministry of Environment and Forests, is undertaking various tree plantation schemes, in the name of “afforestation”, funded by multinational companies and international agencies, one of them being JICA.

The JICA-funded project in the state of Uttar Pradesh (2) is scheduled to last for eight years and will operate in 14 districts and 20 forest divisions. This project has no legislative basis, but it is being undertaken in the very same forest divisions that are covered under the FRA. The Forest Department, which controls 23% of the land in the entire country, is afraid that if the FRA is fully implemented, it will lose control over much of that land. There is a tough battle being fought between the local communities, especially the tribal people and other forest dwellers who are dependent on the forests, and the Forest Department over the control of the vast forests that now fall under the category of "community rights" according to the FRA.

It should be mentioned here that the movement for land reclamation in the entire Kaimur region over recent years has brought honour to tribal peoples and other forest dwellers, because through this movement, they implemented the FRA in their own way even before the act was enforced. After five victorious years of this movement, the forest people have been successful in reaping crops and accessing other forest products, even in the drought years. These crops and forest products have provided them with food security, which means they are no longer forced to work as bonded labourers in the fields of feudal landlords who were using them as slaves. The tribal peoples had been pushed out of forest areas by the Forest Department, while in the villages they were subjected to exploitation by the feudal landlords who appropriated their ancestral lands. Through the reclamation of their lost forest land, they have been able to overcome poverty and increase their assets. Within this movement, women have played an exemplary role, emerging as leaders and fighting the repressive state machinery and feudal landlords to assert their constitutional rights.

After the tribal peoples attained stability in the production of food grain crops this year, they pledged to plant trees to protect their livelihoods and the environment. In as many as 20 clusters where forest land has been reclaimed by the tribal peoples, a movement led by women plans to plant more than 10,000 trees this year. This initiative is also a form of protest against the JICA-funded Forest Department plantation drive. The JICA project is supposed to be carried out through the creation of Joint Forest Management (JFM) committees involving local communities who depend on forests. However, these committees are in fact made up of feudal landlords and upper-caste village dwellers. These JFM committees are not governed by any legislation and are working against committees formed under the

FRA. The JFM committees are planting trees on lands where forest peoples are filing claims under the FRA or have already been granted land titles under the act. The result is a situation of caste and class war within the forest areas due to the schemes launched by the Forest Department. The forest peoples have openly challenged these JFM committees to defeat their nefarious designs.

The community tree planting drive started by tribal women is a move against this foreign-funded Forest Department plantation drive to assert their community rights over the forests. A massive rally to demand respect for these rights was held by tribal women on July 4 in Robertsganj, capital of the district of Sonbhadra. The women were dressed in red and green saris (a traditional women's garment in India) and each carried a tree sapling. After marching through the capital carrying these saplings, they assembled at the District Court headquarters, where they planted them in a large park inside the court premises. The planting was done with great enthusiasm, like a festival with beautiful songs sung by women.

The rally sent a loud message to the entire region that tribal people are taking control of their forests and will not allow any companies, the Forest Department or anyone else to take that control away from them. These women have also challenged the government, stating that if their community rights are not recognized, they will draw maps themselves to identify the boundaries of their forest lands and take over their possession from the Forest Department.

Sokalo Panika, a tribal woman, said that the Forest Department plantation drive is a total failure: the planting is being done on paper only, and the JFM committees are nothing but money-making committees. Rajkumari Bhuiya, another tribal woman, said that the tree planting done by the JFM committees is of no use to the community, since they plant commercial varieties that are neither useful for the community nor good for the environment. The tribal people have started serving notices in accordance with the FRA to these JFM committees, ordering them to stop these plantation activities. Otherwise, action will be taken against them under Section 7 of the FRA, which establishes that anyone working against the act shall be punished.

The women serve these notices in a ceremonial way that creates shock waves not only in the Forest Department but also among all the government authorities who are not serious enough to implement the FRA. In large groups, all of them dressed in red saris, the women paste these notices outside every office starting with the JFM committee, the forest ranger's office, the police station, and then the deputy collector's and collector's offices. Copies of each notice are also sent to the state Secretaries of Forests, Revenue and Tribal Affairs, the Chief Secretary and Chief Minister of the state, and the national Ministers of the Environment and of Tribal Affairs.

