

# The two faces of tropical forest destruction in Latin America and the Caribbean: Revelations of the “green economy” in Acre, Brazil

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## Introduction

On the eve of another world conference on the environment – Rio+20 – which places emphasis on the climate crisis, we are witnessing major efforts by the centres of world power to promote a discussion with no real discussions. The worn-out model of “sustainable development”, now recycled under the new name of “green economy”, is being put forward as the only alternative to “save the planet”.

The mass media monopolies translate the debate in “common sense” terms as a dispute between those who propose “viable alternatives” (such as “sustainable development”) and the “eternal critics” who “have nothing to offer” and simply limit themselves to “blaming capitalism and multinationals” for everything. We believe that one way of breaking away from this kind of Manichean dualism which shapes so-called “common sense” is to more deeply investigate what has been proposed as an alternative under the umbrella of a “green economy”.

By examining data that demonstrates the continued destruction of forests, we want to place greater emphasis on research and analysis of the “solutions” put forward in accordance with the canons of “sustainable development”, such as “sustainable forest management” (SFM).<sup>2</sup> As a reference, we will look specifically at the case of the state of Acre, in the Amazon region of Brazil, which is presented to the world as a “model for the green economy”.<sup>3</sup>

## 1. The status of tropical forests in Latin America and the Caribbean; direct and indirect causes of deforestation

Over the last four decades the growing destruction of tropical forests worldwide has been denounced to an ever greater extent. The images released

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<sup>2</sup>While FAO defines SFM as “the management and conservation of the natural resource base and the orientation of technological and institutional change in such a manner as to ensure the attainment and continued satisfaction of human needs for present and future generations” ([www.fao.org/docrep/006/ad399s/AD399s08.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/006/ad399s/AD399s08.htm)), ITTO defines it as “the process of managing permanent forest land to achieve one or more clearly specified objectives of management with regard to the production of a continuous flow of desired forest products and services without undue reduction in its inherent values and future productivity and without undue undesirable effects on the physical and social environment” (ITTO. Guidelines for the sustainable management of natural tropical forests. Yokohama: ITTO, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Thus defined by Mauro Armelin (coordinator of the WWF Brazil Amazonia Programme) in an interview with the Acre state government radio station “Aldeia FM 96.9” on 31/03/2012 at 8:30 p.m. According to Armelin, the WWF will present Acre at “Rio+20” as an example of the green economy to be followed by the rest of the world.

periodically of vast areas of devastation cause short-lived commotions, but the destruction continues its forward march. The most obvious direct causes of deforestation – logging, the expansion of agribusiness and conversion of primary forests into new production areas, major infrastructure projects like highways, hydroelectric dams, mining, oil drilling and urbanization, as well as forest fires largely caused by these same activities – are very well known and have even come to be taken for granted. We will therefore try to situate the problem within the wider picture of visible forest destruction.

We will devote ourselves to an in-depth analysis of the processes of tropical forest destruction hidden behind the guise of the “green economy”. The combination of logging through “SFM” and the ever greater commodification and financialization of nature through “payments for environmental services” (PES)<sup>4</sup> is eating away at forests like a new species of “green termites” at an increasingly rapid pace.

In 2011, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) released the report “State of the World’s Forests 2011”, which reveals that in the last decades, Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC) and Africa were the two regions that suffered the greatest reductions in forest area, with a combined total loss of 162.1 million hectares. In percentages, Africa lost around 10% of its forest cover and the LAC region lost roughly 9%.

In the meantime, Europe experienced an increase of 1.57% and North America’s forest cover remained practically stable. In the other macro-regions there was little variation, as illustrated in Table 1 (see Annex). In the final balance, between 1990 and 2010, the world lost 135.5 million hectares of forests. It should be noted, however, that in the above-mentioned table, the total area of land currently covered by forests includes monoculture tree plantations of species like eucalyptus, acacia, rubber and pine, geared to the production of timber, pulp, rubber and oils. According to FAO (2011: 19), these “planted forests” account for approximately 7% of the world’s total forest area, and monoculture plantations continue expanding and driving deforestation.<sup>5</sup>

The data on wood removal is consistent with these changes in forest cover in the macro-regions. Between 1990 and 2010, there was an increase of 87.4% in Africa and 40% in Latin America and the Caribbean, while Europe, North America and Asia and the Pacific experienced decreases of 25%, 40% and 10%, respectively, in the total volume of wood removed (FAO, 2011: 7, 12, 17, 21, 28). The reduction in the volume of wood extracted from forests in Europe was attributed by this FAO report to the effects of the recession that began in 2008.

