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OUR VIEWPOINT

- Land grabbing: Towards the unification of struggles

On April 17, 1996, 19 landless rural workers were brutally murdered by the police during a peaceful demonstration for agrarian reform in the state of Pará, in Brazil's Amazon region. If you visit the site of the massacre today, you will find a circle of 19 burnt Brazil nut tree trunks, which form a small forest. As well as serving as a memorial to the workers who lost their lives and the violence unleashed against them, the burnt trunks also symbolize the people's resistance and struggle against

the violation of their rights, as well as the rainforest's resistance against deforestation.

Brazil nut trees are massive trees found in the Amazon region on lands where the rainforest has been almost entirely destroyed, a common practice in Pará. However, these same trees have difficulty surviving when they are not surrounded by an intact forest. In other words, they too demand the recovery and rescue of the forest that ensures the survival and well-being of local communities, also largely destroyed in many places in Pará.

Today, near the site of the massacre, thousands of people – comrades of the 19 who were murdered in 1996 – live in the “April 17 Settlement”. They have succeeded in exchanging a life of suffering and poverty for a life with a piece of land to till and feed their families, regaining their dignity.

This story, like so many others from places around the world where people are struggling and suffering the violation of their rights, needs to be remembered in order to serve as an inspiration to others. April 17 has been declared by La Via Campesina as the International Day of Peasant Struggle. More recently, it has also become a reference for the struggle against the process known as “land grabbing” in English, “concentração de terras” in Brazil, “usurpação de terras” in Mozambique, “acaparamiento de tierras” in Spanish, and “l'acaparement des terres” in French. It is a phenomenon in which companies, investment funds and financial markets in general are acquiring vast areas of land in countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia for a variety of different uses, including large-scale monoculture plantations, mining, tourism, hydroelectric power plants, and food production for export, among others.

This is not a new process; quite the contrary. What is new is the speed and size of these land grabs, which are directly linked to different strategies through which the capitalist system is seeking a solution to the crises it is facing. But as professor David Harvey points out, capitalism never solves its crises, it merely moves them around: seeking out new means of accumulation and speculation in the pursuit of profits, increasing the suffering of a great many people.

The current situation poses a number of challenges for struggles against all forms of land grabbing in the countries of the South:

- Greater articulation of these struggles with a new common denominator: the struggle against land grabbing, against the privatization of common lands used collectively by local, indigenous and traditional communities. It is the same struggle as these peoples' struggle for the recognition of their rights, although it reinforces the importance of joint action. We must also keep in mind the fisherfolk suffering from the advance of “sea grabbing” by private companies. While corporations and national governments generally seek to divide communities who fight back, the phenomenon of land grabbing alerts us to the need for peoples to join together in their different struggles.

- Greater understanding of how the different struggles are interlinked and interconnected, if we observe the phenomenon of land grabbing.

- Greater understanding of how the proposed “green economy”, a central theme at

the Rio+20 conference, is a new “opportunity” for the actors behind land grabbing to continue exploiting and grabbing not only land, but also the air, water and seas, whether to destroy them or to preserve nature as a means of supposedly “offsetting” this destruction.

This is why we must mobilize around a resounding NO to the green economy, to land grabbing, to “Earth grabbing” in general, extending to the land, air and water. And at the same time, we must defend the right of local communities to maintain and recover control of the areas on which they depend for their survival, on land or in the sea, not only in the countries of the South, but in those of the North as well.

- The need to strengthen support for and show our solidarity with the thousands of communities and peoples who at this very moment are struggling to defend their territories, rivers, forests other valuable ecosystems on which they depend for their survival.

For these reasons, we joined the call made by La Via Campesina to “all of its members and allies, fisher-folk movements, agricultural workers organizations, students and environmental groups, women's organizations and social justice movements to organize actions around the world on April 17 in order to display massive popular resistance to land grabbing and highlight the struggle against corporate control over land and natural resources.”

And together with La Via Campesina, we stress the need to unite and fight in order to:

- Stop land grabbing and reclaim grabbed land – the land should be in the hands of tillers.
- Implement genuine agrarian reform in order to bring about social justice in rural areas.
- End the control over billions of people's lives exercised by a few investors and transnational companies.
- Strengthen the agriculture production model based on family farming and food sovereignty.

We are confident that the death of those 19 peasants in Pará in 1996 will continue to inspire us in the resistance struggle to stop land grabbing, to maintain and reclaim control of territories, and to recover forests and other ecosystems, to ensure the well-being of the peoples who depend on them, today and in the future.

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NO TO EARTH GRABBING!

- **Earth grabbing: The ongoing concentration and privatisation of land, water, air**

There is a great deal of talk about the crises facing the planet: the climate crisis,

energy crisis, food crisis, financial crisis, loss of biodiversity, and so on. Without a doubt, these are dramatic situations whose worst repercussions will be suffered by the most vulnerable and dispossessed sectors of the population.

But at this point we know very well that these crises are not the result of natural or random phenomena. They are manifestations of the current capitalist system and its dynamic of permanent expansion. They are also functional for capitalism, because they allow for its renovation and recycling. When bubbles burst they create new business opportunities. Investments grow as old markets are expanded and new ones are created.

The financial market crash of 2008 resulted in heavy losses for speculators, whose need to recover from those losses led them to create new markets and new products. The entire planet has become the setting of a new escalation in financial capital investment.

The “green economy” with its proposal of new markets for investments in new products demands ever more land, more water, more air, more minerals.

The advance on land

While land grabbing and concentration of land ownership are not new phenomena, the financial crisis and previously, in 2007, the abrupt rise in food prices spurred by commodities speculation have resulted in a new escalation.

In a short period of time, millions of hectares of land have changed hands, with an accompanying change in land use. Control of the land passed from rural communities to foreign investors – and sometimes local investors – primarily for industrial and commercial food production, or for logging, the carbon trade or mining, among other projects.

