



WORLD RAINFOREST MOVEMENT
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OUR VIEWPOINT

- The International Day Against Monoculture Tree Plantations

TOWARDS SEPTEMBER 21, THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF STRUGGLE AGAINST
MONOCULTURE TREE PLANTATIONS: SEEDS OF RESISTANCE

- Indonesia: Timber monocultures destroying indigenous' lands and livelihood
Here in Indonesia, ever since a child entered the school, he/she has been familiar with “Merauke” through a patriotic song entitled “Dari Sabang Sampai Merauke” (lit. from Sabang to Merauke – from the westernmost to the easternmost part of Indonesia). The song talks about the unity and glory of Indonesia across its large and small islands reaching from Sabang, the westernmost part, to Merauke, the easternmost.
- Philippines: Indigenous organizations challenge oil palm companies in Palawan
Few places in Southeast Asia can match the distinction of Palawan, in the Philippines. UNESCO declared the whole Province a ‘Man and Biosphere Reserve’ in 1990. Today, in addition to the adverse impact of nickel mining, the local indigenous peoples and lowland farmers are being confronted with the threats posed by oil palm development.
- Cambodia: The Curse of Concessions
Since 2000, residents in more than 111 villages have been struggling against a mammoth land concession that spans 315,028 hectares across the provinces of Pursat and Kampong Chhnang in Cambodia. The concession agreement allows Pheapimex—a powerful Cambodian company—to seize farm, forest and common lands to grow acacia and cassava in monoculture plantations.
- Nigeria: Wilmar, RRDC, and the Calaro/Ibiae Oil Palm Estates
Over the past nine months, a high-stakes confrontation has taken place in Cross River State, home to Nigeria’s last remaining primal tropical rainforests. The controversy has revolved around the activities of Wilmar International, a Singaporean multinational which describes itself as “the world’s largest processor and merchandiser of palm and lauric oils”.
- Liberia: Plantation Expansion and the Plunder of a Continent
The government has granted more than 50 percent of the country’s land area for rubber and oil palm plantation, logging and mining activities. The rhetoric of adopting a pro-poor approach to stimulating growth in the agricultural sector seems to make a mockery of poor farmers who are being stripped of their farmlands that are then handed over to foreign investors.
- São Tomé and Príncipe: Popular resistance succeeds in curbing the expansion of

industrial oil palm plantations

The population of Príncipe opposed an agreement with Agripalma for the concession of land and prevented the establishment of industrial oil palm plantations on their island from destroying more than 1,000 hectares of forests.

- South Africa: Pulp Industry expansion - land-grabbing disguised as community development

During the Apartheid era many South Africans were deprived of their traditional land through laws that led to their displacement – often through forced removals - into remote smaller areas with marginal agricultural potential. At the same time, the South African government of the day was busy converting land taken from rural communities to establish vast monoculture plantations of alien trees, with the intention of supporting a pulp and paper industry that would help to reduce dependence on imported products, as well as reduce exposure to trade sanctions.

- Brazil: Industrial eucalyptus plantations in southwest Bahia – conflicts and confrontations

The interest of the tree plantation sector in the region of southwest Bahia dates back to the times of the coffee plantation crisis, which began in the late 1980s and grew more acute in the 1990s due to drop in world coffee prices and the decrease in the area planted in the Planalto da Conquista region.

- The RSPO challenged in Honduras and Germany

On 6th-8th August, environmental and social campaigners have denounced the Fourth Latin American Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil that took place in Honduras, organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and the Federation of Industrial Oil Palm Producers. In Germany, activists from environmental and human rights organisations staged protests against the RSPO greenwashing of large scale oil palm plantations at two high-profile meetings on oil palm on 2 and 3 September in Berlin.

- Brazil: State government incentives for the expansion of industrial tree plantations in the state of Rio de Janeiro

The government of the state of Rio de Janeiro has adopted various initiatives since 2001 to promote the expansion of large-scale monoculture tree plantations in the state. It would seem that its intention is to recreate in Rio de Janeiro the green deserts that are laying waste to the north of the state of Espírito Santo, the extreme south of the state of Bahia, the north of Minas Gerais, the states of São Paulo and Paraná, the south of Rio Grande do Sul, and more recently, different parts of the states of Maranhão, Piauí and Mato Grosso do Sul.

- Guatemala: The silent advance of industrial rubber tree plantations

Rubber tree cultivation was introduced in Guatemala in 1940 through an initiative of the United States Department of Agriculture. Fifteen years later, the first census of plantations in the country reported some 10,000 hectares of rubber trees. In 2003, that area had increased to 52,000 hectares. By 2012, there were over 100,000 hectares of rubber tree plantations on Guatemala's southern coast.

RECOMMENDED

- “Agribusiness large-scale land acquisitions and human rights in Southeast Asia - Updates from Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, Cambodia, Timor-Leste and Burma”

- "Who is benefitting ? The Social and economic impact of three large scale land investments in Sierra Leone: a cost benefit analysis"
- "Expansion of palm oil in the Brazilian Amazon: an analysis of impacts on family farm in north-eastern Pará"

[index](#)

OUR VIEWPOINT

- The International Day of Struggle Against Monoculture Tree Plantations

What is the sense of another International Day of Struggle Against Monoculture Tree Plantations, which will take place this coming September 21? Some might ask why such a day is celebrated, since these plantations continue to grow and expand around the world. Is there really any way to stop the expansion of industrial plantations of oil palm, pine, acacia, eucalyptus and rubber trees?

It is true that there are no magic formulas for halting the advance of these plantations. In places where local communities have succeeded in stopping or resisting the advance of tree plantations, or have even managed to recover their territories, a mix of tools have been used, depending on each individual situation and context. Nevertheless, in all of the stories that have led to small or big victories, there are frequently certain actions, certain key activities, such as mobilizing, uniting and organizing, which in combination have contributed to the real strengthening of popular pressure on governments and companies in contexts that are generally highly unequal. If there is in fact a "magic formula", it certainly contains some basic "ingredients".

It is in this sense that a specific day of action is another of these very important "ingredients", aimed at strengthening popular struggles and their power to exert effective pressure. It is a legitimate proposal, because it was born at a meeting of roughly 200 people from communities fighting industrial eucalyptus plantations in Brazil in 2004. This proposal became an international day of action through the important contribution of our colleague and friend Ricardo Carrere. And although he is no longer with us, Ricardo continues to inspire us with the enthusiasm and passion with which he always supported these struggles against industrial tree plantations.

