

10 THINGS

communities should know
about REDD



About this booklet

The main goal of this booklet is to inform communities about the serious problems that a REDD project can cause for the people involved. WRM has visited a number of these communities over the past few years. All of them, without exception, have a lot to say about REDD. This is what motivated us to produce this booklet: to share their experiences with other communities who also run the risk of being affected by a REDD project

WRM thinks that the exchange of information is extremely important, so that communities can learn more about the potential impacts of REDD projects from others who are already suffering them, before they decide whether or not they want to accept one of these projects.

We hope you will find this booklet useful and informative.

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WRM, 2012

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Introduction

Close to 300 million people around the world indigenous men and women, forest collectors, peasant farmers and other traditional communities directly depend on tropical forests for their livelihoods. The lives of these people have become increasingly difficult. Their territories have been and continue to be invaded and plundered by logging companies, companies seeking minerals, oil, gas and coal, big landowners and companies that want to raise cattle or create monoculture plantations of trees or food crops, and companies that want to build big hydroelectric dams to sell energy. The result of all this has been widespread deforestation and destruction, very often with the support of governments.

The plans adopted by these governments to prevent deforestation have not been very successful quite the opposite, in fact. Often they create even more problems for the communities who depend on the forest. For example, communities have been evicted from their territories in order to create national parks or other protected or conservation areas.

The most recent proposal being promoted by governments to prevent the destruction of forests is called REDD or REDD+, terms that a lot of people have now heard about. REDD promoters often come to carry out their projects in tropical forest areas where communities who depend on the forest for their survival live.

For these communities, deforestation has never been a common practice. They normally cut down only a small number of trees to meet their basic needs, or clear just a small area of forest to grow food crops, and then let the area recover. Destroying large areas of forest makes no sense for these communities, because it would be like destroying their own homes. Communities that deforest larger areas of land have usually lost part of their traditional territory to big companies or landowners.

Very often, in areas where a REDD project is being promoted, few people know what this really means. Many people have heard the promoters of REDD projects say that they are needed because of climate change, which is causing more rain, more droughts, or higher temperatures. REDD promoters say that deforestation must be stopped in order to alleviate these problems and preserve what is left of the forest.

They also say that it is necessary to reforest and recuperate the areas that have been destroyed. In addition, they claim that the project will benefit the community, for example, by providing jobs, money and/or social projects. It is usually because of these promises of a better life that communities accept REDD projects.

Consider, for example, this comment from the Democratic Republic of Congo:

"We have agreed to the REDD project activities. If there are obstacles, they won't be raised by us. There is carbon in the forest and we have agreed not to destroy the forest. This is going to open the door to development." (1)

**But is a REDD project really good
for the community as a whole?**

**Will it really open the doors to
a better life?**

1 - http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/REDD/DRC_REDD_en.pdf

What is REDD?

REDD is the acronym for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation.

When did the idea of REDD originate?

REDD was first proposed under this name in 2005, at one of the annual United Nations conferences on climate change. At these conferences, governments discuss the problem of climate change and global warming, with the expectation of arriving at measures to solve these serious problems.

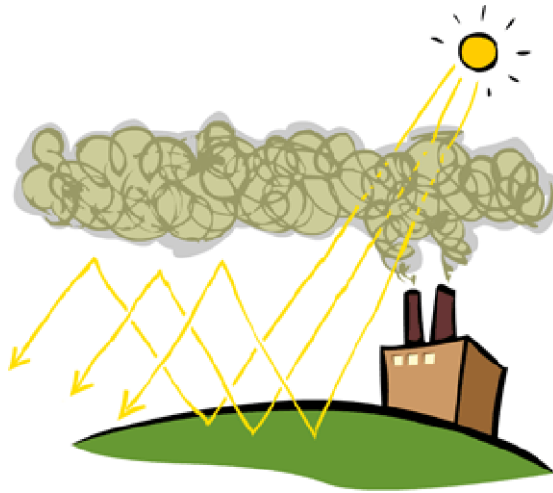
What causes climate change and global warming?

The industrial revolution that began about 200 years ago caused a drastic increase in the use of fossil fuels oil, coal and natural gas to produce energy. This made capitalist industrial production and mass consumption possible.

As a result of the increased consumption of fossil fuels, a huge volume of gases has been released into the atmosphere, especially CO₂ (carbon dioxide), causing

what is known as the “greenhouse effect”, changing the planet's climate rapidly.