However, the devastation of forests in the LAC region and Africa is directly linked to the consumption of high-value tropical timber in the countries of the North and in some urban centres of the countries of the South by their

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<sup>4</sup>WRM Bulletin N° 175, February 2012 <http://www.wrm.org.uy>

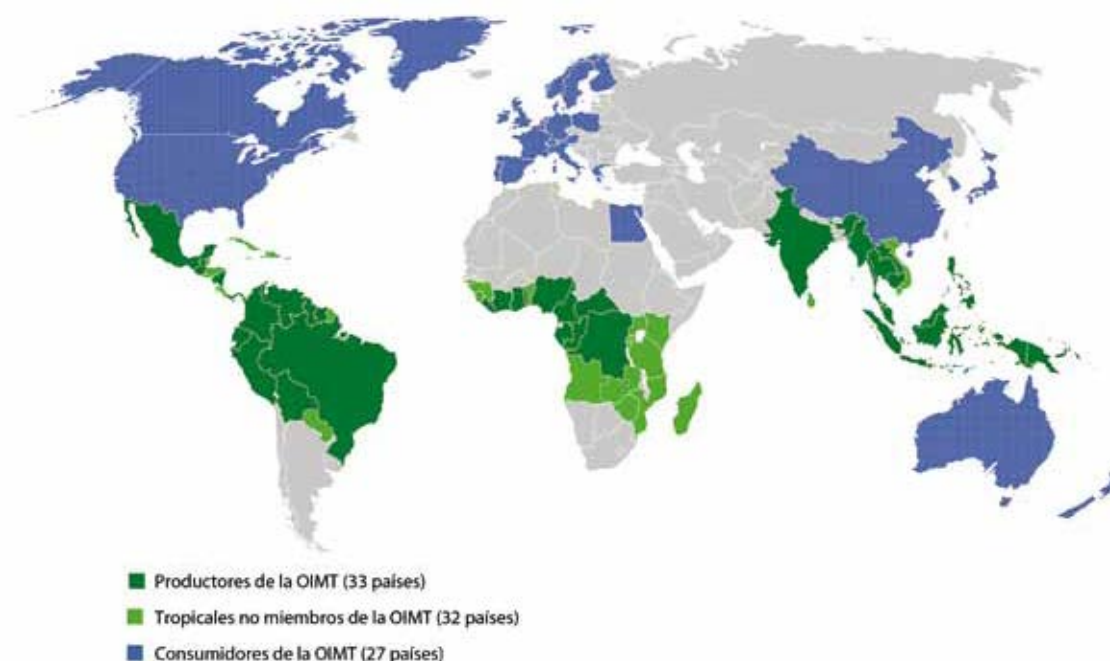
<sup>5</sup>Industrial monoculture oil palm plantations, which are not included in the category of “planted forests” but share similar characteristics, are in full expansion and are one of the leading causes of deforestation in Indonesia and Malaysia.

wealthiest elites. Moreover, the increase in the demand for other mass consumption products, such as meat, also entails an increase in deforestation.

In terms of the significance of Latin America and the Caribbean in the world, the FAO report highlights the fact that it contains 57% of the world's primary forests, and that these account for 75% of the total forest cover in this macro-region. The report also notes, however, that "there was a significant loss of primary forest outside protected areas,<sup>6</sup> particularly in South America" (FAO, 2011: 19). The main causes of deforestation cited were the conversion of forest land to agriculture and urbanization.

To complete this bigger picture, we offer a map (see Figure 1) included by Blaser et al. in the ITTO<sup>7</sup> report "Status of Tropical Forest Management 2011", which identifies the world's tropical timber producer and consumer countries (for more detailed quantitative data, see Table 2 in the Annex).

**Figure 1: Tropical forested countries and ITTO members**



Source: Blaser et al. (2011: 19)

<sup>6</sup> "Protected areas" are public or private parcels of land designated for "environmental conservation". They may be categorized for direct or indirect use. In the former, different forms of exploitation are permitted, such as the extraction of timber through "Sustainable Forest Management Plans". In the case of the Brazilian Amazon, close to 80% of the total land area is encompassed within these different types of "protected areas".

<sup>7</sup> ITTO (the International Tropical Timber Organization) defines itself as "an intergovernmental organization promoting the conservation and sustainable management, use and trade of tropical forest resources. Its 60 members represent about 85% of the world's tropical forests and over 90% of the global tropical timber trade" (Blaser et al., 2011: 3).

In addition to the location of tropical timber producer and consumer countries, identified by the authors of this ITTO report, we would like to draw attention to certain aspects of a geopolitical nature. Above all, it is clear that not only are the production areas outside of the main centres of timber consumption, but in addition, the consumer countries encompass the centres of international financial, political and military power, which are striving to maintain and increase their control over the planet's "natural resources" to ensure their mode of production and excessive consumption, which benefits only a minority of the world population.

In other words, we want to highlight the fact that the variations in the volume of timber produced by the different macro-regions are not only conditioned by economic crises, as suggested by the FAO report (2011). They are also – and above all – conditioned by strategic considerations related to the geopolitics of control over the planet's natural resources. Forests are home to enormous reserves of minerals, water, oil and other products considered to be of high value. The control of the world's "natural resources" still exercised by the imperialist powers, headed up by the United States, is being increasingly disputed, particularly as a result of the emergence of the so-called BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) as major world powers.

By situating the destruction of tropical forests within this bigger picture, we do not intend to spare from blame the local agents of destructive production, namely the Brazilian and foreign companies who rule over the agribusiness production of proteins, agrofuels, timber and pulp, the oil, mining and metallurgy, energy and civil construction sectors, and the financial markets.