The international organization GRAIN – which has been monitoring the process and maintains the website <http://farmlandgrab.org> as an information resource – warns that “contracts are getting signed, bulldozers are hitting the ground, land is being aggressively fenced off and local people are getting kicked off their territories with devastating consequences.”(1)

Meanwhile, according to a recent report from GAIA (2), there has been a marked acceleration of investments in extractive industries in the last three years, and not only in metals, minerals, oil and gas, but also in their associated financial derivatives, in other words, in the associated financial market. In the last ten years, iron ore production has increased by 180%, cobalt by 165%, lithium by 125%, and coal by 44%.

Vast areas of land are also being purchased for the establishment of game reserves or for tourism, and even by conservationists to keep them pristine.

Whatever the purpose, what all land grabs have in common is the requirement that the land be cleared of people – other than workers brought in by the new owners.(3) But there is practically nowhere on the planet that is unoccupied, and especially not fertile lands. This means that land grabs lead to the expulsion of families,

communities, entire peoples, destroying their social networks and even their very identity, and often through violent means. And these lands are lost to future generations as well.

Land grabbing has reached such outrageous proportions that even the international agencies that actively promote or tacitly approve of agribusiness have taken notice: a 2010 report from the World Bank stated that 47 million hectares of farmland were leased or sold off worldwide in 2009 alone.(4) Even FAO, while treating the issue with kid gloves, admits that there have recently been land acquisition deals “of unprecedented scale.”(5)

For its part, Oxfam reports that since 2001, as many as 227 million hectares of land have been sold or leased in countries of the South, the bulk of it in the last two years, and mostly to international investors.(6)

Various sources report that Africa is where most land grabs have occurred, undoubtedly because investors have found prime conditions there: large extensions of land, low prices, and weak and permissive states to facilitate these deals.

But Africa is not alone. The advance on land also extends to Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, and not only through buying and leasing. In India, the National Mission for a Green India or Green India Mission (GIM), part of the government's National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), plans to plant five million hectares of land with trees for carbon sequestration and storage. The aim is to link up the GIM with carbon offset programmes like REDD+ or the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), which convert the carbon recycling capacity of trees into a commodity. These plans would imply moving into lands currently under other uses, such as “marginal” lands. However, lands which the GIM classifies as marginal farming lands or wastelands are already devoted to multiple uses, such as for grazing or as part of shifting cultivation cycles. If these lands are covered with trees, the communities that depend on them will be deprived of their means of livelihood, a situation denounced by the Indian organization Kalpavriksh (see WRM Bulletin 172).

Taking over the air

In the case of the carbon trade system – which opens the doors to the privatization and commodification of the world's last remaining forests – the grabbing even extends to the air, considered an “environmental service”, a commodity that can be traded for pollution. The carbon offsets market has introduced the “financialization” of nature, in which the main sources of investment are capital markets (investment funds, banks, energy traders and other speculators).(7) Those who pollute but have the money to buy carbon bonds are in some way taking over the air, because these emission permits legitimize their personal and irresponsible use of the common resource of the atmosphere. If the current trend continues, we might even see the creation of formal air market, with unimagined scope.

Privatized water

Land grabbing is also closely linked to water grabbing, which has also undergone an upsurge since the outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2008, according to the

Transnational Institute (TNI).(8) Similar to land grabbing, water grabbing involves powerful actors taking control of valuable water resources for the benefit of their own profit-driven business interests, depriving local communities whose livelihoods depend on the shared use of these resources and related ecosystems.

Moreover, this is happening in the context of a veritable global water crisis: according to figures from TNI, 700 million people in 43 countries live below the “water stress” threshold of 1,700 cubic metres per person per year.

Water goes from being a common and public resource to just another raw material, subject to private ownership. Water grabbing takes a wide range of different forms, from the sea grabbing that deprives traditional fisherfolk of their livelihoods to make way for offshore oil drilling, industrial fishing or shrimp farms, to the massive use and pollution of water in mining operations – taken to new heights with the new technology of hydraulic fracturing or “fracking”(9) – to large-scale industrial agriculture through monoculture plantations of both food and non-food crops, which require enormous amounts of water, up to ten times more than biodiverse farming systems.

Among monocultures there has been a particular upsurge in the establishment of plantations of trees for biomass energy production, which also offer the flexibility to be diverted towards other markets – timber, pulp or carbon credits – depending on which offers the most favourable prices. There has also been an expansion of biomass plantations, for example, in the arid Northeast region of Brazil, to supply wood-fired power plants – a practice that is being heavily promoted in Europe as supposedly “renewable” energy. Numerous testimonies bear witness to the dramatic situations that these plantations create for local communities and ecosystems, due to the land they occupy as well as their monopolization of water resources. The situation is made worse when people lack secure and legally recognized land tenure rights, and even more so for women, who tend to suffer particular discrimination when it comes to the recognition of their rights to land.

There is no such thing as responsible grabbing

The effects of this new globalized colonialism are clearly visible, although divisions emerge when it comes to identifying solutions. In the case of land grabbing, water grabbing and air grabbing alike, the underlying context is the extractivist, industrial, large-scale, speculative and consumerist economic model of capitalism in its most nakedly neoliberal form.

Any solutions that are put forward within these parameters cannot be solutions at all. Could there really be any such thing as “responsible” dispossession, “responsible” pollution, the “responsible” loss of the identity and dignity of a people?

Nevertheless, there are proposals along these lines which – just like the “green labels” of certification schemes, sustainable production roundtables and “transparency” initiatives – serve to legitimize and lend a gloss of “responsibility” to a situation that is intrinsically “irresponsible”. Such is the case of the seven “Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI) that Respects Rights, Livelihoods and Resources”, proposed by the World Bank and, since 2010, jointly promoted with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Conference on

Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The principles, which are voluntary, can be held up by investors making large-scale agricultural land acquisitions as proof of their willingness to implement “responsible” projects.