When they proposed a specific day of action, the communities gathered at the meeting were seeking ways to strengthen their resistance struggles, to give them greater visibility. They believed it was also important to have a day to celebrate the successful recoveries of territories, which must always be remembered, because they resulted from struggles waged with great sacrifice. These are communities fighting for their territories and against the green desert, working together, with a small number of allies, but who are often practically alone in their struggles and are persecuted and criminalized by a group made up of the police, the companies, governments, the media, and other actors. They are always accused of being opposed to development and "progress" – a "progress" that leads to more exclusion, more violence and more injustice.

It is therefore well worth having a day on which to draw attention to these struggles and the people involved; to show that, in fact, this is a struggle being waged by communities and their allies in different countries and continents, a struggle for territory, for dignity, for rights. In addition, September 21 is aimed, above all, at fostering solidarity between these struggles. An example of this are the actions that WRM will be carrying out this month to support concrete struggles in different countries

and continents, through letters and other shows of support.

These struggles have enormous value: they seek to defend territories, food sovereignty, forest conservation, natural medicine, and the traditional values, customs and economies of a community, in all their richness. It is on the basis of these struggles that we believe it is possible to construct another world, as long as they have greater visibility and are strengthened by being increasingly interconnected and united.

For a community, knowing more about the struggle of other communities can help it to learn more about its own reality, to reflect on the tools that can be used to confront and combat threats like industrial monoculture plantations, and above all, it can serve as an inspiration and an example, a new source of encouragement. It is extremely important to share information and experiences with communities that are beginning to confront companies that seek to enter their territories. It is in this spirit that we have prepared this bulletin dedicated to September 21.

We hope that the joint coordination of this International Day Against Monoculture Tree Plantations leads to increasingly broad and permanent joint coordination; that the knowledge that the same struggles are being waged in other places serves as new motivation for communities to pursue the sharing of experiences and thereby strengthen mutual support and solidarity.

[index](#)

TOWARDS SEPTEMBER 21, THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF STRUGGLE AGAINST MONOCULTURE TREE PLANTATIONS: SEEDS OF RESISTANCE

ASIA

- Indonesia: Timber monocultures destroying indigenous' lands and livelihood



Here in Indonesia, ever since a child entered the school, he/she has been familiar with “Merauke” through a patriotic song entitled “Dari Sabang Sampai Merauke” (lit. from Sabang to Merauke – from the westernmost to the easternmost part of Indonesia). The song talks about the unity and glory of Indonesia across its large and small islands reaching from Sabang, the westernmost part, to

Merauke, the easternmost.

Unfortunately, present day Merauke is not like it used to be, no longer representing the unity and glory but standing for deprivation of the native peoples' tenurial rights, fear in the midst of giant energy projects and threat of poverty, mixed with food crop corporations' euphoria. Merauke has been changing its face. Officially, since the beginning of 2010, it has been selected by the national government to be 'the food and energy barn' to address the world's food insecurity and energy crises.

The giant project to realize this 'food and energy barn' of Merauke is called MIFEE (Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate), a mega project that integrates production of food crops and energy. About 80 companies, subsidiaries of giant corporate groups, have been granted permission to take part in the project. At least 2.5 million hectares of land has been allocated, of which about 1.2 million hectares is located in forest zones. The designated area spans across three districts (kabupaten): Merauke, Mappi and Boven Digul, 16 sub-districts and 130 villages.

The production will be bound for international markets to meet the global hunger-for-food-and-energy demand. Various land-based commodities have been prepared and processed by the corporations involved such as oil palm, sugarcane, rice and eucalyptus.

Apart from the ambition, placing such a large land-based project with massive high-tech input in the middle of the Merauke peoples, who are highly dependent on 'natural resources', has brought about many acute and multi-dimensional problems. The Merauke peoples are facing challenges that are coming rapidly and that are beyond what their local knowledge can address.

The indigenous Marind People is native to Merauke and their villages are the most numerous. The tribe is composed of six sub-groups: Kaize, Gebze, Balaigeze, Mahuze, Ndiken and Basik-basik. They have developed intertwined and harmonious management of the land they share. They divide their living space into "sacred places", "water sources", "sago pools" [sago is a type of worm used as food], "ancestors' stopovers", "ancestors' journey", and "conservation of customs". The tribe also has typical names for their forests: "Deg" for old natural forests containing large trees, and "Mamoi" for young natural forests containing mid-sized trees.

"In the past, we never had any difficulty in finding meat as Merauke was home to deer and kangaroos. It was also easy to collect sago as sago trees grew naturally in sago pools. Fish used to breed in swamps. Nowadays, however, our hunting grounds have been converted into timber estates; our sago forests have been stripped and our swamp fish have gone," said J (initial of an organizer of local communities). "This started to happen after companies came into villages and the MIFEE project commenced," he added.

A sad story comes from the village of Zanegy, where monoculture timber company PT Selaras Inti Semesta (PT SIS) is operating. PT SIS is a subsidiary of the Medco Group, a giant corporation producing energy. For the company that has felled the trees on thousands of hectares of land of the indigenous Marind, these trees only mean 'woody biomass', it has sent the timber to its wood pellet mill, PT MedcoPapua Industri Lestari (PT MIL). Wood pellets are used as a so called "renewable energy" source. International corporations LG and Y Han International are among the investors in the sector, promoting "environmentally-friendly alternative energy".

The village of Zanegy is located below PT SIS's monoculture estate. The Sakau River flows downhill through the village and is used by the Marind Zanegy peoples for domestic purposes (bath, drink,

etc.). “The water tastes different now,” told a Zanegy elder. In the village, children have died of malnutrition. Even nowadays the village sees many children with a disproportionately large head, dry eyes, a disproportionately thin body, distended stomach and limp legs. Skin diseases are also prevalent within the community.

“The company only provided compensation for the displaced sago worms; they have deceived us,” said AG (initial). “Life has been getting more difficult because the sago pools have been declining in quality; deer are disappearing as their habitats have been converted into timber estates.”

Merauke peoples pay the price to meet an unfair global production and consumption model that demands more food crops and “renewable” energy sources at the cost of food sovereignty of entire regions like in Merauke, aiming to maintain corporate profits. Justified by supposed global needs, the mega-project will lead to the destruction of the local Marind Peoples’ lives.