To curb global warming we must stop burning fossil fuels, which is only possible with changes to the model of production, export-oriented trade and consumption.



Who is responsible and what have they done to curb this process?

Although the process has global effects, the causes of warming are not “global” and not all human beings are responsible for it. Historically, a group of actors

including large transnational companies and financial institutions have been mostly responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, since they profit from the model of mass production and consumption that depends on fossil fuels, and they have a major interest in maintaining it. The majority of this group of actors is found in the industrialized countries of the North: North America, Europe and Japan. The governments of these countries are still not willing to take the measures necessary to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, because that would seriously affect the interests of their big companies and financial institutions.

And what does REDD have to do with all this?

REDD was one of the false solutions to the problem of global warming presented and supported by governments and companies who are seeking to avoid making real emissions reductions in their countries.

REDD promoters argue that deforestation, especially in tropical countries, is responsible for around 15% of all CO₂ emissions globally, so that preventing deforestation, as well as preserving the forests, would help to reduce the amount of CO₂ released into the atmosphere. At the same time, REDD promoters say

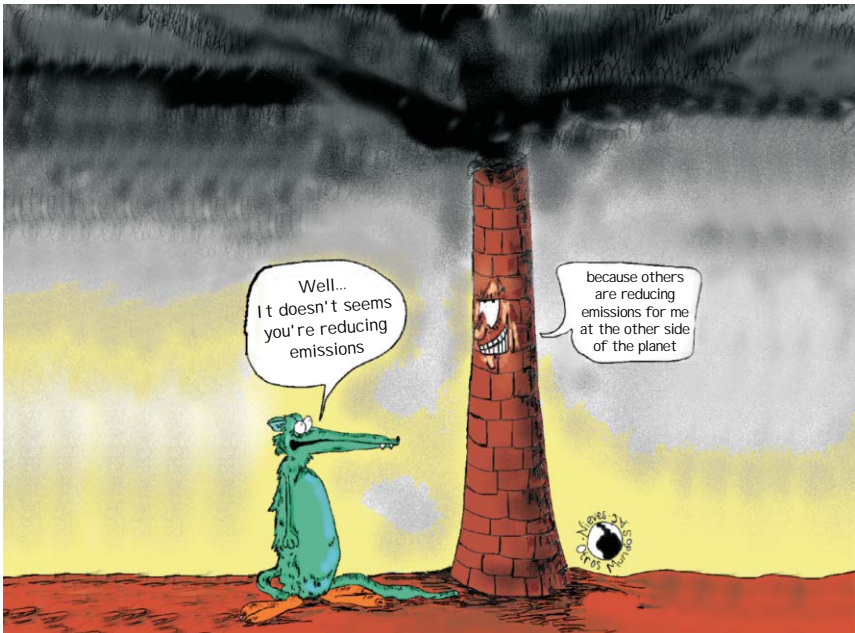
that as trees absorb CO₂ when they grow, forests can store part of the gas emitted when burning oil, coal and natural gas. They argue that this will help reduce the impact of climate change.

But does it work?

No. First, it does not address the main cause of the problem: the model of mass production, export-oriented trade and consumption. Worse still, defending measures like REDD reinforces the belief that it is possible to solve the climate change problem without changing this model.

Second, the REDD mechanism does not work because it assumes that avoiding carbon emissions from deforestation can compensate for continuing to burn fossil fuels. Why does that not work? Because in terms of the climate, there is a very important difference between these two types of carbon. On the one hand is the carbon emitted through deforestation, which is part of the natural cycle of carbon that is released and absorbed by plants. It has been circulating in the atmosphere for millions of years. On the other hand is the carbon released when oil, coal or natural gas are extracted and burned. This carbon was stored underground for millions of years, and when it is

released, it increases the total amount of carbon in the atmosphere. Although plants can absorb part of this additional carbon introduced into the atmosphere, they do so only temporarily, since when the plant dies, or there is deforestation or a forest fire, the CO₂ is released again and returns to the atmosphere.



Even so, can REDD provide a solution to climate change?

No. There are countless reasons why reducing deforestation and preserving forests are important,

including for the sake of the peoples who depend on them. But suggesting that REDD projects can compensate for emissions from oil, coal and gas elsewhere on the planet delays decisions about the real cause of climate change: the industrial use of fossil fuels. If we buy the idea that REDD projects can compensate for fossil fuel emissions, over time the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere will increase, and the climate change problem will become worse.