But the principles basically accept large-scale land transactions, placing all of the “stakeholders” on an equal footing, as if it were an even playing field. They speak of possible “win-win” scenarios, ignoring political questions and structural inequalities.

And they do not refer at all to agrarian reform, a measure that has long been demanded by social movements in the context of the human right to food. As stressed by the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform, Land Research Action Network, FIAN International, Focus on the Global South, La Via Campesina and Social Network for Justice and Human Rights, “deciding who has rights over which land resources is essentially a political matter that involves conflicting interests and power relations; these are not merely technical or administrative problems. ... History shows that almost always, when ‘one-size-fits-all’ technical approaches to land rights are used, the interests of capital, favouring the rich (and the state) prevail, leading to further marginalisation of peasant and working classes through dislocation, displacement or dispossession.”(10)

While the RAI principles do address the concept of “food security”, this is a very limited concept, which does not call into questions the modes of production, distribution and consumption which have led to the food crisis. Food production could be made available through industrial agriculture, but at the cost of the inevitable consequence of dismantling rural communities and the depletion and pollution of the soil and water, as well as the air. That is why La Via Campesina and other organizations, through the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform, refer instead to the right to food sovereignty. And land grabbing is totally incompatible with food sovereignty, since its sole motive is the maximization of profits: investors are promised profit rates of 20%, while food production generates profits of between 3% and 5%.

The discussion, therefore, should not focus on mitigating the negative impacts of large-scale investment projects – which is generally nothing more than a public relations strategy – but rather on identifying the types of investment needed to eradicate hunger and support the rights of peasant farmers and rural communities to their lands.

In 2011, La Via Campesina and the West African Network of Peasants and Agricultural Producers (ROPPA) joined with other organizations to launch the “Dakar Appeal Against the Land Grab”, which has since been endorsed by numerous social organizations. Their goal is for the appeal to serve as “a vehicle to forge broad alliances at the local, national and international levels and pave the way for large mobilizations to support all the communities and peoples’ organizations that are defending themselves against land grabbing on the ground. The appeal calls for an immediate stop to land grabbing and the restitution of the lands that have been taken away from local communities. Moreover, it makes several demands of national governments and international organizations.” (11)

There is no such thing as responsible land, water or air grabbing. That is the dividing line.

1- "It's time to outlaw land grabbing, not to make it 'responsible'!", Vía Campesina, GRAIN and others, April 2011, <http://www.grain.org/article/entries/4227-it-s-time-to-outlaw-land-grabbing-not-to-make-it-responsible?locale=en>

2- "Opening Pandora's Box: The New Wave of Land Grabbing by the Extractive Industries and the Devastating Impact on Earth", The Gaia Foundation, 2012, <http://www.gaiafoundation.org/sites/default/files/executivesummary.pdf>

3- "The Land Grabbers", Fred Pearce, cited by Gaia Vince in "Hungry for Land", Conservation Magazine, March 2012, <http://www.conservationmagazine.org/2012/03/hungry-for-land/>

4- Rising Global Interest in Farmland, World Bank, 2010, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTARD/Resources/ESW_Sept7_final_final.pdf

5- "Trends and drivers", Land Grab or Development Opportunity? Agricultural investment and international land deals in Africa, FAO, IFAD and IIED, 2009, <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/011/ak241e/ak241e02.pdf>

6- "Land and Power: The growing scandal surrounding the new wave of investments in land", Oxfam, September 2011, <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/bp151-land-power-rights-acquisitions-220911-summ-en.pdf>

7- Mercados de carbono. La neoliberalización del clima, Larry Lohmann, 2012, Ediciones Abya-Yala, http://www.wrm.org.uy/temas/REDD/mercados_de_carbono.pdf

8- "The Global Water Grab: A Primer", Jennifer Franco and Sylvia Kay, Transnational Institute, March 2012, <http://www.tni.org/primer/global-water-grab-primer>

9- Fracking involves the high-pressure injection of a toxic mix of chemicals and water into underground rock deposits to release the natural gas and oil trapped within. It is a technology that pollutes the soil and groundwater.

10- "Why We Oppose the Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment (RAI)", Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform, Land Research Action Network, FIAN International, Focus on the Global South, La Vía Campesina and Social Network for Justice and Human Rights, October 2010, http://www.landaction.org/IMG/pdf/FINAL_Engl_Why_we_oppose_RAI.pdf

11- Dakar Appeal Against the Land Grab, <http://www.petitiononline.com/dakar/petition.html>

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What kind of development is this? If the government cares about development, they should take the people along so that we can own the development and what comes out of it. But in this type of development, people lose everything.

(From a discussion with village residents affected by the Pheapimex concession in Krakor district in Pursat, Cambodia. March, 2010)

In Cambodia and the Lao PDR (Laos), rapid and intense exploitation of land and natural resources by state and private investors is increasing land insecurity, landlessness, environmental destruction, distress migration and poverty.

Over 70 % of the population in both countries reside in rural areas and are engaged in subsistence agricultural production and artisanal fisheries. Laos is rich in natural resources and biodiversity, and boasts stunning landscapes of rivers, mountains, forests, plateaus and alluvial plains. It is home to about 10,000 species of animals, plants, insects and fish, many of which are disappearing because of habitat loss. Laos is also one of the world's hotspots in rice biodiversity with an astounding variety of traditional seeds and indigenous knowledge about rice cultivation and resilience. Cambodia contains approximately 10.7 million hectares of tropical forests of various types which are fast falling to chainsaws and bulldozers. Its landscapes are shaped by numerous streams, lakes, wetlands and rivers which spawn a large variety of fish and molluscs. The country is home to the famous Tonle Sap lake, the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia that expands almost three times in size during the monsoon season.