The contradictions of the food crop project also can be seen in the districts of Semangga and Kurik. PT Texmaco Group is preparing to establish eucalyptus estates. The concession spans over two districts and 7 villages. It is ironic that such development will threaten the local rice fields – another project to meet the so-called “global food demand” that will lead to the destruction of local food crop estates in the first place.

The MIFEE is the reflection of the world’s globalized food and energy governance system that poses a threat of destruction to local living systems and therefore creates hunger and poverty. It is also the story of the expansion of land-based monoculture corporations that grab the lives of and bring a humanitarian tragedy to native Peoples and village communities.

Source: YL Franky, PT. Medco Menguras Isi Hutan Kampung Zanegi: Rakyat Tersingkir dan Menderita Lapar di Lumbung Pangan, 2013 (PT Medco is depleting the forest of Zanegi Village: The community is marginalized and starving in food barns); Koesnadi WS, MIFEE Bukan Proyek Pangan, Laporan Perjalanan Dari Ujung Timur Indonesia Merauke, 2013 (MIFEE Is Not A Food Crop Project, A Journey from Merauke the Easternmost Tip of Indonesia)

By Rivani Noor, CAPPA, e-mail: rivani@cappa.or.id

[index](#)

- Philippines: Indigenous organizations challenge oil palm companies in Palawan



Few places in Southeast Asia can match the distinction of Palawan, in the Philippines. This is home to seven protected areas, a declared “Game Refuge and Bird Sanctuary” since 1967 and a “Mangrove Reserve” since 1981. UNESCO declared the whole Province a ‘Man and Biosphere Reserve’ in 1990.

Today, in addition to the adverse impact of nickel mining, the local indigenous peoples and lowland farmers are being confronted with the threats posed by oil palm development. The bulk of oil palm operations are being carried out by the Palawan Palm & Vegetable Oil Mills Inc. (PPVOMI) and its sister company Agumil Philippines Inc. As of now, about 15,000 hectares of land are being converted into oil palm plantations. Agumil Philippines Inc. is 75% Filipino and 25% Malaysian-owned. Its sister company, PPVOMI is 60% Singaporean and 40% Filipino-owned. The companies began official operation in January 2006.

According to the Provincial government, oil palm monocultures will eradicate poverty and reduce economic dependence from imported edible oils. But, from the perspective of the local indigenous peoples, oil palm expansion is a tragedy since it destroys their ancestral lands and forest products, thus impoverishing them to an unprecedented level.

Recently, indigenous Palawan have decided to take this matter in their own hands by building solidarity linkages with oil palm affected communities in Mindanao. An important meeting between Higaonon and Palawan oil palm affected communities took place in Malaybaly (Province of Bukidnon, Mindanao) on 21/22 June 2013. This was facilitated by the national network ALDAW (Ancestral Land/Domain Watch) and the Father Vincent Cullen Tulugan Learning and Development Centre (FVCTLDC). The meeting resulted in a Joint Palawan/Mindanao Resolution against oil palm development.

The so called “Malabalay Resolution” was supported by more than 100,000 signatures collected through the help of German-based NGO Rainforest Rescue and was presented to government authorities. As a result an inter-agency meeting was held on 7 August in Palawan, at the office of the Governor. The meeting was attended by all concerned government agencies at the provincial level, as well by NGOs and Indigenous Peoples/farmers delegations.

Towards the end of the meeting, when one of the moderators openly asked whether participants were in favor of a moratorium on oil palm expansion, the majority said YES. The exception to this majority were of course the Oil Palm companies’ representatives and the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development which, in the past, has taken the side of large enterprises, including mining corporations.

A subsequent oil palm inter-agency meeting took place in Palawan on 28 August at the Governor’s office with participation of representatives of Indigenous Peoples’ organizations – including ALDAW and NATRIPAL/ United Tribes of Palawan and also of local NGOs.

ALDAW and NATRIPAL presented their findings showing that oil palm development in Palawan has taken place with no monitoring on the part of concerned authorities. As a result, in the absence of existing maps, it is impossible for the government to systematically determine the ownership, elevation, land classification, etc. of the area in which oil palms are being planted.

ALDAW presentation also pointed out that a Multi-stakeholder Monitoring Team (MMT) should have been established for the Palawan oil palm plantations. But until now, after more than 7 years of operation, the indigenous organizations and NGOs have no clue on the composition of the MMT and of the results (if any) of the inspections it has carried out in each oil palm impacted municipality. As

well, no information has ever been provided to members of civil society about the results (if any) of the MMT monitoring activities on the impact on air and water of the palm oil processing plant and on the management and disposal of industrial/plantations' waste by PPVOMI-Agumil.

With specific reference to the impact of oil palm development on biodiversity ALDAW also pointed out that Palawan has one of the last remaining contiguous areas of forest in the Philippines. Oil palm plantations are breaking the contiguity between different and interrelated ecosystems, such as hilly forest, lowland forest, shrub and grassland, wetlands, etc. thus having an impact on animal species that move and thrive in different ecological niches, as well as on the integrity of each specific niche.

Another important point that was brought forwards relates to the procedures which have led to the issuance of Environmental Clearance Certificates (ECCs) by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to Agumil and PPVOMI. ALDAW clarified that Environmental Compliance Certificates (ECCs) are documents proving that a developer has met environmental standards and stipulates the conditions that it must abide by. Instead, ECCs have been issued by DENR despite the fact that the proper procedures were not observed and without any technical report by Agumil and PPVOMI showing that environmental standards would be met. More importantly, ALDAW pointed out that Agumil and PPVOMI had never received from DENR a 'Permit to Cut Trees' and thus they have violated Revised Forestry Code P.D.705 of 1987, and existing environmental legislation.

The Agumil's claim according to which oil palm development is contributing to eradicate poverty was challenged by ALDAW with some hard-facts. The Municipality of Sofronio Española, in fact, has the highest percentage of land (over 45%) covered by oil palm plantations and produces most of the bulk of production for the oil palm mill. And yet, Española is a 4th class municipality. According to the 2008 Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) survey, Española comes bottom in terms of the Human Development Index for Palawan. It is also one of the 100 poorest municipalities in the country. A 2007 Social Watch report cites a poverty rate of 58% for Española in 2006. Sofronio Española has also one of the highest rates of malnutrition in the province (22.98%) according to the provincial nutrition action officer.