Yet there has been a lot of support for REDD. Why?

It is easy to explain why governments of countries with tropical forests support REDD, because they see it as an opportunity. They know REDD can bring in money if they commit themselves to preventing deforestation.

Conservation NGOs that work to preserve forests are also interested, because they see REDD as an opportunity to fight deforestation and to get resources to expand protected areas in forests.

Polluting countries were enthusiastic about the idea because it is a relatively easy way of appearing to give an answer to the problem of climate change, without having to reduce their emissions, just by selling the idea that they would be compensating for the pollution they produce.

Finally, financial capital groups like financial exchanges, funds and investment banks were very interested in REDD because of its potential as a new market in which to trade profitably.

A market? In what way?

In the capitalist world, where everything is converted into merchandise, REDD promoters thought from the outset that REDD should operate through a market. Only a market could generate the money needed to conserve the world's forests. The "carbon credit" was invented to be a tradable good. A "carbon credit" is nothing but a piece of paper, a document that represents one ton of CO₂ in some part of the world where it is alleged that CO₂ emissions are being reduced through a given project. In the case of REDD, the carbon credit represents the affirmation that one ton of CO₂ is being stored because deforestation has been avoided.

How can you tell how many “credits” can be sold, that is, how do you determine the CO₂ emissions saved by a REDD project?

To know how many carbon credits will be generated by each REDD project, REDD promoters say it is necessary to make some rather complex calculations.

First, it is necessary to calculate how much carbon exists in the area of forest where the proposed REDD project will take place. This is difficult or impossible; there is still no reliable method to calculate this. Experts carry out expensive studies using approximate and complicated models. Even so, it is impossible to reach a precise figure and impossible to verify the results, which can vary by more than 50% between studies.

Then, an even more difficult calculation is required. The amount of carbon the forest will store in the future, while it is protected by the REDD project, must be estimated. This is done for a period of time established in a signed agreement between the seller and buyer of the “carbon credits.”

And the third calculation is really impossible to perform, but it is essential for marketing carbon credits: estimating the amount of carbon the forest would have if the REDD project were not done. This calculation is even more arbitrary than the other two, because with the REDD project under way, it can never be known what would have happened without it.

Why are these calculations so important? Because the buyer

of a “carbon credit” is really buying the “right to emit” an additional ton of carbon which he was previously not allowed to release. The credit gives the buyer the right to say that the harm caused by his carbon emissions has been neutralized. In other words, the credit justifies an additional emission, and so the reduction must also be additional to what would have happened without the REDD project.

The amount of carbon expected to be stored in the forest with the REDD project in place, minus the amount of carbon it is imagined the forest would have stored without the project, gives the amount of carbon emissions that the project is said to save.

Is this calculation reliable?

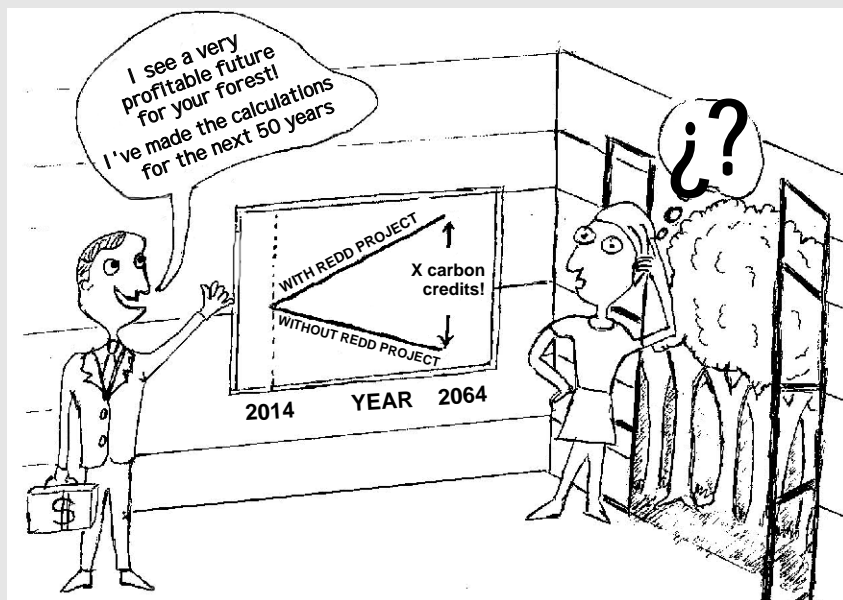
No. The logic of these calculations clearly shows that they are not reliable. But to make them acceptable to the carbon market, which wants to trade in reliable carbon credits, a large amount of documents is created. Producing these documents involved large numbers of consultants and experts to perform, verify and audit these calculations, to certify the projects and provide the market with guarantees that “carbon credits” are reliable.