Mithai Lal Gond, a tribal leader, says: "In the past, we were served notices by the Forest Department to vacate our land. Now we have rights and power under the FRA, hence we will now serve notices to these departments for illegal activities." Tribal people have also sent notices to newspaper agencies, calling on them to write in their favour and stop writing in favour of the Forest Department. A multi-pronged strategy has been adopted by the tribal people to fully assert their community rights.

By Roma, 10 July 2011, NFFPFW (Kaimur) / Human Rights Law Centre, Uttar Pradesh, India, e-mail romasnb@gmail.com, http://jansangarsh.blogspot.com

(1) - In 2007, there was a major movement, led by women, undertaken by tribal and Dalit people to reclaim their lost land in the Kaimur region of Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar. The lands that tribal people had occupied for centuries were stolen from them by feudal landlords, the Forest Department and various industrial projects before and after independence. The reclaiming of land was viewed as the "working class taking back its lost political space". Through this movement, thousands of hectares of land were reclaimed under collective possession by tribal people. These lands are also collectively cultivated by women. During this time, leading activists were jailed and cases were filed under false charges against thousands of forest people, 80% of them women. The writer of this article was also

charges against thousands of forest people, 80% of them women. The writer of this article was also jailed for one month for her role in leading the movement and booked under the National Security Act.

She was released by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati herself after the state government found that all of the cases filed by the Forest Department and police were fabricated. This was a major victory for the people's movement and since then, tribal and Dalit women have been in the forefront of the movement, challenging the state in a collective manner through their collective political consciousness.

(2) The JICA project is being implemented in the entire country. Here we focus on only one state, Uttar Pradesh. For more information, see:
http://www.jica.go.jp/english/operations/evaluation/oda_loan/economic_cooperation/2007/pdf/india07.pdf

index

- Mozambique: Timber plantations expansion

In the South East of Africa, Mozambique glimmers like a bright jewel in the African sunlight.

The coastline stretches thousands of kilometres, the warm Indian Ocean feeding the abundance of life. Ragged tooth and Zambezi sharks patrol the coral reefs, alive with sounds in an underwater spectacle of a wide variety of colourful fish, manta rays and turtles. Line-fish, muscles, crabs, shrimps, prawns and crayfish, these rich food resources are available in Mozambique, and have been feeding the people for thousands of years.

Inland we find the wetlands, fertile floodplains, freshwater lakes and rivers, filtering and delivering life giving water which enables agriculture and enterprise.

Mozambique is one of the last remaining countries where you still find free roaming mega fauna, such as lion, elephant and leopard. Apart from the resources wildlife provides to the communities living in such areas, the presence of these animals provides a enormous eco-tourism potential, and increasingly so, as functional 'semi-wilderness' ecosystems globally are becoming increasingly scarce.

One of the greatest natural assets of Mozambique is its people. The land has produced inspirational leaders, incredible artists and active entrepreneurs. For thousands of years people have been cultivating and utilizing the resources of the land, ancient and historical trading sites are a testimonial to the abundance of the region.

Millions of versatile coconut trees can be found almost everywhere in the coastal region. These trees provide shelter, building materials, fibre, food and valuable oil. Massive mango trees dot the landscape in many areas, providing an abundance of nutritious food for countless people and animals, and a livelihood for many. Similarly, Cashew nut trees and the delicious nuts they produce in abundance have contributed to the attractiveness of Mozambique as a country of delicacies. Peri peri chicken – on its own a reason for a traveller to visit Mozambique - deliciously prepared in a small roadside restaurant. Or fish "fresh from the river or fresh from the dam' in Tete. Wild honey sold in bottles on the side of the road, goats being transported to the market in Lichinga on a bicycle. Peanuts, roasted or raw, bananas, tomato's and sugarcane at road crossings, an abundance of food and culinary delight around every corner.

Yet – in the Mozambique provinces of Zambezia, Niassa and Cabo del Gado natural forests are being decimated – massive quantities of valuable hardwood timberis being shipped to the east. Forests which used to supply timber sustainably, satisfying the local demands. Forests which could provide food, shelter, refuge and opportunity for the people and wildlife of the land.