During the meeting a clear stand was taken by the Provincial Environmental and Natural Resources Office (PENRO) official against Agumil. PENRO's Mr. Leonard Caluya told Agumil representatives "we will compute the damage caused by your company to the forest and this will be part of the legal complaint against you. You know our policy, and you know your limitations. We (DENR) have never allowed you to cut trees". He reminded the company that there is a national moratorium on cutting trees within residual forest and timberland and that his office (PENRO/DENR) "will continue to perform its mandate with the support of NGOs partners". According to Caluya, it is likely that that Agumil, as a form of punishment, will be asked by DENR to eradicate the oil palms illegally planted on timber land and to substitute them with native tree species.

The good news is that as an outcome of ongoing pressure generated by ALDAW on the provincial government authorities, different agencies are now mobilizing themselves to carry out their own field assessments on the impact of oil palm development.

Towards the end of the meeting, powerful and uncompromising statements were made by both indigenous and NGOs representatives. Datu Sangkula from the Non-Timber Forest Exchange Programme confronted the Agumil and warned them that "the long hand of the law will reach them either administratively or criminally" and he also reminded them "violations of the IPRA law (Indigenous Peoples Right Act) have criminal liability and the company will be challenged on this".

At the end of the meeting both NGOs and IPs representatives confirmed their call for a moratorium on

oil palm expansion, at least until reliable scientific data becomes available on the real benefits gained from oil palm development in comparison to its unintended costs such as increased carbon dioxide (from cleared plantation areas), loss of traditional access to land and resources, reduced land productivity, loss of traditional livelihood, etc.

ALDAW also pointed out very loudly that a serious review of existing and proposed oil palm plantations is urgently needed, in order to assess their present ecological status and the overlapping between them and those areas that are still conserved and managed by indigenous people as well with the ECAN (Environmental Critical Area Network) land categories within the SEP law. Unless such review is carried out, there is a high risk that the environmental and ecological sustainability of the Province, its agricultural productivity, and people's food security, will be severely compromised.

By the Ancestral Land/Domain Watch (ALDAW), e-mail: aldaw.indigenousnetwork@gmail.com,
<https://www.facebook.com/Aldaw.network.palawan.indigenous.advocacy>

[index](#)

- Cambodia: The curse of concessions



The company promised to increase forest cover but they planted cassava; cassava is not a tree; a cassava plantation is not a forest.

(Resident from Ansar Chambor, Pursat, Cambodia)

Since 2000, residents in more than 111 villages have been struggling against a mammoth land concession that spans 315,028 hectares across the provinces of Pursat and Kampong Chhnang in Cambodia. The concession agreement allows Pheapimex—a powerful Cambodian company—to seize farm, forest and common lands to grow acacia and cassava in monoculture plantations. Owned by Choeung Sopheap and her husband Lao Meng Khin, a senator from the ruling Cambodian Peoples Party (CPP), the Pheapimex Group is considered by many Cambodians to be virtually untouchable because of the close relations between its owners and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, and the large donations that Pheapimex makes to the CPP.

Although current law limits the size of each land concession to 10,000 hectares, Pheapimex secured its agreement in 1997, before laws regulating economic land concessions (ELCs) were established. Its initial plans were to establish a eucalyptus plantation and pulp and paper mills, for which it partnered with the Chinese Farm Cooperation Group and arranged financing from the Export-Import

Bank of China. Pheapimex is also the Cambodian partner of the Chinese plantation company Wuzhishan. Since passage of the ELC law, Pheapimex collaborates with middlemen and other companies who acquire land within the legal limit but are part of Pheapimex's massive operation.

By 2002, the company started clearing forest and farm lands, building roads and canals, and preparing a nursery in Ansar Chambor commune, Krakor district in Pursat. In protest, village residents blocked roads and filed complaints at the royal cabinet in Phnom Penh, the nation's capital. Although the national government did not respond favourably, local protests halted operations in Ansar Chambor for a short period. However, the company continued to claim, fence and clear lands in other areas. By 2008, the nursery in Ansar Chambor was fully operational and Pheapimex had started evicting residents from their lands in other areas in the concession, blocking local peoples' access to forests, planting cassava and acacia, and building work camps.

Since then, company operations have expanded and speeded up, and heavy machinery such as bulldozers and excavators are being moved across the entire concession area. The expansion is clearly phased, but affected communities have no prior information of the company's plans and are often caught unaware. The company uses various means to secure local "cooperation," from bribery and trickery to intimidation, violence and incarceration. In 2010, Pheapimex organized a "gift giving" ceremony in Ansar Chambor in which residents were given rice, instant noodles and krumahs (traditional scarf) as evidence of the company's good intentions. Government officials then praised Pheapimex's efforts to bring prosperity to the area and instructed communities to cooperate now that they were recipients of the company's largesse.

District and commune officials have told affected communities that Pheapimex cannot be challenged or stopped, and that village residents should accept whatever settlements the company is willing to provide. Pheapimex routinely uses its own armed private security, as well as armed commune police and military police to "protect" company property in the face of local protests. Although local police empathise with affected communities, their orders are to protect the company, not communities.

Impoverishing People

Before the plantation, even 100 hectares of farmland and forest sustained hundreds of families; but now thousands of hectares are given to just one company and [this arrangement] does not feed even one family fully.

(Resident from Psach Latt, Pursat, Cambodia)

Testimonies from affected communities show that the Pheapimex concession is robbing Cambodian people of natural heritage and wealth, impoverishing communities in and around the concession areas, and closing off livelihood options for future generations. The areas granted to Pheapimex include farmlands, grazing lands, wetlands, forests, woods, lakes and watersheds, all of which constitute a system of natural infrastructure that rural people depend on and nurture for daily survival and wellbeing. In some areas, the plantation blocks access between villages and to forests and pastures. Because of loss of grazing lands, affected families have started to sell their cows and buffaloes, which are important traditional forms of wealth in rural Cambodia.

Forest clearing for the concession is destroying local bio-diversity and ecosystems, including precious primary forest, water sources, fish and wildlife. Economically valuable trees (such as Knyung Beng, Neang Nun, Chheu Krom, Khnong and Phchek) are being depleted, wildlife habitat has been lost and watersheds severely shrunk. The company has filled up ponds, blocked streams

and redirected water to their nurseries and plantations through canals. Some streams have dried up altogether. Residents worry that this will harm local fisheries, especially in the Tonle Sap Lake. Streams bring nutrition to the lake for fish and many fish travel upstream to spawn; if streams and ponds blocked, the overall health and quality of fisheries will decline. Farming has also become more difficult: residents are unable to grow vegetables and cash crops in gardens since the company dominates access to water. Without forest cover, rainwater drains away quicker, soil erosion is not checked, and the few remaining streams are becoming shallower.