But in both countries, development is becoming increasingly synonymous with private investment. As in many countries in Asia, the dominant development model prioritizes integration with regional and global markets, and rapid economic growth regardless of the ecological and social consequences. Private investment is sought in virtually every sector of the economy from energy, oil, minerals, agriculture and food processing to education, health, tourism, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, transportation and urban infrastructure. Both countries depend greatly on foreign aid, which generally comes tied to investment opportunities for firms from donor countries. National development plans are augmented by economic arrangements promoted by multilateral institutions and groupings such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank Group and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

At the heart of most large-scale investment projects is the exploitation of land, water, minerals and agricultural potential. The Lao Government promotes Laos as a desirable investment destination citing among its advantages an abundance of natural resources, large areas of fertile land, a flourishing tourism industry, reliable power supply, low risk of natural disasters, political stability, and privileged access to European Union (EU) and several other markets. The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) offers generous incentives to foreign investors with long term land leases at throw away prices, tax holidays, few restrictions on imports from abroad and repatriation of profits.

Agro-industrial plantations have become scourges in Cambodia and Laos. Millions of hectares of agricultural, forest and common lands have been transferred to state and private companies to grow rubber, pine, acacia, eucalyptus, hard-woods, corn,

cassava and sugarcane. The latest mapping by LICADHO, a human rights organization in Cambodia, shows that 3,936,481 hectares of land have been given to mining and economic land concessions (ELC)s, of which, 2,036,170 hectares are ELCs for agro-industrial plantations for crops such as rubber, cassava and sugarcane. ELCs cover almost 53 % of the country's arable land and 346,000 hectares are located in conservation areas. In Laos, an inventory in 2010 by the National Land Management Authority showed that the area covered by ELCs in the country amounts to 1,400,000 hectares, counting over 760 projects of which, over 375,000 hectares are for agro-industrial plantations for mostly rubber and eucalyptus.

The investors come from India, Vietnam, China, Thailand and also further afield, from Singapore, South Korea and Australia. Such investments have been promoted by many bilateral donors, the ADB, World Bank, and private consulting firms as a strategy to maximize economic revenues from “degraded” forests, “idle” or “under-utilized” lands, increase reforestation and alleviate poverty. Recently, new forms of revenue extraction from natural resources are being proposed through the “green economy” framework.

At the end of March, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Thailand and China signed a pact to increase trade among them, with sale of rubber to China as a centerpiece. Cambodia already has 204,800 hectares of rubber plantations, which are expected to expand to 300,000 hectares by 2020 largely for export to China, with concessions to operate plantations for 70 years. In Laos the agreement is part of the government's national agricultural development plan and the contract will cover approximately 270,000 hectares of rubber plantations.

The evidence that is accumulating shows that these ELCs offer few or no benefits to the national economy, but result in many major impacts for the livelihoods and economies of local communities, compounded by human rights abuses and destruction of diverse landscapes, forests and native ecosystems. Plantation agriculture requires intensive use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides which create aridity, degrade soils, and poison aquifers and surface water sources. Many plantations are accompanied by processing plants close at hand, which consume huge amounts of energy and water that are denied to local communities.

ELCs have displaced local peoples from their villages, fields, forests and traditional occupations. In many cases, local communities are forced to relocate altogether. In cases where people can remain in their villages, they are not permitted to use the surrounding forests and commons for foraging and grazing since these now belong to investors, although encroachment by investors onto village, forest and public lands is common. Communities in southern Laos report that companies have fenced their grazing lands and claim them as part of the concessions. Communities in the Pheapimex plantation area in Pursat and Kampong Chnang provinces in Cambodia report the loss of community forests, wild food sources, sanctuaries for rare wildlife, sacred spirit sites, streams and water sources, grazing lands, rice fields and even their homes and villages. According to a woman from a village affected by the ELC,

The forests that the company is clearing are not degraded; they are forests from which we get food, roots, medicinal plants and things for our life. We have protected these forests for decades. Now the company will pull these forests out from their roots, they

will take everything; they will sell the hardwood and take out all the plants. Nothing will grow there naturally. What the company will plant in this area will not be a forest; they will plant trees that we cannot even eat the leaves of. Woman community resident. (Resident from Ansar Chambok Commune (Krakor District, Pursat Province, Cambodia, on April 9, 2010).

Investing companies frequently violate written agreements but rarely face state censure or punitive action. Companies promise jobs, schools, health centres, roads and other infrastructure but generally do not deliver. Promises of employment and better standards of living are belied by actual experiences. According to villagers struggling against the Pheapimex company in Kampong Chnang, Cambodia, *People who work on plantations work under very bad conditions: their sources of food are destroyed, they have no money to buy food and only get a few cups of watery rice for long, hard days of work. They are not paid for several months. Workers come home sick, tired, weak and without any money.*

For people dispossessed and displaced by investment-driven-development, survival is a daily struggle. Language by policy makers, donors and financiers about encouraging “high quality and environmentally and socially responsible investment,” ring hollow in the absence of appropriate regulatory frameworks that protect the land, resource, food and livelihood rights of rural populations, and discipline investors who violate these rights. The high levels of economic growth that Cambodia and Laos seek through agro-industrial investment projects will come at ever increasing costs to their rural populations, who create real value for society by producing food, nurturing fragile eco-systems and regenerating biodiversity and environmental wealth. A genuinely responsible approach to development would be for governments to recognize the importance of, and support the investments that rural communities make to sustain food security, livelihoods and the economy.

By: Shalmali Guttal, Focus on the Global South. April 2012.

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- A Timorese Forest Struggle

How far would you go to protect your forest?

Villagers from Pollo community in South Central Timor regency in Indonesia have set a remarkable example, weathering years of bureaucratic indifference, enduring violence from thugs and embarking on an odyssey across their country's archipelago in search of support for their defence of local trees and land.

The story begins with a forest of the kind known in the local Celebic language as *kio*, used to provide wood and food for guests of the community. In times past, the *kio* was a source of deer, pigs, wild cows, firewood, rope and other goods, and boasted many large hardwood forest trees. Five clans prominent in the community (which in recent times has been subdivided into several administrative villages with different names) enjoyed common rights to the forest, including the Nabuasa, from which the community's *raja* or chief always comes.