And how is the price of a carbon credit set?

The price of a “carbon credit” document depends on the value of the credit, which in theory is determined by the market of carbon credit supply and demand, or a negotiation between seller and buyer. In recent years, the price of a

carbon credit has varied from 5 to 12 dollars per ton. Consultants and experts involved in the studies are estimated to have been paid more than half the value of the "carbon credit." The immense value of the entire forest impossible to put in cash terms is not considered here. What matters is the monetary value of the carbon.

In addition, REDD demands that states enact legislation to regulate the operation and auditing of the carbon market, to provide guarantees for CO₂ traders. These laws are fairly complex; one example is the legislation already existing in Acre, in Brazil.

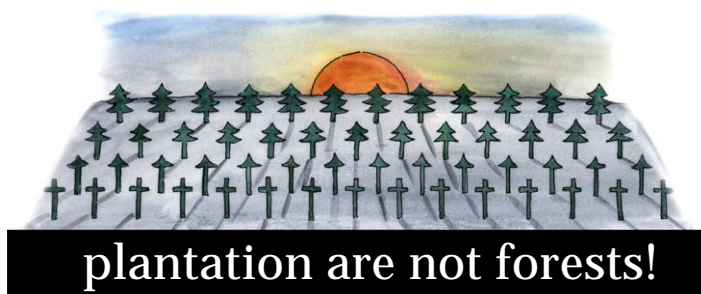


So far we have discussed REDD, but there are also REDD+ and REDD++. What are they?

REDD+ was presented in 2009 as an expanded form of REDD. It includes the following items: "conservation of carbon stored in forests," "sustainable management of forests," and "increase of forest carbon stocks." This means that any forest area with a proposal to maintain "standing" forests can get a REDD+ project, even when the project is about "sustainable management" which actually continues to destroy forests. Projects to regenerate forest areas by planting monocultures of exotic trees, even transgenic eucalyptus, can also become REDD+ projects.

Why was REDD expanded to REDD+? To expand the business. The original idea for REDD made it difficult for all countries to receive resources. For instance, countries with a lot of tropical forests but a low rate of deforestation could not make money from the original REDD proposal because they could not argue that REDD projects in their forests could generate many carbon credits, because the rate of deforestation was already very low. It suits these countries to include the option of "conservation of carbon stored in forests," that is, to be able to receive money from selling carbon credits generated by maintaining existing forests.

REDD++ in turn expands the REDD+ concept beyond forests, by including agriculture and other land uses.



Finally

Since 2005, governments of countries with tropical forests, consulting firms and large conservation NGOs have received enormous sums of money to prepare for REDD. Dozens of pilot REDD projects were created in order to implement REDD in practice and demonstrate that the mechanism can work. REDD has already been introduced in areas that communities that depend on the forests call home. The 10 things communities should know that we present below are based on the experiences of these communities that are coexisting with REDD.

ALERT 1

A proposal that comes from the outside, “from the top down”

REDD stands for “Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation” and is a United Nations programme. It is not a proposal put forward by local communities, by people who live in and depend on the forest. On the contrary, it is a proposal that comes from the outside, “from the top down”, like monoculture plantations of eucalyptus trees and soybeans, mining projects, big hydroelectric dams, and so many others.

In order for communities to truly benefit from the activities proposed for their territory, these proposals must come from the community members themselves. They cannot be imposed from the outside. That is the first big problem with REDD.



A proposal that entails restrictions and prohibitions for communities

As is the case with national parks and “protected” areas, a REDD project also entails a series of restrictions and prohibitions for communities, for their way of life, and for their traditional use of the forest. Sometimes this affects part of their territory, sometimes it affects all of their territory.