Forests and woods are important food and medicine 'cupboards' for affected communities, as well as sources of fuel, housing materials and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) such as mushrooms, bamboo and rattan shoots, honey, vines, resin, roots, wild herbs and fruit. Forests also have important cultural and religious values for affected communities: the company has cleared sacred, spirit forests where traditional rituals are conducted for peace, good harvests, prosperity and health. Over 6000 hectares of forest identified as community forests have been lost in Ansar Chambor and Kbal Trach communes (Pursat). Kbal Trach residents assess that the loss of income from NTFPs alone for each family exceeds one million riel (US\$ 245) per season.

As families expand in size, younger generations need land to farm, which is now no longer available to them. An initiative to title village land holdings in and around ELCs launched by Prime Minister Hun Sen in 2012 (called Directive 01BB) fixed a ceiling of 5 hectares of paddy and garden lands respectively for each adult, although the actual amount titled is much less in most villages affected by the Pheapimex concession. But even the 5 hectare limit ignores the future land needs of those who are not adults at present but will reach adulthood in a matter of years.

Out of desperation, many residents have sought employment at the plantation where they are faced with low wages -600, 000 riel or US \$147 for 30 days- irregular payments and poor working conditions. Many families now have to survive on the plantation wages of one family member, which cannot sustain an entire family that had previously lived off the food and income from paddy, gardens, forests and streams. As a result, local indebtedness has increased, outmigration is rising and families are breaking up as family members go to cities or neighboring Thailand to find work.

Keeping Up the Struggle

Since learning about the concession, people in affected communities have tried to defend their lands, forests, livelihoods and lives through several means. They have protested at commune, district and provincial offices; blocked traffic on Highway 5 to build public support; stopped machines from clearing farmlands and forests; and filed complaints with authorities at all levels. They have held prayer ceremonies for justice in villages, pagodas and in front of government offices. They have ordained trees in their sacred sites and in one place ceremony at least a 1000 trees were ordained, but the company still cut them down

Mobilizing and organizing people in the eight districts covered by the concession are huge challenges for local residents who are simultaneously trying to feed their families and make ends meet. The concession is massive not only in size but also in money and political power. Those who protest are branded "inciters," arrested on false charges, jailed and fined large sums of money. While many are exhausted and discouraged, others see hope for change in the longer term. The recently concluded national elections show decreasing overall support for the CPP and it is likely that the CPP mass base is weakening where land-forest conflicts are the highest.

In the words of a resident from Krang Skea (Kampong Chhnang): We are like the bamboo that starts

out with one shoot; we have to wait till there are more shoots and the bamboo gets bigger.

By Shalmali Guttal, Focus on the Global South. e-mail: s.guttal@focusweb.org, <http://focusweb.org/>

[index](#)

AFRICA

- Nigeria: Wilmar, RRDC, and the Calaro/Ibiae Oil Palm Estates



Over the past nine months, a high-stakes confrontation has taken place in Cross River State of Nigeria, home to Nigeria's last remaining primal tropical rainforests. The controversy has revolved around the activities of Wilmar International, a Singaporean multinational which describes itself as "the world's largest processor and merchandiser of palm and lauric oils". The company has been taken to task by a Calabar-based NGO, the Rainforest Resource and Development Centre (RRDC), for what the latter says are blatant violations of human and environmental rights as well as local and national laws.

Wilmar operates 19,712 hectares oil palm estates in the Calaro, Ibiae and Biase area of Cross River State, part of a joint venture with PZ-Cussons. The company is geared towards acquiring 50,000 hectares of community lands for the expansion of its plantations in the State in the next few years. The plantations were launched to much fanfare in November, 2012. Speaking as President Jonathan's representative at the opening ceremony, Agriculture Minister Akinwunmi Adesina declared that the Calaro-Ibiae and Biase Oil Palm Plantations represented "an important milestone in our national investment drive that will stimulate economic diversification...."

This lofty hope is oblivious of the real and ongoing human and ecological cost of the venture. According to RRDC, under its executive director, Odey Oyama, Wilmar's claim to the Ibiae lands is contestable, given that the area comprises lands owned by local farmers. Equally crucial is the fact that at the Wilmar concessions in the Kwa Falls axis, the oil palm estate also lies within the bounds of established forest reserves namely, the Oban Hill Division of the Cross River National Park, and the Ekinta Forest Reserve.

In November 2012, RRDC made representations to the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil [RSPO] accusing Wilmar of starting operations - without compliance with the legal provisions regarding the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) - on lands acquired without having complied with the legal stipulations on land use. RRDC also accused the company for several failures including for not having reached an agreement with landlord communities, unlawful acquisition of land leased to

CARES [the Cross River State Agricultural and Rural Empowerment Scheme]; and non compliance with applicable municipal laws and regulations.

RRDC highlights that those issues pertain to the core principles of RSPO, of which Wilmar is a member. In view of these issues, RRDC suggested to the RSPO that Wilmar be urged to suspend its activities and endeavour to assuage the concerns of aggrieved parties. Responding to the RSPO in respect of the allegations by RRDC, Wilmar submitted a four-page denial of the NGO's claims, declaring that it had tried to resolve all outstanding issues pertaining to its purchase and operation of the estates in Cross River. For RRDC, any private company that takes on community lands without compliance of legal provisions is actually engaging in land-grabbing. Wilmar has continuously made reference to agreements with indigenous communities, but no copy of such agreements has ever been tendered. RRDC believes that in a constitutional democracy such as the one presently operating in Nigeria, no government agency has the power to bypass the due process of law, nor to grant guarantees which amount to exempting private enterprises from compliance with the due processes of the law.

According to Wilmar's environmental advisers Ibara Environs Consultants, the company had carried out environmental impact assessments on both its plantations, as statutorily required. In a letter issued on its behalf in November 2012, by Ibara Consultants, the palm oil giant insisted that it "recognizes the value and importance of managing its mills and plantations such that the present multiple needs of the society are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and enjoy the same resources we have today". In spite of the fulsome rhetoric by Wilmar, RRDC argues that the company does not possess any authentic EIA certificate nor had it presented evidence of compensation to local communities, or copies of gazettes in which its acquisitions were recorded.