In 1982 an integrated livestock project supported by the Australian government got approval from both the provincial livestock office and community leaders for 25 years of activities on land that included the forest. *Leucaena leucocephala* trees were planted on some of the land for cattle food, 14 rain-fed ponds were dug, and a contract was drawn up with local villagers. In return for being given a cow, each participating household would pledge to give 1 ½ calves to the Australian business, which would then distribute them to other villagers in order to build up a local herd.

In 1987, however, the Australian project shut up shop, and the contract reverted to the local government, which began to sell the calves instead of putting them back into the project. The project's ponds fell into disrepair, with only two today able to serve as water sources for people and cows, and after 1990 the cattle population began to decline.

In 2003, some of the officials who had inherited the project decided they wanted their own fields on the project's land. They hatched a scheme through which they would ask villagers to prepare parcels of land for cropping in return for the promise of cows. Soon a stream of villagers were visiting officials, bearing traditional *adat* offerings – fabrics, cash, chickens, pigs, sheep – in order to acquire cows. Some households could even get two cows in successive years by presenting enough *adat* offerings to the officials. As many as 200 cows per year were distributed in this way.

By the end of 2003, some 21 hectares of land had been cleared through such deals. The officials pledged that the land would be replanted to *Leucana* to feed the cows, but no trees appeared. At the same time, the regency-level forestry office undertook a 'forest rehabilitation' project on 150 ha of the project's land. Then, in 2006, regency forestry office staff arrived, announcing another rehabilitation project. Villagers – mostly from outside the Pollo community – were paid to clear still more of the kio forest. Among the tree species cut down were *Pterocarpus indicus*, *Sterculia foetida*, *Ceiba pentandra*, tamarind and acacia.

An additional 450 additional hectares of forest had now disappeared, and the impacts began to be felt. One outcome of particular concern to the villagers centered on a set of springs that had appeared in 1999, which, strangely enough, flowed only during the dry season, making possible 50 additional hectares of wet-rice cultivation. With deforestation, these springs dried up.

In 2008, the situation worsened when GERHAN, a project of the National Forest and Land Rehabilitation Programme, working with the regency forestry office, embarked on another 'forest rehabilitation' scheme in Pollo. Loath to lose any more forest, Pollo's *raja* and four *amafs* (deputy *rajas*), gave their consent to the plan only on condition that it was carried out on degraded land. But by June 2008 GERHAN was cutting another 450 hectares of good forest adjoining a local road to make way for new hardwood trees. As before, fires were set to clear logged sites after the big trees had been taken away. With so much forest having disappeared, many local people had had enough.

After visiting the regency government and assembly, both of whose representatives promised to investigate, 100 Pollo villagers filed a complaint of forest destruction with

the regency-level police, following up with a trip to the regency's forestry office and GERHAN headquarters.

After three months of silence, the villagers then traveled to Kupang, the capital of East Nusa Tenggara province, taking their grievance to the provincial government and assembly there and making sure to take away with them a copy of the complaint of illegal logging they filed with the provincial police.

By December 2008 still nothing had happened. At a community meeting, the *raja* ordered seven of Pollo's young men to go to the Presidential Palace in Jakarta to see what they could do about the situation.

Vowing that "it's better to die in Jakarta than to die in our home," the young men – one of whom had never set foot outside the district – set out with a total of around US\$250 between them. Five of them paid a bit over \$20 each to stow away illegally on a cargo ship bound for Surabaya in East Java.

Before long the ship's engines broke down and the ship began to drift in heavy seas. Water washed over some of the decks. The Pollo villagers were frightened but told each other, "If God takes us, so be it. We are fighting for others."

After a while the engines were started again, but the ship now needed rerouting since it had drifted out of the shipping lanes. In the end it took four days for the ship to reach Surabaya, where the villagers had to huddle in a hidden room for two hours while the port inspector finished his rounds on board.

In Surabaya, the villagers had to buy food, and within a week their money was gone. One of the villagers, Niko Demus Manao, went to work humping 50-kilogramme sacks of fertilizer for a bit over three dollars a day, but was urged to desist by his friends who feared for his health. Some of the others got work as drivers, however, and the expedition was finally able to put together around \$55.

They then got in touch with a television journalist who had once visited their region. The journalist invited them to her house together with staff from the East Java branch of WALHI – Friends of the Earth Indonesia – who suggested that they seek help from the organization's national office.

On 5 January 2009 the team got on the train to Jakarta, standing up in third-class carriages for the entire 15-hour journey. Exhausted when they arrived, they collapsed on the Jakarta platform for a few hours of rest. After then locating a relative who helped them rent a room, they called on WALHI, where three of the villagers stayed a week while they met with the Environmental Ministry, the Forestry Department and a member of parliament as well as the national ombudsman. The villagers also joined hands with community representatives from Riau at a protest at the Forestry Department office, and filed a complaint about illegal logging and forest destruction with the national police.

The Forestry Department said it had no record of the Pollo forestry project, but an MP from East Nusa Tenggara province, citing his duty to serve his people, promised a follow-up investigation. He did arrive later in 2009, but only to campaign for re-

election, not to pursue the case.

By the time the villagers made it back to Pollo, the 450 hectares of forest subjected to the GERHAN project were virtually gone. And even three years later, at the beginning of 2012, no official action had been taken in response to local concerns, with the exception of a letter from the national Human Rights Commission to the subprovincial government and another from the subprovincial parliament demanding an investigation.

The struggle was far from over, however. In February 2009, following the villagers' return, Pollo residents began land occupations on the 450 hectares of roadside land that had been cleared for the GERHAN project. The objective was to prevent the government from returning, to use the land for houses and fields, and to replant part of it with useful tree species. A bonus was that occupying villagers could protect what large trees remained against human-caused or natural fires and guard against the banditry, murder and rape that afflicted this lonely stretch of road.