For example, in forest areas where REDD projects are established, it is common for members of the community to be prohibited from cutting down a tree to build a canoe or a house, and they are also prohibited from hunting and fishing. Sometimes they are even prohibited from gathering things from the forest, such as medicinal plants, fruit and other foods. Anyone who dares to do any of these things faces persecution by the police or by private security guards working for the REDD project.

REDD projects usually determine that the women and men of the communities can no longer use the forests the way they did before. This signifies a violation of their culture, traditions and way of life. They can no longer be the way they were before the arrival of the REDD project.

ALERT 3

REDD threatens food sovereignty

One activity that is always subject to restrictions is the clearing of an area of forest to plant crops, an activity that is essential for the vast majority of communities. Sometimes, they are permitted to practice some form of agriculture in one permanent place, in a single spot that has already been deforested. However, in some cases, not even this is allowed.

Prohibiting communities from producing their own food in their own way is not only a show of disregard for their customs and traditional knowledge, but is also a threat to their survival and food sovereignty that is, their ability to produce food for themselves, today and in the future, and to contribute to the food supply for the rest of the people in the region where they live.



REDD means communities lose control over their territories

REDD project promoters seek control over the area where the project is carried out, because they need to prove to those who provide the financing that deforestation in the area has been reduced and that the “danger” posed by the community has been dealt with.

In the past, logging companies plundered forest communities' territories by cutting down the trees and selling the timber to make money. REDD project promoters, on the other hand, leave the trees standing, but they have the same goal of making money.

This is possible because there is something called carbon stored in the trees. REDD supporters argue that the carbon that is released into the atmosphere when the trees are burned is the same as the carbon that is released when companies burn fossil fuels like oil, which is causing climate change.

Governments and companies claim that they can continue to burn oil and produce carbon emissions without affecting the climate, if they pay someone to



stop carbon from being released somewhere else. This is why there are now companies interested in “buying” the carbon stored in trees. More precisely, they are buying the right to continue burning fossil fuels and releasing carbon into the atmosphere by paying someone to guarantee that the same amount of carbon will be kept stored in the trees in the forest. Therefore, guaranteeing the continued storage of carbon, by guaranteeing that the trees remain standing, can be a way to make money, and this is what interests the promoters of REDD projects.

This is why REDD promoters seek control over the territory where the project is to be carried out, which usually leads to conflict with the communities who live there, especially if this territory has already been recognized or demarcated as theirs.

But it also leads to problems for communities who are still struggling to ensure their rights to the territory where they live and to the use of the forest, since REDD promoters seek out carbon where there are more trees still standing, where forest communities live.

This is clearly demonstrated in this letter signed by communities in Indonesia who are affected by a REDD project:

"They [the REDD project developer and local government] do not show any good will to seek a solution with regards to the problem of recognizing and respecting community rights to lands." (2)

In practice, REDD is not about recognizing the rights of communities. It is about taking over control of their territories. This makes the struggle of communities fighting for their land rights even more difficult.

2 - <http://www.redd-monitor.org/2012/09/11/controversy-surrounding-australias-kalimantan-forest-and-climate-partnership-redd-project-deepens/#more-12901>

ALERT 5

REDD projects create divisions within communities

To gain the support of the community and to prevent them from continuing to use the forest as they did before, REDD project promoters usually offer the community something in exchange, such as jobs, money or financing for a social project. This is supposed to be a way of compensating for the losses suffered by the community because they can no longer use the forest.

REDD projects often hire people from the community itself to work as forest rangers, who act as security guards, keeping an eye on other members of the community to make sure that they do not break the “rules” imposed by the project by cutting down trees, hunting, fishing or growing food crops in the forest. REDD pits community members against each other, by forcing them to spy on one another.

Another problem that can arise is when REDD project promoters offer money to a community and then create or demand the creation of a community organization to manage the funds. The creation of a new organization as a result of the imposition of a

REDD project often causes conflicts with already existing, traditional systems of community organization.

REDD project administrators are not concerned about providing jobs and benefits to everyone in the community. Usually there are a few people who benefit, and others who do not benefit at all. The most disadvantaged members of the community are generally excluded: they neither get hired by the project, nor do they receive payment or participate in “community projects”.

A common result of all this is the creation or worsening of divisions within the community, which negatively affects the ability of community members to organize and work together, something that is essential for them to be able to fight back against the negative impacts of the project and to guarantee or regain the control of their territory.