The government provides these private conglomerates with crucial support – through infrastructure, subsidized financing, tax exemptions, and control and repression of the workforce – for their business enterprises. The "power bloc" formed by private and government actors has expanded and accelerated its activities in South America and Africa in recent years. The execution of major projects through the South American Regional Infrastructure Integration (IIRSA)<sup>8</sup> initiative is an especially clear indication of the potential expansion of the scale of destructive production in tropical forests and their incorporation into the dynamics of international capitalist accumulation, as a mere supplier of raw materials. Recent cases of civil construction companies based in Brazil and the Brazilian National Development Bank (BNDES) involved in conflicts with indigenous peoples in Bolivia and Peru, as well as the Brazilian mining conglomerate Vale in Colombia, clearly illustrate the "exportation of destructive production" by Brazilian-based corporations.

In order to "mitigate" the effects of this destructive advance underlying the endless accumulation of capital, the recommendations of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in line with FAO and ITTO, point to the "green economy" as salvation<sup>9</sup> in the report "Towards a Green Economy", published in 2011. In the following section, we will look at its key proposals and

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on IIRSA, see CECEÑA, Ana Esther (et al.). **Territorialidad de la dominación: Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Sudamericana (IIRSA)** [www.geopolitica.ws](http://www.geopolitica.ws)

<sup>9</sup> WRM Bulletin No. 175, February 2012. <http://www.wrm.org.uy>

how they are translated in practical terms into so-called “sustainable forest management”.

## **2. Destruction hidden and justified by the “green economy”: Sustainable Forest Management Plans (SFMPs)**

In June 2011, ITTO released a four-page summary of the 420-page report, “Status of Tropical Forest Management 2011”. Under the suggestive heading, “Survey of World’s Embattled Tropical Forests Reports 50% Increase in Areas under Sustainable Management since 2005”, the summary notes that “the area of natural tropical forest under sustainable management across Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean increased from 36 million hectares to 53 million hectares,” while the area of timber production forests subject to at least some type of management plan<sup>10</sup> – considered a “critical first step” toward achieving sustainability – “has increased by about one third since 2005 and now totals 131 million hectares.”<sup>11</sup>

Given that the estimated area of permanent “natural tropical forests” (designated the Permanent Forest Estate or PFE)<sup>12</sup> is approximately 761 million hectares – of which 403 hectares are so-called production forests and 358 million hectares are protection forests – roughly 24% of the total (183 million hectares) are being exploited under sustainable management plans. Between 2005 and 2010, according to Blaser et al. (2011: 4), “the area of natural forest under management plans in ITTO producer countries increased by 69 million hectares, to 183 million hectares.” This is the combined total of areas exploited under registered SFMPs both within and outside of territories designated as sustainable forest management areas.

The subtitle of the same summary quoted in the previous paragraph warned, **“But New Data on 33 Countries Holding Bulk of World’s Tropical Forests Suggest Forces Driving Preservation could Lose to those Favoring Destruction”**. However, the total combined area of natural tropical forests exploited under sustainable logging plans rose sharply in 2010 and is now greater than the 135.5 million hectares of forests destroyed around the world in the 1990-2010 period. If this trend continues and deforestation continues at the same levels as in 1990-2010, it would take only 20 more years for the total remaining 625 million hectares of “natural tropical forests” (calculated on the basis of the loss of another 136 million hectares through deforestation in the next 20 years) to be targeted for exploitation under SFMPs.

Meanwhile, in order for the exploitation of tropical forests and extraction of their natural resources to continue, the idea of a “green economy” is crucial. That is, in order for the destruction of certain forest areas to be compensated through the “protection” of other “sustainably managed” areas, the sale of

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<sup>10</sup> SFMPs are **not** conditioned by SFM, they may be implemented in areas ruled by other forms of regulation.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.itto.int/>, accessed in February 2012.

<sup>12</sup> ITTO defines “permanent forest estate” as “land, whether public or private, secured by law and kept under permanent forest cover. This includes land for the production of timber and other forest products, for the protection of soil and water, and for the conservation of biological diversity, as well as land intended to fulfill a combination of these functions” (2011: 20).

“environmental services” is being established. In this sense, the “green economy” not only complements the concept of “sustainable forest management” but also serves to expand the commodification of forests and increase the opportunities for the agents of destruction to reap greater profits, which translates into new opportunities to overcome the economic-financial crisis that hit in 2008.

When the problem is framed within this perspective, the “warning” voiced by the ITTO summary report – pitting the forces in favour of “preservation” against those who promote “destruction” – might seem nonsensical. But in fact, it is not. It has a well-defined purpose: to convince everyone that we can continue to destroy the forests, as long as this destruction is “compensated” with SFMPs and their “environmental services”, which will serve as a guarantee of “protection”. Through this Manichean approach, the simplification of the problem of shaping a “common sense” perception of the supposed “conservationist” benefits of SFMPs has been very effectively achieved. The first battle was waged around the legitimization of SFMPs, and in more recent years, efforts have turned to imposing the total commodification of forests through the adoption of a system of payments for environmental services (PES) and trade in these services, especially “carbon sequestering” through the REDD mechanism.