Four households occupied the land at first. Now there are 50, and some 365 additional families are still waiting to establish homesteads. The ultimate aim is to give each occupying household a 20-by-40 metre plot. Meanwhile, many of the pioneers are temporarily intercropping with the newly-planted trees on acreage outside their own household plots until the replanted trees are mature and the entire area can be divided up. Criminal activity along the road has ceased and at least one fire put out, but the occupants' crops are failing due to bad weather.

On 30 January 2012, the head of the provincial livestock authority held a meeting in a local field office with the regency head and other members of the regency government about reviving the old livestock project, whose contract had expired in 2007. With villagers from four local settlements present, they said that on 2 February officials would hold a followup meeting at the same place.

The villagers' response was immediate. On 1 February they began constructing a wooden barricade across the road to the field office. Their message: we want clarification of the status of the land in question.

On 2 February a vehicle arrived full of troops from Satuan Polisi Pamong Praja (Satpol PP), Indonesia's public order agency tasked with policing riots, protests and evictions. Niko Demus Manao was taken to a nearby cooperative for a 'heart to heart' conversation about the objective of the protest.

During his interrogation, more vehicles showed up. One car full of thugs recruited from the local layabout population, together with two motorcycle policemen from the local station, went straight to the barrier across the road. Advancing to the barricade, the thugs asked the 50 villagers present to disassemble it. They refused.

Another car carrying the head and vice-head of the regency, together with more toughs, pulled up at the cooperative where Niko was being questioned. The Satpol officers went out to meet them, along with Niko. The regency head jumped out of his car, swearing at Niko. One of the thugs then put Niko in a headlock while another slapped and punched him in the face.

Wary of escalating the situation, Niko didn't call out to the other villagers, who were out of sight, to come to his aid. Instead, shouting out to them not to fight, he did his best to wipe away the blood on his face and ran to a nearby house. The thugs who had arrived with the regency head meanwhile took apart the barricade.

Niko proceeded to the regency police station to report the assault on himself, but the responsible officer was still at the barricade. Niko wound up filing a complaint at the provincial level instead, taking care to obtain a personal copy. Afterwards, the police summoned the thug who had punched him to get his side of the story, but he denied even being on the scene. Nevertheless, he was jailed.

On 3 February the Pollo villagers reassembled the barricade across the road, also planting banana, coconut and cassava on the site to demonstrate their commitment to their cause. By mid-February, rumors were circulating that the regency head and the thugs he had hired were planning to burn down the houses of the villagers most active in the struggle.

The Pollo villagers remain unbowed, however. As an ethnic Amanuban community, they are an active part of an environmental and social alliance linking communities throughout South Central Timor belonging to the Mollo, Amanuban and Amanatun ethnic groups, each of which was formerly associated with a traditional principedom. The Mollo, who live in the upstream area and know themselves as the 'daughters of nature', have waged a largely-successful decade-long struggle against marble miners who would have destroyed many of the area's distinctive mountains, and are also battling industrial tree plantations. The related Amanuban and Amanatun groups, who live downstream and are seen as the 'sons of nature', meanwhile face threats from oil development as well as mining and plantations.

By Larry Lohmann, The Corner House (larrylohmann@gn.apc.org) and Dinar Rani Setiawan (dinar.setiawan@sdelink.org), School of Democratic Economics, based on interviews in Timor in February 2012 together with: "Timlico dan Besipae, Contoh Kelam Peternakan NTT," Pulangkandang, 3 December 2010, <http://www.pulangkandang.com/2010/12/timlico-dan-besipae-contoh-kelam.html>; "Pelajaran Dari Timlico dan Besipa", Ekspedisi Jejak Peradaban NTT, Kompas, May 2011; Wikipedia, "Amanuban", <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amanuban>; and Siti Maimunah, "Climate Justice", Inside Indonesia 105, July-September 2011, <http://www.insideindonesia.org/edition-105-jul-sep-2011/climate-justice-18071465>.

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- Mozambique: Monoculture tree plantation projects foster land grabbing, threaten food security

The interest of foreign investors in natural resources, and especially land, has grown

significantly in recent years throughout Africa, and Mozambique is no exception. It is in the northern region of the country that foreign investment projects have come to occupy the largest areas of land in Mozambique, primarily for the establishment of monoculture plantations of eucalyptus, pine, jatropha and sugarcane.

The implementation of these projects has been closely linked to land grabbing because, in the majority of cases, local communities have been evicted from their territories to make way for them.

In 2011, the National Peasants Union (UNAC) and the NGO Justiça Ambiental (Environmental Justice) published a study entitled “Os Senhores da Terra” (The Lords of the Land) which offers an analysis of the phenomenon of rural land grabbing in Mozambique for foreign investment projects in the agribusiness, mining and tourism sectors. According to the study, the investments analyzed “have created ever greater conflicts and deepened the poverty, deprivation and vulnerability of rural communities.”

In the province of Niassa in northern Mozambique, Chikweti Forests, a Swedish-Norwegian enterprise with shareholders in the United States and Mozambique, established a eucalyptus monoculture plantation project on an area of 140,000 hectares. No community consultation took place prior to its establishment, in clear violation of the Mozambican land law, which requires investors to have the consensus and approval of the community. In addition, there have been reports of the invasion of inhabited community lands and the restriction of access by local peasants to their “machambas” (family farming plots).

“When the company arrived, I had doubts about turning over my community's lands to them, because I was afraid they could invade the lands of local peasants and force them to move their machambas to faraway forests, where they would run the risk of being devoured by animals,” declared a community leader from Maniamba, Niassa, quoted in the study.

The actions of Chikweti Forests therefore constitute a violation of the human rights of the local communities in the areas where it operates, since they limit their access to their means of production.