Despite the massive deforestation, there is a sense that nature is resilient and that the forests can rehabilitate and grow to its former splendour and diversity – because the seed bed is still intact, much diversity is left behind in the forest when the timber is extracted, some plants survive, - to grow and live again.

According to the valuable teachings of Ricardo Carrere - "Afforestation is MUCH WORSE than De-forestation" – because with 'deforestation the foresters come – extract the timber resource – and leave'.... BUT when a natural landscape is 'afforested' it normally implies the establishment of alien timber plantation monocultures. These trees are planted – and they stay. Never will the planted region be rehabilitated to its former glory – not even if vast financial resources are utilized to achieve such goal.

Industrial timber plantations in the southern African region are composed of primarily eucalyptus and pine species. These plantations are being promoted by multinational corporations and investment funds whose main motif is profit – and who need hundreds of thousands of hectares of land to secure a sufficient return on investment.

Establishment of large scale timber plantations comes with a massive cost to the environment – utilizing huge quantities of precious water, destroying local natural biodiversity and ecosystem integrity. The extractive model eventually leads to impoverished soils and soil erosion on a large scale. Small scale and diversified farming becomes more difficult as land, soil and water resources diminish, leading to less food being produced, insecurity, malnutrition and poverty.

These impacts are clearly evident in neighbouring South Africa – where millions of hectares of alien timber plantations have been established to feed export orientated pulp mills, impoverishing the environment and polluting the air and rivers. Gone is the abundant and diverse natural grasslands and 'water retention' services they provide. Diminished is the grazing ability of the land – impacting on traditional livestock farming. Dry is the rivers which feed the people of the lowveld and flow through to southern Mozambique, as the low flow in the dried winter months can not provide for the water 'greed' of these alien, evergreen trees, the eucalyptus roots penetrating 50m plus into the soil profile, decimating the precious water resource.

Few workers find permanent and quality jobs in the timber industry in South Africa. Most often the jobs are 'outsourced' – and once trees have been planted little management intervention is required, due to the long 9 – 15 year rotation cycles of the trees. The industry in South Africa has become increasingly mechanized, and specialized harvesting equipment has replaced the jobs of thousands of men and women throughout the industry.

Alien timber plantations are of invasive species, and such is the impact on the water resource that timber plantations have been classified as a 'Stream Flow Reduction Activity' or SFRA. As such, a 'license has to be applied for to the department of Water Affairs. Certain provinces in South Africa, such as Mpumalanga, is 'over-subscribed' with regards to water allocations – which has made it very difficult to obtain timber growing licenses in the province.

South African based timber farmers are now looking to Mozambique for investment in plantations, and the state timber company 'Komatiland' has already invested in plantations in Manhica and Zambezia provinces. Similarly, Sappi is investigating the possibility of establishing timber plantations and a possible pulp mill in Zambezia province of Mozambique.

As land resources are becoming scarce on a global scale, multi national corporations are looking to the Global South for access to arable land resources. At a conference in Stockholm, a Swedish Industrialist said: "If you want eucalyptus to grow quickly, learn to speak Portuguese.." in context implying that Mozambique and Angola are the regions that investors should explore with regards to timber plantation establishment.

And so it is that hundreds of thousands of hectares of Niassa, Zambezia and Manhica provinces in Mozambique are experiencing the dangerous phenomena of 'afforestation'. Vast industrial timber plantations of primarily eucalyptus plantations are being established by multinational corporations claiming to plant 'forests' but in reality causing land degradation on a scale never before experienced.

We cannot sit in our electrified houses, drinking our piped water, and demand that there be 'No Development' and only environmental protection. It is a fact that there is a need for 'development', for 'growth' and opportunity for all. But we caution that monoculture timber plantations throughout the world have shown impacts which need to be comprehensively considered and debated, with the full participation of local people whom will be affected by changes in land use of their environment.