It is within this context that we should situate the new cycle of exploitation of forests in particular and natural resources in general. As emphasized by Schwarz (2008), from this point on, forests cease to be planned as a mere extension of farming and livestock activities, essentially for the production of raw materials, and begin to be viewed as “ecosystems that require protection” and that need to be valued, to the extent of placing a price on the “environmental services” that they provide.

This analysis serves to highlight four aspects that we consider to be crucial: 1) the productivist logic that guides destructive production, far from ceding ground to the criticisms of environmentalists and concerns over the complexity of ecosystems, has appropriated these same concerns in order to use them for the deepening of the commodification of natural goods; 2) the asymmetry of power relations between the countries that contain forests and those which control world power has been translated into policies aimed at instituting a standardized regulatory framework, primarily with regard to forest exploitation activity through SFMPs and PES; to legitimize the expansion of SFMPs and PES, the use of “scientific authority” has been stepped up to certify the validity of these instruments as effective practices for “forest conservation”; 4) key roles are attributed simultaneously to the state and the “market”, with the former responsible for the institutionalization of a new legal and regulatory framework adapted to the total commodification of forests and the second in charge of the “orientation” of economic activities. All of these efforts have been widely supported by representatives of international and national civil society, especially large conservation NGOs, including, in particular, the WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), and TNC (The Nature Conservancy).

Three fundamental steps were taken in order to implement this series of proposals: 1) the dissemination of Sustainable Forestry Management Plans (SFMPs) as an “antidote” to the destruction of forests; 2) the adoption of “forest certification” as a means of “soothing” the conscience of consumers while at the same time creating an elite market for the consumption of high-value wood products or so-called “precious woods”; 3) the provision of incentives for the creation of conservation areas for the “sustainable use” of “natural resources”.

In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, the most ambitious initiative was carried out in the Brazilian Amazon region under the leadership of the World Bank through the Pilot Program for the Protection of Brazilian Tropical Forests (PPG-7). Initiated immediately after the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio and completed in 2009, the programme achieved notable success. The state of Acre is considered the Brazilian state that made the most “progress” in the adoption of this model of “sustainable development”.

The architecture of this territorial reorganization is essentially based on the establishment of a legal framework instituting the creation of “conservation units”, whose control may be formally designated as communal, community-based and/or governmental, although they are subjected to rules of use to ensure the commodification of nature for the benefit of private capital. “Forest concessions” were granted in the government-controlled conservation units while SFMPs were established for areas under community or communal control. Specific laws, such as those passed in Bolivia (1996), Peru (2000), Brazil (2006) and other Latin American countries, pave the way for private sector appropriation of natural goods. This explains why approximately 60% of the production of ITTO member countries in Latin America and the Caribbean comes from public or communal forests. At the same time, it clearly reveals how the “green economy” has also appropriated the natural goods in territories won through the resistance struggles of peasant and indigenous movements in the last two decades. In this regard as well, an analysis of the case of the state of Acre – where 45% of the territory is designated as conservation units, primarily as a consequence of the victories of peasant and indigenous struggles – offers a good parameter to analyze the appropriation of public resources by the private sector when it comes to tropical forests.

### **3) Acre as an “outdoor laboratory”: The truth behind the “green economy”**

The state of Acre (see Maps 1 and 2 in the Annex) is located in the Brazilian Amazon region. It has a total area of 16.5 million hectares, of which 88% are still covered with native forests, and roughly 50% of these are in protected natural areas. With a population of 732,793 inhabitants, and 72.61% of them living in urban areas, Acre is considered one of the poorest states in Brazil: 66.2 percent of households earn up to one minimum salary monthly, and 2.9% are in the highest income bracket of more than five minimum salaries monthly (IBGE, 2010 Demographic Census). According to Celentano et al. (2010: 24), Acre has the greatest income inequality in the northern region (Gini index=0.61) and the second greatest in all of Brazil, behind the Federal District.

The main productive activities are extensive beef cattle grazing and logging. The first decade of the 21st century was marked by the expansion of these activities and massive reconcentration of land ownership under private control.

According to Teixeira (2011), in 2010, 583 large landholdings of over 1,000 hectares each totalled 6.2 million hectares, while 23,500 small landholdings of between 50 and 100 hectares made up a combined total of only 1.4 million hectares. In just seven years, the total combined area of large landholdings increased by over 100% (see Table 3).

The state of Acre became internationally known in 1988 as a result of the murder of Chico Mendes, the president of the Union of Rural Workers of Xapuri. In the resistance struggles against the destruction of the forests that were the source of their livelihoods, the peasant movement led by Chico Mendes became famous for showing that forest conservation could not be approached separately from the peoples who live in and from the forests. The extractive reserves or RESEX<sup>13</sup> initiative was the most concrete reflection of this interaction between society and nature.

As “the land of Chico Mendes”, Acre sparked the interest of the international environmental movement from that point forward and the state has been publicized worldwide as the most advanced in the Amazon region in terms of the implementation of a “sustainable development model”, now relabelled by the UN as a “green economy”. The financing received by the state government for over a decade from the World Bank, IDB and BNDES, as well as from big international conservation NGOs like the WWF, is aimed at promoting this “model”. Since 1999, the state government of Acre has been headed by a broad coalition of forces that encompasses everything from parties considered to be leftist to ultra-right wing parties, led by the Workers Party. During this time, various initiatives have been implemented to adapt state legislation<sup>14</sup> to the canons of the “green economy”.