In the province of Niassa, 80% of the population lives in rural areas and earns a livelihood from agriculture. These people depend on the land and forest resources to ensure their food security. The implementation of monoculture plantation projects threatens the food security and sovereignty of local communities and creates social conflicts. In addition, monoculture tree plantations destroy native vegetation and compromise local biodiversity.

These large-scale tree plantations are established for the purpose of producing large volumes of raw materials for the agrofuel, timber, energy, pulp and rubber industries. They are also aimed at supposedly offsetting the greenhouse gas emissions produced by the countries of the North, which leads to their incorporation in the carbon market. In fact, however, these measures will not resolve the climate crisis, but will instead cause ever more problems for the people of Mozambique and all of Africa.

By: Boaventura Monjane, La Via Campesina Africa

The publication “Os Senhores da Terra - Análise Preliminar do Fenómeno de Usurpação de Terra em Moçambique” (The Lords of the Land – Preliminary Analysis of the Land Grabbing Phenomenon in Mozambique) (2011) is available in Portuguese at: http://www.cebem.org/cmsfiles/publicaciones/senhores_terra.pdf

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- Land grabbing and its consequences: The case of Brazil

Throughout history, rural areas have been occupied two different ways in Brazil. One of them is the colonial, capitalist and entrepreneurial way, which is nothing new, but has recently gained new momentum and adopted new methods. The other way of occupying rural land, which dates back to before the capitalist production model, is that of peasant agriculture, based on the way of life of indigenous peoples and traditional communities

Capitalist enterprise views land ownership as a means of production aimed at the reproduction and accumulation of capital; it focuses on profits, and as a result, develops productive activities that will generate the greatest revenues. This model has been strongly supported by governments, through public procurement programmes, insurance schemes, price guarantees, loans, infrastructure, etc. In order to take advantage of these state policies, in some cases, land ownership alone is enough to guarantee profits – the land does not even need to be used to produce anything.

On the other hand, in the case of peasant agriculture, indigenous peoples and traditional communities focus production on the social reproduction of the community. The work is carried out by members of the family themselves, who seek to cultivate the most diverse range of foods possible and use agricultural practices adapted to the local environment. In this model of production, which does not receive the support of governments, communities live in precarious conditions and lack access to basic services, and therefore confront numerous difficulties. Nevertheless, this is the model of production that continues feeding the world, and currently involves around three billion people.

Up until a short time ago, the big international, multinational and transnational economic groups sought to establish control over production chains through inputs such as seeds, chemical pesticides and fertilizers, and through the processing and marketing of agricultural products. These efforts were strongly encouraged by the state apparatus, through universities, research centres, government technical assistance agencies, financial incentives, etc., demonstrating that the state works for these big economic groups. However, capital market saturation in the so-called “core” countries and the imminence of a crisis due to the speculative nature of this capital have led to massive new investments in rural areas, primarily in the countries of the so-called “periphery”.

Companies come to buy up land, invest in the production of commodities,

accumulate profits, and then channel the capital invested and revenues generated back to their countries of origin. This is a new process of colonization and plunder of the countries of the so-called Third World, although in the discourse used by the companies it is portrayed as “sustainable production”. It is the last frontier in the advance of the capitalist model of production, by way of the “green economy” and investment in the production of biomass to meet the energy demands of the industrialized countries, through plantations of sugar cane, eucalyptus, soybeans, oil palm, etc. The aim is to reap profits by continuing to feed an unsustainable model of consumption.

What is most remarkable is that these companies are eagerly and enthusiastically welcomed by governments. In the case of Brazil, this included the launching of the second phase of the so-called Growth Acceleration Programme (PAC), with planned investments of 955 billion Brazilian reais (around 530 billion US dollars), including 465 billion reais in energy production (through 104 projects) and 104.5 billion reais in transportation (3,157 km of railway lines, ports and airports), which are essentially investments aimed at improving infrastructure for the benefit of these companies and their production.

At the centre of this situation in which the state apparatus is at the service of the capitalist model of production and development, reforms to the Brazilian Forest Code are currently making their way through Congress, thanks to omission and/or collusion on the part of the executive branch. The underlying objectives of the reforms include an amnesty for environmental crimes and the expansion of the agricultural frontier. The relaxation of labour laws in the countryside is also being fast-tracked through Congress, while a Constitutional Amendment Bill (PEC) establishing the expropriation of landholdings where slave labour is used, although tabled ten years ago, has yet to be submitted to a vote.

In the meantime, another proposed constitutional amendment, PEC 215, is moving quickly through the Brazilian Congress. Under this amendment, the power to demarcate the territories of indigenous peoples and quilombola communities (traditional communities of descendants of escaped African slaves) would be taken away from the executive and transferred to the legislative branch. Approval of this amendment would signify an enormous step back for the demarcation of indigenous and quilombola lands, considering the conservative bent of the Congress in which the majority of members are either large landholders themselves or have close links with them. And finally, quilombola communities, whose territorial rights are guaranteed in the Brazilian Constitution, are fighting against an action underway in the Supreme Court aimed at the annulment of Decree 4.887/2003, which regulates the process of the demarcation of their territories.

The new phase of land grabbing has direct impacts on all of humankind, but the consequences of this process for peasant farmers, traditional communities and aboriginal peoples are brutal, because the expansion is happening on their territories. On one hand, the rising price of land prevents peasant families from buying land; on the other hand, it motivates those who own parcels of land to sell them, pushing them out of the countryside, whether to make way for infrastructure projects or for the expansion of capitalist enterprise.

The growth in the production of commodities and agrofuels, and in the use of toxic agrochemicals, seriously threatens the food sovereignty and health of the population. The increasing use of agrochemicals also works to the detriment of the production of healthy food through agro-ecological farming practices. And it should be stressed that there are currently one billion people in the world who suffer from chronic hunger and 800 million who face a situation of food insecurity, while every five minutes a child dies from malnutrition. Who will produce food for all of these people if capitalist enterprise continues its advance on the lands of peasant farmers? The logical outcome will be a decrease in the production of food crops, which will lead, in turn, to higher food prices and more hunger.