There are development alternatives which need to be assessed and could potentially be much more beneficial to the people and the land. Organic agriculture models which provide more jobs, food security and resilience to climate change. Agriculture models which do not require hundreds of thousands of hectares to be degraded, but that can be applied on much smaller areas of land and still be financially viable. Land use models which provide for more value adding, processing and job creation potential.

Ideally, more land need to be left to be 'semi-wilderness' – but utilized – for the many diverse services nature provides. Then Mozambique will remain a Paradise, one of the few places in the world where a night can be truly silent and where the stars truly shine bright.

By Philip Owen, Geasphere, email: owen@soft.co.za

index

- Oil palm in Benin: From small-scale production by women to large-scale corporate industry

Oil palm has historically played an important role in Benin and oil palm plantations, as opposed to naturally occurring palm groves, were established in the 19th century to meet an increasingly greater demand for palm oil from Western countries, primarily to supply their soap factories.By this time, oil palm was grown on an estimated 500,000 hectares of land in Benin, and the processing of oil palm products was entirely manual, carried out by women small-scale producers.

The first oil palm sector industrialization programme was launched in the 1950s. The colonial government invested in large-scale, public industrial processing facilities, and after independence in 1960, the national government established more of these facilities with even greater capacity, and planted around 30,000 hectares of selected oil palm seedlings between 1960 and 1974.

But difficulties quickly arose, both internal (decrease in rainfall and thus in oil palm production yield, poor management, etc.) and external (competition with Asian countries, etc.). These factors decreased the profitability of the large industrial complexes and discouraged the government from further developing the industrial oil palm sector. These same difficulties had an impact on small-scale plantations as well, whose combined area, estimated at 500,000 hectares in the 1930s, dropped to 300,000 hectares by the end of the century.

The creation of plantation blocs between 1960 and 1974 had led to the expropriation of the land of 17,000 peasant farmers, who were supposed to receive an annual rent as compensation. The farmers considered the rent offered to be insufficient, and complained of the constant delays in payment. Although protest against the scheme began with the first expropriations, it remained muted during the "authoritarian" political regime in Benin (1972-1990), but was stepped up following the return to democracy. In 1993, after 2,000 hectares of oil palm plantations were destroyed by the former owners of the land, the government decided to triple the annual rent paid to them. Industrial palm oil production

accounts for about 20% of total production in the sector, but most of it is exported. In 2000, 83% of the domestic palm oil market in Benin was supplied by the thousands of women small-scale producers (industrial production accounted for 7%, and the remaining 10% was imported). Small-scale traditional production has predominated throughout the century, and has successfully adapted to constantly changing conditions, on both the supply side (fluctuations in the volume of raw material available) and the demand side (market diversification).

Until today, the small-scale, traditional production of palm oil has been carried out almost entirely by women, individually or sometimes with the help of family members. These women producers use completely manual techniques. There has been no obvious process of market concentration in the sector, which has remained widely spread out among the population.

Beginning in the 1990s, the government of Benin and its financial backers decided to opt for a new approach; large industrial processing facilities under public management had clearly demonstrated their limitations. These were privatized over the course of the decade, and support was provided for the creation of small private operations, through the distribution of selected oil palm seedlings and the promotion of processing equipment. A programme for the distribution of selected palm seedlings was initiated in 1993. Private nurseries, authorized and subsidized by the government, sell these seedlings to the public at fixed prices.

A new category of actors appeared in the sector: planters of selected oil palm varieties. Their strategy is wholly different from that of planters of naturally occurring oil palms. The latter normally combine the cultivation of oil palm with the growing of subsistence crops, while the former tend to specialize in oil palm and become “planters” as opposed to “farmers”. Under current conditions in south Benin, where it is now possible to own land, these planters purchase parcels of land that they devote specifically to the cultivation of oil palm. These new planters are almost entirely men. Women small-scale producers are rarely able to own their own palm plantations. The oil palm’s status as a cash crop, reinforced by a symbolic aspect (as a “symbol of wealth”), has given rise to a process of growing monopolization of the sector by men.

These male planters are fully aware of the profits they can make from processing, especially if they have the capacity to stockpile. Currently, roughly one planter out of two keeps at least a part of his production and hires women small-scale producers to process it. For the last decade, development organizations have supported the distribution of processing equipment (presses and mixers) as part of their emphasis on enhancing technical capacity.