In January 2013, a stakeholders meeting was convened at the Ministry of Justice of Cross River State of Nigeria and was attended by a delegation of the Cross River State Government, representatives of Wilmar, representatives of the indigenous communities, and RRDC. Strangely, the discussions were diverted from the substantive issues presented by RRDC to RSPO, while the Executive Director of RRDC was condemned as a wicked man who does not want Wilmar to conduct business in Nigeria (notwithstanding the fact that the issues in contention pertain to RRDC's insistence that Wilmar must comply with the laws.)

RRDC in court with Wilmar

Following the inability of the parties at the stakeholders meeting of January 15, 2013, to resolve the matters previously raised by RRDC and placed before RSPO, RRDC was compelled to place the matter before a court of competent jurisdiction within the Federal Republic of Nigeria for appropriate interpretation. Furthermore, RRDC stresses that there is no evidence to suggest that the transfer of the land belonging to indigenous committees complies with the Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

In the weeks following that January meeting, Mr Oyama suffered sustained harassment from the police in Calabar, who invaded his home, by forcing their way uninvited (and absolutely without a warrant) on Sunday January 27, 2013. By reason of such police harassment, Mr. Oyama had to go into hiding for his own safety, and his case was taken up by international environmental protection organizations like Friends of the Earth International (FoEI). Mr Oyama maintains that, on the one part, the police harassments arose as a consequence of his advocacy against Wilmar and its Calarobiae/ Biase plantations, and also the stand of RRDC over the plantation estates which Wilmar intends

to commence operations in Cross River State without evidence of compliance with local and federal laws.

In a letter dated 13th March, 2013, Wilmar finally submitted 20 hard copies of the draft EIA report dated June 2013, for Biase/Ibiae Oil Palm Plantation to the Honourable Minister of the Federal Ministry of Environment for public display and panel review. It is thus evident that the claims made on behalf of Wilmar by their consultants (Ibara Consultants) in November 2012 were not genuine. Furthermore, following preliminary studies made by RRDC it has also become evident that the report is deficient in many respects, for instance, the page that is supposed to contain the Map of the concession area of study is blank. Thus one wonders how an EIA report that does not contain the map of the concession area could be authentic.

By Missang Oyongha, Rainforest Resource & Development Centre (RRDC), e-mail: rainforestcentre@yahoo.co.uk

[index](#)

- Liberia: Plantation expansion and the plunder of a continent



“Liberians are healthier, better fed, have more income, consume more, are more literate and enjoy the greatest amount of freedom ever” (1), says the Liberian government. The government also claimed that more Liberians are getting richer and the gap between rich and poor people in Liberia is reducing. But, according to UNDP (2) 84 percent of the population lives in Multidimensional Poverty or faces deprivations in health, education and their overall standard of living. In 2012, Liberia ranked 174th out of a total of 186 countries listed on the Human Development Index. More than two thirds of Liberians are amongst the poorest people in world, and widespread public perception is that the level of inequality between the rich and the poor continues to rise.

The UNDP statistics beg the question: why is Liberia, like many African countries, so rich in natural resources, and yet the majority of the people are poor? The factors responsible are numerous, but bad governance and plunder of a country’s resources by elites and corrupt politicians are key factors. According to the International Land Coalition, “bad decisions over land can equally expand and entrench poverty, inequality, and disempowerment” (3).

Using the land example, changes in policy and practice could contribute to reversing the situation in many parts of Africa. Instead of African governments taking land from the poor and handing it to

multinational corporations, they could be supporting communities to put their land to productive and profitable uses. One way could be to encourage investment in food production through low tech but efficient technology.

Liberia, for example, “depends on imports for 60 percent of its food, of which the national staple, rice, constitutes 65 percent” (4), and “81 percent of the population is either highly vulnerable or moderately vulnerable to food insecurity” (5). To address this situation, two of the three broad objectives of the government’s agricultural policy are to make “safe and nutritious foods available in sufficient quantity and quality at all times to satisfy the nutrition needs of all Liberian” (6) and to ensure “inclusive and pro-poor growth in agricultural production, productivity, competitiveness, value addition and diversification, and linkages to market” (7).

Investing in food production clearly has the potential to economically empower citizens, reduce poverty, enhance food sovereignty, and stimulates economic growth that leads to more equitable and inclusive development. The government has instead granted more than 50 percent of the country’s land area for rubber and oil palm plantation, logging and mining activities. The rhetoric of adopting a pro-poor approach to stimulating growth in the agricultural sector seems to make a mockery of poor farmers who are being stripped of their farmlands that are then handed over to foreign investors.

Experiences across Africa show that the current concession model does not only dispossess people of their land and disrupts their livelihoods, it creates conditions that reinforce poverty, inequality and injustices. These conditions intensify grievances against the state and its corporate collaborators – fertile conditions for violence and conflict. This export-dependent model is also vulnerable to price fluctuations, such that low commodity prices often leave natural resource dependent countries with dangerous budget deficits.

It goes without saying that, when African governments take actions that do not make economic sense, package them in political rhetoric, and justify them as measures aimed at creating jobs, reducing poverty and promoting development, they set themselves against their citizens’ interests. When they fail in their responsibilities to negotiate business deals that ensure the maximum possible development benefits for their people, they betray the public trust. Their failures give rise to, and justify citizens’ demands for accountable and responsible leadership.

September 21, 2013 farmers, social movements and NGOs across Africa will renew their calls on governments to implement sound development programs aimed at promoting more inclusive and equitable development. These will not be new demands, but there is now a sense of urgency that did not exist before. Unfortunately, while citizens across the continent are demanding to have a say during contract negotiations and to receive their fair share of benefits from their resources governments are responding aggressively.

In Uganda, a new law has imposed wide ranging restrictions on public gatherings, a tool used by activists challenging land grabbing. In Gabon, a Goldman Environmental Prize laureate has been harassed and intimidated, reportedly for his stance against large-scale land allocations to plantation developers. In Liberia, two senior government officials have publicly attacked the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) and branded the organization anti-development, for challenging human rights abuses linked to oil palm plantation expansion. When asked to justify his attempt to shut down a citizens’ meeting on palm oil in western Liberia, the Superintendent countered that NGOs were not talking about how plantation development would benefit the people.