Another serious risk we are facing due to large-scale specialized agriculture is the reduction and concentration of the food products consumed by humans to just a few: "Today, of the 50,000 plants used as food worldwide, 200 are used to a significant extent, 100 are commercially marketed, but 80% of the food consumed comes from 20 crops, and of these, wheat, rice, corn and soybeans represent more than 85% of grains consumed (Guterres, 2006)." What are the consequences of this limited diet for human health?

Finally, large-scale production in tropical countries, which have high degrees of biological diversity, leads to environmental dysfunctions, converting simple insects into powerful plagues and creating fungi and bacteria that cause serious diseases. The solution adopted is the intensive use of toxic agrochemicals, which has resulted in environmental disasters, the contamination of food, and the proliferation of neurological diseases, cancer, birth defects, etc.

Society needs to adopt a position on this matter before it is too late. Rural communities, who are guardians of life, are being threatened, and are responding with struggles of resistance and confrontation. The advance of capitalist enterprise is met with resistance every step of the way, but in order to stand up against this model of production, a global effort is needed. This is a struggle that must be waged by everyone, not only communities who live in the countryside. The involvement of everyone is needed to fight back and to build another possible world.

Globalize the struggle, globalize hope!

By: Raul Krauser, Small Farmers Movement (MPA), a member organization of La Via Campesina, Brazil

Guterres, Ivani, "Agroecologia militante: contribuciones de Enio Guterres", São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2006.

You can participate in the fight against PEC 215, mentioned above, by signing the online petition at <http://www.peticaopublica.com.br/PeticaoVer.aspx?pi=P2012N22454> and another online petition against the revocation of the decree regulating the demarcation of quilombola lands: <http://www.peticaopublica.com.br/?pi=P2012N23370>

- International Day of Peasant Struggle

La Via Campesina is gathering information on actions organized around the world against land grabbing and in support of agrarian reform, food sovereignty and other demands in the framework of the International Day of Peasant Struggle, April 17. Information should be sent to viacampesina@viacampesina.org, and all activities will be recorded on the map available at: <http://viacampesina.org/map/17april/map.html>

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- Declaration of the Third Special Conference for Food Sovereignty, Rights and Life

In Buenos Aires, Argentina, on March 22-25, the International Committee for Food Sovereignty-Regional Coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean (CIP-ALC) organized the Third Special Conference for Food Sovereignty, Rights and Life. The meeting was attended by representatives of social organizations in 20 countries. Its objectives included the strengthening and expanding of strategic alliances and the formulation of proposals and recommendations for the 32nd FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean, and specifically for the drafting of the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of National Food Security.

The final declaration issued by the conference condemns the “accelerated advance of land grabbing throughout the continent,” caused by, among other factors, the expansion of agribusiness and mega projects in the mining, hydroelectric power and tourism sectors, as well as the various false solutions to climate change, such as REDD and REDD+ projects and monoculture plantations for the production of biomass as an energy source. The declaration also stresses that the current definition used by FAO for the word “forest” – which includes tree plantations – acts as a driver of land grabbing, since it legitimizes large-scale plantations by classifying them as forests, despite their countless negative impacts.

The full declaration is available in Spanish at: [http://www.radiomundoreal.fm/get.php?file=IMG/pdf/Declaracion III Conf mov sociales x sob alimentaria.pdf&type=application/pdf](http://www.radiomundoreal.fm/get.php?file=IMG/pdf/Declaracion%20III%20Conf%20mov%20sociales%20x%20sob%20alimentaria.pdf&type=application/pdf)

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- Impacts of oil prospecting and exploration in Virunga National Park

Numerous social organizations from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) met together with local and traditional authorities in the province of North Kivu on March 23-24 to consider the impacts of oil exploration and drilling by the multinational oil company SOCO in Virunga National Park.

In the declaration issued at the end of the meeting, local communities denounced the

pollution of the air, the soil and the waters of Lake Edouard resulting from oil industry activity, in addition to the violence they have suffered as a consequence of the conflicts caused by commercial interests competing for the appropriation of natural resources. They also called on the government to respect the international agreements it has signed, implying a commitment to the protection of the environment and the conservation of forest ecosystems.

The full declaration is available in French at:

www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Congo/CommuniquePetroleMars2012.pdf

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- Petition to support Chinese lawyer imprisoned because of defending communities affected by Stora Enso's eucalyptus plantations in China

Chinese lawyer Yang Zaixin has been imprisoned in Beihai, Southern China since June 2011. We urge you to support a petition that demands that the Finnish government and company Stora Enso take action to end his unjust imprisonment. Finnish-Swedish company Stora Enso is planning to build massive board and pulp mills in Beihai city in Guangxi, Southern China. The project began in 2002 and has been surrounded by controversy and accusations of misconduct. The tree plantation and pulp mill project has displaced local people of their lands without their free and prior consent. Thousands of people's access to vital resources such as farmland and water has been restricted. Lawyer Yang Zaixin has been representing local residents and farmers who claim to have been forced or threatened into giving up their lands.

Participate on: <https://www.change.org/petitions/take-action-to-release-lawyer-yang-zaixin-halt-pulp-mill-plans-in-beihai>

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- Support the statement against the corporate capture of Rio+20

A number of international civil society organizations and social movements have joined together to issue a statement against what they call the "corporate capture" of Rio+20: the zero draft of the conference declaration highlights the role of business as promoter of the so-called "green economy", while failing to hold business accountable for its role in creating the financial, climate, food and other crises. Instead of discussing measures that serve the public interest, the UN and its members merely formulate proposals that benefit certain companies and business sectors, and push for public policy reforms that place profits above the rights of peoples.

If you agree with the need to put an end to the corporate capture of the UN, please sign the civil society statement and join the campaign to reclaim the UN as a peoples' space at: <http://www.foei.org/en/get-involved/take-action/end-un-corporate-capture>

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