REDD projects do not help solve the common problems faced by communities

REDD project promoters have only one main goal: to “sell” carbon. This is why they claim that deforestation by communities must be controlled and prevented. This is the only way they can make money through the project.

This means that the projects do nothing to solve the common problems faced by many communities, such as the lack of recognition for the community's rights to the land, or problems with health care services, education, transportation, the marketing of the community's products in other words, the lack of adequate public policies. These problems, which have usually been faced by the community for a long time, will not be solved, and are also not the responsibility of the REDD project.

This is why we often hear communities say that after a REDD project has been implemented, their lives became worse, because the project imposed restrictions on people, it benefited very few of them, and it did not solve the community's main problems.

ALERT 7

REDD projects threaten the continued existence of communities

Communities who live in an area chosen for a REDD project are seen as a “problem”. They are subjected to “awareness raising” to convince them that they need to preserve the forest by changing their way of life. But taking care of the forest is precisely what these people have always known how to do and have always done; they don't need “classes” on this subject.

Members of the community who do not follow the rules imposed by the project are persecuted, and so they lose their freedom and independence. The community as a whole loses when this happens. Families who feel isolated and frightened and are left without possibilities for working and earning a livelihood begin to look for alternatives outside of the community, usually in the city. As a result, people begin to leave, and the community begins to break down.

REDD projects will not prevent forest destruction

REDD projects are carried out in one specific area of forest. Outside of this area, the usual destructive activities continue: mining, oil drilling, the construction of big hydroelectric dams, monoculture plantations, cattle ranching, etc. Often, communities wonder: why isn't anyone trying to prevent these causes of deforestation?

And who is financing REDD projects? In addition to governments, these projects are also promoted and financed by polluting companies who want to show that they are compensating for or “offsetting” the pollution they cause and the carbon emissions they produce in other places. But the problem is, if this pollution continues, the future of the forests continues to be threatened by climate change. What's more, the raw materials that these industries need, like minerals, oil, coal and the electricity generated by big hydroelectric dams, often comes from forest areas, causing more destruction, forest fires, and climate change. These companies continue polluting and deforesting, but with REDD they can say this is not a

problem, because they are investing in projects and in areas where deforestation is being “reduced”.

REDD projects do not provide a solution for this cycle of destruction. In fact, REDD forms part of this cycle. That means that the future of tropical forests continues to be greatly threatened, even with REDD.

Big companies involved in REDD projects also have an interest, like the REDD projects themselves, in gaining ever greater control over the territories that belong to communities, so that, at some point in the future, they can implement their destructive projects there.



ALERT 9

It is not only communities who depend on the forest who suffer

As we mentioned earlier, those who finance REDD projects include polluting companies that produce carbon emissions. For example, companies that exploit oil reserves in Canada. The activities of these companies have serious impacts on the lives of Canadian indigenous communities. The real solution for this would be to stop oil exploitation and pollution in those places. But that is not what REDD projects are about quite the opposite, in fact.

REDD projects propose that companies that cause pollution and carbon emissions in Canada, for example, can compensate for or “offset” this by providing financing for “standing forests” and preventing deforestation in other places, like Brazil, the Democratic Republic of Congo or Indonesia.

And so we can see that it is not only peoples and communities who live in tropical forests who suffer the consequences of REDD projects. These projects also cause suffering for communities who live far away, in the places where the companies that finance REDD projects operate. Just ask Canadian indigenous people...

The final result: huge injustice

In the REDD projects already underway, we always see how a small group of people manage to benefit from the project. These include, for example, big NGOs, government technicians and consultants. They are responsible for the coordination of the project and the “technical” aspects, such as verifying if deforestation was, in fact, prevented. Many of them can enter the community's territory whenever they want.

Polluting companies also benefit when they finance a REDD project, because they can continue to produce carbon emissions, or produce even more, and say that they have earned this “right” because they are preserving forests, and the environment, but somewhere else.

As for the members of the community that has always taken care of and coexisted with the forest, the vast majority do not benefit, or benefit very little. What's more, the communities are accused of deforestation, while the polluting companies are not. The communities are punished if they try to maintain their traditional way of life, which depends on the forest. And on top of it all, they run the risk of being evicted from the land where they have always lived.

How can we fight pollution and preserve tropical forests?