“Taking away farmers’ lands, destroying forests, and surrounding entire villages with oil palm plantation do not fit in with our vision for development in Liberia” says Nora Bowier, who leads SDI’s work on oil palm plantation expansion. To her, when her government allocate land that customary communities depend on without their consent and just compensation, it contravenes its duty to protect citizens against human rights abuses. On the other hand, when oil palm and other plantation companies such as Sime Darby and Golden Veroleum as in the case of Liberia, fail to avoid infringing on the rights of communities, they cannot shift the blame to the government – their responsibility is separate from that of the state.

As many of these plantations on the continent expand, activists warn, land conflicts will become commonplace. “It is just a matter of time, before things start falling apart for the state, their corporate collaborators and communities; no one is likely to emerge victorious in this situation” Nora concludes.

NOTE: A shorter version of this article has been submitted to D+C Magazine <http://www.dandc.eu/> (Germany).

Endnotes

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<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/HDR/2013GlobalHDR/English/HDR2013%20Report%20English.pdf>

(3) Land Rights and the Rush for Land: Findings of the Global Commercial Pressures on Land Research Project, 2012, p.9, International Land Coalition.

(4) Everyone Must Eat? Liberia, Food Security and Palm Oil, 2013, p.5, Columbia School of International and Public Affairs.

(5) Food and Agriculture Policy and Strategy: from subsistence to sufficiency, undated, p.1, Government of Liberia.

(6) Food and Agriculture Policy and Strategy: from subsistence to sufficiency, undated, p.xii, Government of Liberia.

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By Silas Kpanan’Ayoung Siakor, Sustainable Development Institute (SDI), e-mail: sksiakor2005@gmail.com

[index](#)

- São Tomé and Príncipe: Popular resistance succeeds in curbing the expansion of industrial oil palm plantations



In one of his last works – “Oil palm in Africa: Past, present and future scenarios”, published in December 2010 – our beloved friend and colleague Ricardo Carrere provided an overview of the history and current status of monoculture oil palm plantations in Africa (see http://wrm.org.uy/oldsite/countries/Africa/Oil_Palm_in_Africa.pdf).

Oil palm is a traditional crop in numerous African countries, used for the artisanal production of a wide range of products for household and local use, from baskets woven from its leaves to palm wine, in addition to the oil extracted from the tree, which has played an important role in many local economies.

However, the international demand for palm oil for the food and cosmetics industries and, more recently, for the production of agrofuels, opened the way to the expansion of large-scale oil palm plantations, promoted by large agribusiness companies.

In the case of São Tomé and Príncipe, oil palm grows naturally on the two islands that make up the country. However, its use dates back to the era of the Portuguese invasion of the islands, which were uninhabited at the time. When the Portuguese introduced sugar cane cultivation based on slave labour, it led to the forced arrival of Africans from Benin, Congo and Angola, who brought with them the traditional uses of this palm.

Following São Tomé and Príncipe’s independence in 1975, financing from the European Investment Bank and the European Community were used to establish 650 hectares of oil palm plantations and a palm oil factory (Empresa de Óleos Vegetais - EMOLVE) in the south of São Tomé island.

EMOLVE eventually halted production, but in 2009 the Belgian-French company Socfinco arrived in the country. Registered locally as Agripalma, it is part of the powerful Bolloré investment group, based in France.

Socfinco planned to establish 5,000 hectares of oil palm plantations on the islands of Príncipe and São Tomé to supply palm oil for the production of agrofuel in Belgium.

In 2009, the government signed an agreement with Agripalma for the concession of the land area needed for the project, but according to the local digital publication *Téla Nón*, the population of Príncipe opposed the agreement and prevented the establishment of industrial oil palm plantations on their island from destroying more than 1,000 hectares of forests.

On the island of São Tomé, however, the agreement prospered, and the government even managed

to obtain more land to make up for the 1,000 hectares denied to the company on Príncipe and thus to fulfil the agreement with Agripalma.

As a result, the inhabitants of São Tomé began to see bulldozers advancing on the pristine forests of the southern region of the island, where exuberant natural vegetation, nourished by various rivers and streams, spreads along the country's largest hydrographic basin.

Agripalma's bulldozers are also affecting the local population's food supply, particularly coconuts, a staple food that is becoming increasingly scarce. "Our parents and grandparents cultivated the land here. And now they have taken all of the land away from us so that Agripalma can plant oil palms. Coconuts are one of the things that guarantee a source of food for us here, and they are going to destroy all of the coconut trees. What kind of life will we have?" asked a young man from the village of Monte Mário.

"The government decided that it would be more advantageous for the country to trade all of its biodiversity, unique in the world, for a few tons of oil!" was another of the complaints that began to be voiced as the destruction advanced.

As a result, some inhabitants of São Tomé began to mobilize to fight against what they consider to be an environmental crime committed by Agripalma. They went to court to request an injunction against the advance of the company' bulldozers and chainsaws in the forests in the south of the island, specifically in the area of the Obo nature reserve.

In late July, the court ruled in their favour and established restrictions on Agripalma's activities, prohibiting the company from clearing forests in the vicinity of the Obo nature reserve, on hills, in coastal areas, and in other areas where these activities could endanger or destroy protected flora and fauna. The judge who issued the ruling also stipulated that Agripalma must leave a 40-metre-wide strip of vegetation along the banks of all rivers, streams and lagoons. This means the company is already guilty of an infraction, because, according to Têla Nón, there is a large deforested area practically on the banks of the Caué River where several hundred oil palms have already been planted. The forest cover on the hill near the river has also been destroyed in order to plant oil palms.

The court ruled that the Agripalma project must be rescaled to a land area that will not affect the reserve. This renders the project practically unfeasible, given the lack of lands that both comply with this requirement and serve the company's interests.

While the court ruling did not halt Agripalma's activities, it established a series of limitations that have curbed them, and for the group of citizens who mobilized in response to the advance of the oil palm plantations, this signifies a victory. Above all, the ruling demonstrates that the power to confront destruction lies in organized popular resistance.