A summary that concisely explains the actions undertaken by the state government of Acre to promote adaptation to the “green economy” is provided by Vorocai et al. (2012):

The main programmes undertaken by the government of Acre (...) were carried out in the area of the Policy for Sustainable Development and the Policy for the Valuation of Forest Environmental Assets, which are based on the conception of the forest as a supplier of goods and services and the principles of rational management (...) in conjunction with civil society organizations in the environmental field, international technical cooperation agencies, research centres and universities, as well as private companies. (...) The Programme for the Valuation of Forest Environmental Assets (PVAAF), implemented with state treasury funds and supported by the IDB (Phase I of the Acre Sustainable Development Project) and the National Development Bank (BNDES), involves the regularization of forest environmental liabilities and the certification of sustainable productive units, (...) payment for environmental services, and enhancing the value of forest cover with the

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<sup>13</sup> For more information see PAULA & SILVA, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> More details on the legal framework measures are provided by NEVES, Rodrigo (Org) (2010) Coletânea de normas ambientais do estado do Acre <http://www.pge.ac.gov.br/site/arquivos/cartilhas/2010/coletaneanormasambientais2010.pdf>



legalization of ownership, providing incentives for multiple-use management practices (Verocai et al., 2012: 21, 23).

This summary demonstrates how “green economy” proposals were materialized in the state of Acre. What stands out particularly in the case of Acre is the implementation of Economic Environmental Zoning, with the aim of “sustainable management” of land use, and the successful implementation of SFMPs in their different forms: private sector, community-based and individual. Verocai et al. emphasize the fact that in 2010, 756,000 cubic metres of wood were extracted in the form of roundwood, primarily by companies and large rural landholders. This amount is 150% more than the volume of roundwood extracted annually (304,000 cubic metres) in the entire state of Acre during the previous decade (Paula, 2005: 85). Another significant point is that during this period there was a decrease in logging activity in the Brazilian Amazon region as a whole. Also significant is the recorded expansion of SFMPs in conservation units (such as Extractivist Reserves, Agro-Extractivist Settlement Programmes and state Public Forests), reflecting the appropriation of public natural goods for the purpose of private exploitation.

Of particular relevance in this context is State Law 2.308/2010, which created the State System of Incentives for Environmental Services (SISA). This law is considered one of the most “advanced” in the world in terms of the establishment of the legal bases for the “green economy”. According to the Acre News Agency, the “SISA law” paves the way for Acre “to participate in the international carbon market and the markets for other environmental services, such as biodiversity and water.” The article concludes by stating: “Policies for the reduction of deforestation are the greatest advertising for Acre carbon. And once again they place this Amazonian state in a prominent position in the world.”<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, then, the basic foundations for the “green economy” have been established in Acre. The importance and “value” of Acre was duly recognized by ITTO assistant director Eduardo Mansur during the 2nd International Expert Meeting on Sustainable Forest Management, held in Rio Branco, the capital of the state, in 2011, which was also the “International Year of Forests” and the 25th anniversary of ITTO. According to Mansur:

Acre was chosen as the venue for the event, because the work being carried out here is, indeed, a reference for all of us. Acre has succeeded in establishing a sustainable development model that is an example for all, because it followed sensible models of respect for the forest, and for traditional populations.<sup>16</sup>

Immediately after this declaration, the participants in the event were informed that they would be visiting the Antimary State Forest, “a veritable outdoor laboratory where the Technology Foundation of the State of Acre (FUNTAC) is carrying out a variety of experiences.” There are 50 families living in Antimary, the news story continues, “who receive a Forest Allowance of R\$ 880.90 [US\$

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.agencia.ac.gov.br/index.php?Itemid=26&id=14065&option=com\\_content&task=view](http://www.agencia.ac.gov.br/index.php?Itemid=26&id=14065&option=com_content&task=view), accessed February 2012.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.portalamazonia.com.br/secao/noticias/acre/2011/08/23/acre-sedia-2%C2%BA-encontro-internacional-de-especialistas-em-manejo-florestal-sustentavel/>, accessed February 2012).

450], financial assistance for the conservation of the forest through sustainable management, said the secretary of forests, João Paulo Mastrângelo.”

In our opinion, a careful examination of the “outdoor laboratory for the green economy” represented by the state of Acre could contribute considerably to exposing the hidden destruction to which we are referring. More generally, it makes the connections between SFM and PES more understandable and explains why ITTO, FAO and other promoters of this policy insist so strongly on their joint adoption. After impoverishing the forest (according to the meaning we attribute to this word, that is, territories marked by indivisible relations between material and symbolic life, socially constructed by peoples for whom the forest is their place to live in the world) through the extraction of timber, PES is used to alleviate social conflicts – through the payment of allowances as in the abovementioned case of Antimary – that are caused or aggravated by this activity. In the meantime, the companies who control these forest territories are able to reap huge profits, whether they are in the logging industry or the financial sector involved in the “carbon market”, not to mention the benefits obtained by industries that are able to produce harmful emissions thanks to the opportunity to purchase the “right to pollute”. The losers are the peoples and communities who live in these impoverished forests.