On the one hand, it isn't difficult to understand what REDD is. Communities affected by REDD projects explain it very clearly: there is a problem with carbon emissions in a place far away from their community, and the promoters of REDD are trying to solve that problem in the community's territory, in its "home". This leads people who are suffering from the impacts of a REDD project to suggest that the problem should be solved in the place where it is caused, and not in their territory, where it causes them more problems.

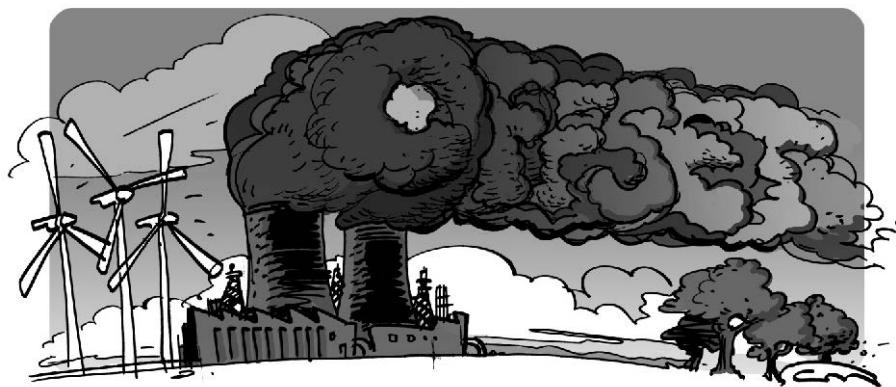
In the words of this community member affected by a REDD project in Brazil:

"Now we've ended up imprisoned here to send [carbon] there. That's not right. If they used it up over there, let them deal with it there. We're suffering here to help them over there." (3)

What is perhaps more difficult or even impossible to understand about REDD is how polluting companies

3 - <http://www.fern.org/pt-br/publications/briefing-note/sofremos-aqui-para-ajuda-los-la>

can claim that preventing deforestation in one place gives them permission to continue polluting or causing destruction in another place. This part of the story is poorly explained, but that is simply because it is totally illogical. How can pollution in one place be offset by an activity thousands of miles away? And also create new business opportunities on top of that, like the buying and selling of this carbon on the so-called carbon market?



A logical solution for the problems of pollution and carbon emissions, one that is much simpler and more sensible, would be to stop them where they happen. At the same time, it is obvious that the best way to take care of the forest is to guarantee the land rights of forest communities and other communities who depend on forests, and provide them with support so that they can continue to preserve and manage forests as they have always done, through their traditional practices.

To genuinely deal with the problem of deforestation and forest degradation, the real solution would be to confront and prohibit the direct causes, such as mining projects, the construction of big hydroelectric dams and highways, and the establishment of monoculture plantations on large areas of land, among other destructive activities.

It is also necessary to deal with the massive consumption of all types of products and energy by just a small minority of the world's population, mainly in the big cities of Europe and the United States. This excessive consumption serves as an indirect cause of the destruction of forests.

The good news is that opposition to REDD is growing around the world. More and more communities are organizing to guarantee and regain collective control over and use of their territories. One important step in this struggle is to know what REDD projects are really all about by hearing about the experiences of other communities; to know that the struggle is being waged by many different communities; to know that by joining together and organizing, it is possible to stop this new form of destruction.

Here are some links to videos on the subject, with the stories of people who have already been affected by REDD projects and are fighting to defend their lands:

The CO2 Alibi

<http://www.carbontradewatch.org/video/the-co2-alibi.html>

Suffering here to help them over there

<http://www.fern.org/sufferinghere>

Disputed Territory: The green economy versus community-based economies

http://www.wrm.org.uy/Videos/Disputed_Territory_intro.html

A Darker Shade of Green: REDD Alert and the Future of Forests

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPFPUhsWMaQ>

The Carbon Connection

<http://www.carbontradewatch.org/carbon-connection/index.html>

Links to declarations critical of REDD:

NO REDD+! in RIO +20: A Declaration to Decolonize the Earth and the Sky

<http://www.redd-monitor.org/2012/06/19/no-redd-in-rio-20-a-declaration-to-decolonize-the-earth-and-the-sky/>

Kari-Oca 2 Declaration at Rio+20

<http://indigenous4motherearthrioplus20.org/kari-oca-2-declaration/>



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October 2012

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