In addition to the economic benefits, there is also a social benefit. The owner of a mechanized workshop benefits from a social prestige that is not enjoyed by planters who hire women to process their production. Investment by planters in the downstream segment of the production chain is thus likely to increase even further.

The growing number of planters who process their production themselves has a direct impact on women small-scale producers: the volume of raw material (oil palm fruit) available to them will consequently decrease. Since these women are most often unable to own their own palm plantations, many could find themselves excluded from the sector. And given that a good number of women in south Benin earn part of their income by producing palm oil, the development of mechanization could prove problematic.

Unlike the industrial sector, which has its own supply and marketing networks, the small semi-mechanized workshops are in direct competition with the women small-scale producers.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this overview of the situation is that the current programme for the development of the oil palm sector, based on the distribution of selected oil palm seedlings and equipment, benefits only one category of actors, which it has actually created: the “new” private plantation owners. These planters will enjoy a competitive advantage over women small-scale

plantation owners. These planters will enjoy a competitive advantage over women small-scale producers on several levels, because they benefit from privileged access to raw materials; their mechanized processing techniques allow for lower cost prices; and their larger production volumes allow for bulk sales that are more attractive to retailers.

According to a study published in 2007, "Plans for the development of an agrofuel industry in Benin have the strong backing of government, and make up a key part of the government's Agricultural Revival Programme for economic development." (http://www.africanbiodiversity.org/media/1210585739.pdf)

In line with these plans, Benin has received visits from various industrial groups from Malaysia and South Africa who have proposed the conversion of 300,000-400,000 hectares in the wetlands of the southern part of Benin [Ouémé, Plateau, Atlantic, Mono, Couffo and Zou] for production of oil palm. (1)

More recently, a report (2) announced the visit of a delegation of Chinese agricultural engineers and entrepreneurs who were willing to invest some 2.15 million dollars in Benin's palm oil industry over the next five years to increase production and mechanize the oil palm industry.

Regrettably, these plans have taken no notice of the warning of the above mentioned study: "There are already a number of palm tree monoculture plantations in the south of Benin" which should "serve as a warning against future developments, due to the complications and difficulties experienced by communities attempting to sell their palm products."

(1) Excerpted and adapted from "Oil palm in Africa: Past, present and future scenarios" by Ricardo Carrere, WRM, December 2010, http://www.wrm.org.uy/plantations/material/Palm2.pdf

(2) "Chinese entrepreneurs to invest in Benin palm oil production", by Serge-David Zoueme, published in Bloomberg, zsergedavid@bloomberg.net, received through farmlandgrab.org

index

DEFINING FORESTS

- On the International Day of Struggle against Tree Plantations let's define the forest by its true meaning

On September 21st several activities will be coordinated around the world to celebrate the International Day of Struggle against Tree Plantations.

For WRM is also a day to challenge FAO present definition of forest which has important and serious implications as long as even a monoculture of exotic trees is considered to be a forest. That is why on September 21st an open letter signed by more than six hundred scientists from all over the world will be presented to FAO expressing their disagreement with FAO definition of "forest" and calling on the organization to initiate a process for the review of this definition. Signatures will be received until September 21st at http://www.wrm.org.uy/forests/letter_to_the_FAO.html

As part of the actions, a new VIDEO produced by WRM will be launched on September 21st. "Forests, much more than a lot of trees" gathers testimonies of forest people around the world who tell what the forest means to them and will be available in our website.

We will also launch the new WRM briefing "The definition of forest", giving our arguments of why we must continue to challenge FAO regarding the way this publicly funded agency currently defines "forest" and explaining how this definition leads to constant negative impacts on the lives of a great many communities around the world and weakens their struggles to live with dignity.

The briefing, the video and the final list of signatures of the letter to the FAO will be available in our

The briefing, the video and the final list of signatures of the letter to the FAO will be available in our website on September 21st. All this information will be posted on the front page of our web site. Stay tuned!

On the International Day of Struggle against Tree Plantations let's resist the expansion of monoculture tree plantations, let's define the forest by its true meaning.

index