The destruction resulting from the expansion of SFM in Acre can be explained by a combination of technical and political factors. The former relate to a lack of scientific evidence on forest regeneration<sup>17</sup> in units exploited under SFMPs, as well as the behaviour of different ecosystems in response to the deployment of the whole apparatus of forest exploitation, which includes the building of roads and highways for the circulation of heavy machinery and trucks, the diversion of waterways, the contamination of the soils and rivers with burnt oil and other toxic wastes, the noise of the machinery, which scares away birds and wild animals, etc. The latter relate to the absence of control and monitoring of the SFMPs by government bodies, whether these have been deliberately downgraded as a result of neoliberal policies, or due to the emphasis on “public-private partnership” that characterizes the national government in Brazil. This complicity between private business groups and the state is only made visible when social conflicts emerge that cannot be controlled by the state authorities, such as those witnessed in 2011 in the São Bernardo rubber plantations and Antimary State Forest. In both cases, local communities denounced the destruction of forests and the pressures exerted on them to leave the areas where they lived. The repercussions of these conflicts in the media forced the State Public Ministry (MPE) to take action, recommending the suspension of the licence for one of the SFMPs granted to Laminados Triunfo, a private company.<sup>18</sup>

Incidents of this kind occur throughout the state of Acre and had already been denounced by union leaders who have not been co-opted by the powers that be, particularly the president of the Rural Workers Union of Xapuri, Dercy Teles,

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<sup>17</sup>As shown by researcher Paulo Kageyama (2000).

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.ac24horas.com/2011/12/19/ministerio-publico-recomenda-suspensao-de-licenca-ambiental-para-o-plano-de-manejo-da-laminados-triunfo>

and the leader of the STR union opposition in Brasília, Osmarino Amâncio Rodrigues.<sup>19</sup>

As for PES policies, their perverse effects are beginning to be felt in forest areas, as clearly illustrated in this statement by Dercy Teles:

(...) PES policies only serve to silence these people, who have no opportunities or a voice. They have no voice because they sign a contract which is for at least 30 years. And for 30 years they leave the area in which they live at the disposal of the government and the multinationals to do research and use all of the knowledge of the area in exchange for a meagre, insignificant amount of money. And what is even worse is that they can't do anything in this area, they can't fish anymore, they can't remove wood for their own use, they can't hunt anymore, they can't do anything anymore. I was closely following the development of these policies, in Pará as well, and there were cases in which a community member was arrested for cutting down a tree to make a canoe to go fishing. And so, in my opinion, these policies only serve to confine communities within their own territory, and that means in the future they will give up living there, because it doesn't make sense to live in the middle of a forest without being able to take advantage of the goods it offers. A life like that makes no sense. And the subsidies they are given, even if it was a million reais it wouldn't be worth it. But nobody lives paralyzed in a corner because life has lost its meaning, right? You feel useless, it isn't possible to live without being able to do the things that have always been done, you grew up fishing, hunting, moving about, growing crops" (interview conducted by Israel Pereira Dias de Souza in March 2012, [upcoming]).

In addition to sparking an increase in social conflicts in the forests of Acre, the adoption of PES initiatives involving carbon credits not only contributes to the continued environmental pollution in the industrialized countries but also to the intensification of conflicts beyond the borders of South America, as illustrated by Michael Schmidlehner (2012):

With the "legal backing" of SISA and with the help of the EDF [Environmental Defense Fund, a U.S.-based non-profit organization], the government of Acre signed a REDD agreement with the states of California (USA) and Chiapas (Mexico) in 2010. The objective of the memorandum signed is the sale of carbon credits that would be issued by the governments of Acre and Chiapas. Industries in California that produce higher emissions than those allowed by the legal standards in the state could offset some of these excess emissions by purchasing these credits. The legal mechanism that would facilitate this type of offset in California, so-called "cap and trade", has been fought against in court by Californian civil society organizations. (...) Through cap and trade,

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<sup>19</sup>According to union leader Osmarino Amâncio Rodrigues (a contemporary of Chico Mendes), "The government is implementing the green economy, but [sustainable forest] management is forcing rubber tappers out of their place, stripping the dignity of tappers and indigenous people and threatening biodiversity. That is what is happening in Santa Quitéria, in Antimary. You go there and you see that the people have not become rich, they are receiving a subsidy [family allowance]. The economy is stagnant and poverty persists." (<http://www.ac24horas.com/2011/10/08/4050>).

industries could partially maintain their excessive emissions and communities would have to continue suffering the impacts, such as higher rates of cancer and miscarriages (CBE, 2011). In Chiapas, the agreement between the three governments has further aggravated severe land conflicts in the Lacandón jungle. In order to be "Ready for REDD" the government of Chiapas must prove that the areas from which carbon certificates would be generated are under environmental protection, and the communities who live in the area delimited by the government as an environmental park are now afraid that they will be expelled (Conant, 2011).

Finally, in addition to the continued selective destruction of forests through SFMPs, the different forms of total forest destruction also continue in the state of Acre. According to Verocai et al. (2012: 56), "In the last ten years, the total area of forest cleared in Acre increased by 730,000 hectares, of which 62% were converted to other land use in the 2000-2005 period," thus surpassing the average recorded in the previous three decades of approximately 500,000 hectares, prior to the implementation of the "green economy". It should be noted that extensive beef cattle grazing, considered one of the most destructive activities in the Amazon, underwent a steep increase in Acre in the last decade: the cattle herd has grown from 800,000 head to 2.5 million, in other words, a threefold increase in just ten years.

### **Final considerations**

As we stressed in the introduction to this article, criticism of the capitalist development model linked to the "green economy" requires, in addition to theoretical analysis, efforts to demonstrate how the model actually works in practice. This was our objective: to shine a light on these initiatives in order to dispel the shadows that loom over the accelerated destruction of tropical forests in Latin America and the Caribbean in general, and the Brazilian Amazon region in particular. Promoters of the "green economy" could question the validity of the generalization of criticism of the reality of "sustainable" forest exploitation based on an in-depth look at the case of Acre in particular. We would respond with a question of our own: When a specific case is used as a "certification of validity" for the reproduction of a model, why would it be any less valid to make generalizations based on this particular case when critically challenging the model?

We hope we have been able to demonstrate with reasonable clarity, by focusing on a case publicized by the promoters of the "green economy" as a model to be replicated in other regions, the truth behind so-called "sustainable" forest exploitation. We have seen how the real practices of this exploitation model simply repeat the destruction and plunder of the conventional capitalist production model. The increased destruction of forests, alongside the increase in land grabbing and the expansion of extensive cattle grazing, reveal the falsity of the "green economy" in Acre.

In brief, our aim has been to emphasize the fact that forests are currently threatened by a combination of the most visible conventional forms of destruction, but that under the new logic of the "green economy", this destruction can now be "compensated" through "sustainable forest

management". Moreover, the trade in "carbon credits" and other environmental services represents a frontal attack on forest peoples' autonomy, freedom and control over their territories, in addition to erroneously "offsetting" continued pollution in the industrialized countries of the North, as in the case of California and its agreement with the states of Acre (Brazil) and Chiapas (Mexico). In spite of all this, just as they did in the past, the communities and peoples for whom the forests are their "place in the world" are reacting and fighting back against old and new forms of destruction and plunder.

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## ANNEX

**Table 1: State of the world’s forests**

Region	Area (1000 ha)			Annual change (1000 ha)		Rate of annual change (%)	
	1990	2000	2010	1990-2000	2000-2010	1990-2000	2000-2010
North America total	676 760	677 080	678 958	32	188	n.s.	0,03
Latin America and Caribbean total	978 072	932 735	890 782	-4 534	-4 195	-0,47	-0,46
Europe total	989 471	998 239	1 005 001	877	676	0.09	0.07
Near East total	49 123	46 323	46 348	-280	3	-0.59	0.01
Asia and Pacific total	733 364	726 339	740 383	-703	1 404	-0.10	0.19
Africa total	749 238	708 564	674 419	-4 067	-3 414	-0.56	-0.49
World total	4 168 399	4 085 063	4 032 905	-8 334	-5 216	-0.20	-0.13

**Source:** FAO, 2011 (data compiled by the authors based on tables presented in the report).

**Table 2: Global tropical forest area, by region**

Region (number of countries)	Total forest area (million ha)	% of forests in ITTO producer countries	Primary forest (million ha)	% of primary forests in ITTO producer countries
<b>Tropical Africa(26)</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>98</b>
ITTO members (10)	270		100	
Other countries (16)	170		2	
<b>Tropical Asia and the Pacific (16)</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>97</b>
ITTO members (10)	282		104	
Other countries (6)	35		3	
<b>Tropical Latin America and the Caribbean (23)</b>	<b>907</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>678</b>	<b>96</b>
ITTO members (13)	868		647	
Other countries (10)	38		30	
<b>WORLDWIDE TOTAL (65)</b>	<b>1 664</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>887</b>	<b>96</b>
Total ITTO producers (33)	1 421		851	
Total non-ITTO (32)	243		35	

**SOURCE:** ITTO, Actualidad Forestal Vol.18 N.3/2011 (p. 3)

Note: The regions used by ITTO differ from those used by FAO. In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, ITTO includes Mexico but FAO excludes it, placing it within North America. As a result, the quantitative data on tropical forests in Latin America and the Caribbean differ in the two tables presented here.

**Table 3: Rural properties registered with INCRA (Acre 2003 and 2010)**

Category	2003		2010		N° of properties	Area - ha	N° of properties as percentage of total	Area as percentage of total
	N° of properties	Area - ha	N° of properties as percentage of total	Area/Área total				
Large productive area	63	322,666	14.2%	11.6%	72	523,285	12.3%	8.5%
Large property	444	2,787,39	2.2%	67.1%	583	6,183,55	2.4%	78.9%
Medium property	321	243,583	1.6%	5.9%	429	317,937	1.8%	4.1%
Smallhold	16,197	785,126	81.1%	18.9%	20,267	970,399	82.8%	12.4%
Small property	3,013	339,073	15.1%	8.2%	3,194	368,920	13.1%	4.7%
<b>Total</b>		<b>19,975</b>		<b>4,155,180</b>		<b>24,473</b>		<b>7,840,810</b>

**Source:** Teixeira (2011: 9)

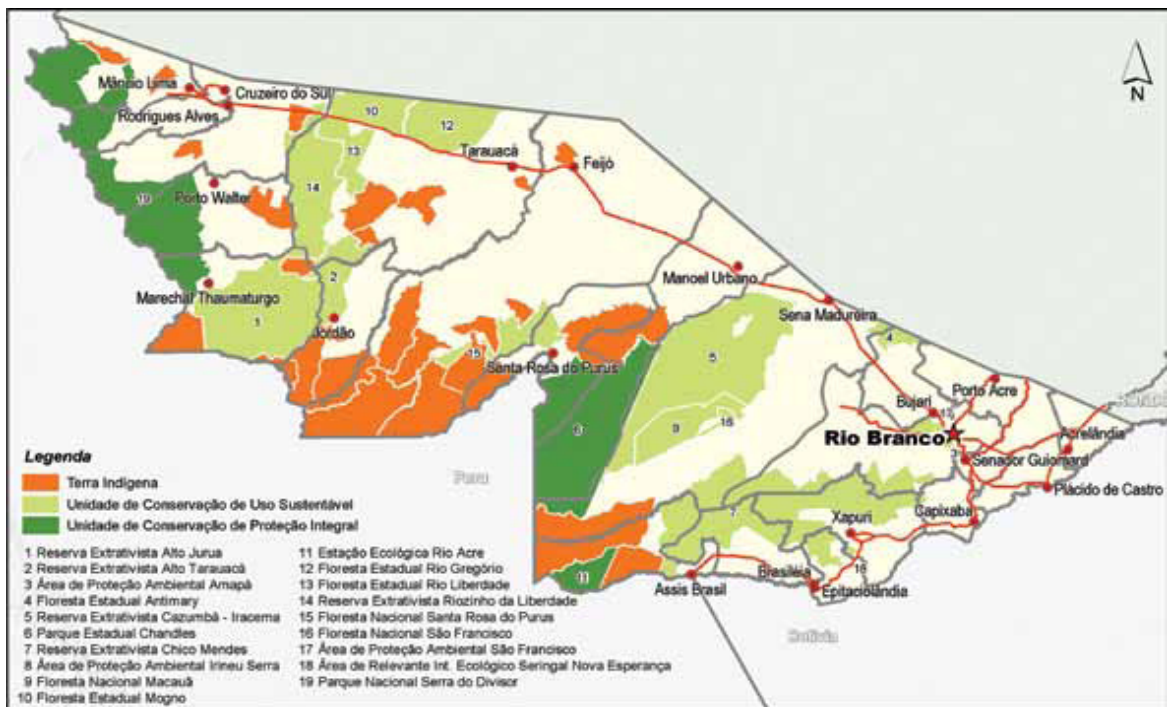
## Mapa 1: State of Acre



Source: Government of Acre (2011: 6)



## Map 2: Territorial organization of Acre



Source: ZEE/AC geographic database, Phase II, 2006

## IMAGES OF LANDS UNDER SFMPs in Acre

The following sequence of photographs is highly illustrative of the reality of SFMPs. Photo 1 was taken on side of the Trans-Acre Highway, at the entrance to the local road that provides access to the managed area. Those who pass along the Highway and see the sign tend to identify it with the virtuous image of the plans publicized by the media apparatus. However, those who enter the local road confront images like those revealed by the other photographs, along a stretch of approximately 30 km.

Some were divulged in October 2011, and form part of the evidence for the denunciation filed by the Pastoral Land Commission in Acre against the private company Laminados Triunfo. This is the largest timber company operating in Acre and one of the largest in the Brazilian Amazon. It is Acre's largest exporter and has received the FSC label as well as most of the SFMPs approved by the IMAC. The company has been the target of numerous denunciations by inhabitants of "managed areas", such as the Ranchão I and Ranchão II SFMPs, located in the basin of the Riozinho do Rola (photo 1), the main affluent of the Acre River, which supplies water to the state capital, Rio Branco. In recent years, the water supply has been seriously compromised by the drastic reduction of the river's flow, and one of the causes is the destruction caused by activities like those in the Laminados Triunfo SFMP areas.



Photo 1: Archives of the Pastoral Land Commission, Acre



Photo 2: Archives of the Pastoral Land Commission, Acre



Photo 3: <http://blogdaamazonia.blog.terra.com.br/2011/09/28/no-acre-moradores-de-seringal-denunciam-crime-ambiental-causado-por-manejo-de-madeira>



4: Archives of the Pastoral Land Commission, Acre

Photo



Photo 5 : <http://blogdaamazonia.blog.terra.com.br/2011/09/28/no-acre-moradores-de-seringal-denunciam-crime-ambiental-causado-por-manejo-de-madeira/>



Photo 6: <http://blogdaamazonia.blog.terra.com.br/2011/09/28/no-acre-moradores-de-seringal-denunciam-crime-ambiental-causado-por-manejo-de-madeira/>