Based on information from: "Tribunal mostra sinal de STOP à empresa Agripalma", agosto de 2013, Abel Veiga, Diário Digital de São Tomé e Príncipe -TÉLA NÓN, <http://www.telanon.info/sociedade/2013/08/12/14103/tribunal-mostra-sinal-de-stop-a-empresa-agripalma/>; "Sociedade civil denuncia crime ambiental na zona sul de São Tomé", Abel Veiga, Diário Digital de São Tomé e Príncipe -TÉLA NÓN, <http://www.telanon.info/sociedade/2013/06/04/13409/sociedade-civil-denuncia-crime-ambiental-na-zona-sul-de-sao-tome/>

- South Africa: Pulp Industry expansion - land-grabbing disguised as community development



During the Apartheid era many South Africans were deprived of their traditional land through laws that led to their displacement – often through forced removals - into remote smaller areas with marginal agricultural potential. At the same time, the South African government of the day was busy converting land taken from rural communities to establish vast monoculture plantations of alien trees, with the intention of supporting a pulp and paper industry that would help to reduce dependence on imported products, as well as reduce exposure to trade sanctions.

A state-owned company called SAPPI – South African Pulp and Paper Industries – was established to implement the plan, and although the company was later privatised, the South African government still holds a substantial stake through the IDC (Industrial Development Corporation). Now known as Sappi Ltd, with various subsidiary companies, it has grown into a huge multi-national corporation, with vast land and equipment assets spread across the planet.

Recently, Sappi has shifted its focus away from paper production towards manufacturing chemical cellulose, for which it appears there is potential growth in demand, mainly from China. With a view to capturing a slice of this new market Sappi has embarked on a major transition process involving selling or closing down a number of its smaller or older mills, which caused major health problems in the areas where they were situated, besides leaving a legacy of polluted land and water.

Part of this process involves enlarging and converting two large mills in SA, as well as one in the US, to chemical cellulose production, which will require increased supplies of cheap raw material in the form of eucalyptus logs. In South Africa, the Sappi mill at Ngodwana in Mpumalanga province has been converted and considerably enlarged, and will now require much more eucalyptus wood as feedstock. This means that besides creating new eucalyptus plantations, existing pine plantations now need to be converted to eucalyptus, which has far worse environmental impacts, especially in terms of water consumption and invasiveness.

However the existing Sappi Saiccor cellulose mill (1) at Umkomaas in KwaZulu-Natal province has been substantially expanded, increasing its production capacity to nearly a million tonnes per annum and this has led to Sappi going on an aggressive campaign to obtain more timber from nearby sources.

It is a general principal that in order to be profitable for the company from a transport cost point of view, logs need to be procured from within a distance of 250km from the mill. This has meant that large areas of local community land within the so-called “catchment” of the mill have been targeted for the establishment of new plantations.

The Sandanezwe (2) (coincidentally also the name of an invasive weed – *Chromolaena odorata*) plantation in the Ingwe area is one such project that will take 405 ha community land that is on the government allocation list for new plantations in the Umkomaas catchment area. Projects like this have been driven by Sappi and the government using so-called ‘community development’ consultants like Awethu Forestry Investments (Pty) Ltd and NGOs such as LIMA, with strong ties to the timber industry.

Special concessions have been made for these projects based on the argument that the local community had itself requested permission for the plantation, while in reality it was Sappi working behind the scenes and misinforming the local leaders, who actually submit the licence applications to government! The claimed financial benefits of plantations are emphasised, while neglecting to mention any of the negative social and environmental impacts that would have to be paid for by local people and future generations who would lose their rights to land and water.

(1) Engineering News: Sappi to issue notes for bond payment, expansion

<http://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/sappi-to-issue-r5bn-notes-for-bond-payment-expansion-2013-04-15>

(2) Draft Review: Ingwe IDP 2013/2014, <http://www.ingwe.gov.za/upload/Ingwe%202013-14%20IDP%20Draft%20Review%204.pdf>

By Wally Menne, Timberwatch Coalition, e-mail: plantnet@iafrica.com

[index](#)

LATIN AMERICA

- Brazil: Industrial eucalyptus plantations in southwest Bahia – conflicts and confrontations



The Brazilian countryside, since the time of colonization, has always been the target of capitalist appropriation, driven by the logic of the accumulation of wealth and profits, with the Brazilian state

mediating the maintenance of the capitalist world order. This logic, supported by technical assistance and bank credit agencies or by the active participation of multinational corporations, is manifested in the appropriation of nature and its transformation into merchandise, leading to growing concentration of control over rural areas, above all.

More recently, in the state of Bahia, with the creation of Odebrecht Perfurações Ltda. in 1979 and the Camaçari Petrochemical Complex, massive investments were made in the production of pulp and paper in coastal areas of northern Bahia. In this domestic industrial market, the Brazilian state established the foundations for the expansion of eucalyptus plantations, extending this production towards the south and extreme south of Bahia. This was the framework for the construction of the BR 101 highway linking two major cities, Vitória in the state of Espírito Santo and Salvador in the state of Bahia, to enable and facilitate the occupation and exploitation of the region by industrial eucalyptus plantations. This expansion strategy turned the region of southwest Bahia into the “hotspot” of the moment.

The interest of the tree plantation sector in the region of southwest Bahia dates back to the times of the coffee plantation crisis, which began in the late 1980s and grew more acute in the 1990s due to drop in world coffee prices and the decrease in the area planted in the Planalto da Conquista region. It is important to note that this was also the period of the largest number of land occupations, with more than 20 between the years 1986 and 2000. The first of these was on an estate of the former Brazilian Institute of Coffee (IBC), which is now the União Settlement.

Thus the cattle-farming and coffee-growing eras were followed by a new stage of agribusiness capital investment in southwest Bahia, that of eucalyptus plantations. It is important to stress that, unlike the south and extreme south of Bahia, the eucalyptus grown in the Planalto da Conquista region is primarily used to supply charcoal for the iron and steel industry in northern Minas Gerais, as well as providing firewood for ceramic production and treated wood for various agricultural, industrial and civil construction activities.

In this context, rural producers and forestry sector companies, supported by public education, research and extension institutions such as EMBRAPA Florestas and the State University of Bahia (UESB), set their sights on tree plantation agribusiness for investment opportunities aimed at quick profits. It is important to stress the fundamental role played in this period by the UESB through its reinforcement of the concept of “forestry agribusiness”, which served to promote the establishment of industrial eucalyptus plantations. Following two symposiums held in 1992 and 2005, these discussions spread to numerous municipal governments and producers in the region.

In the meantime, social movements, non-governmental organizations, environmentalists and other sectors of civil society began to mobilize under a collective banner of opposition to the expansion of large-scale industrial eucalyptus plantations, protection of the environment, and the search for sustainable alternatives.

This mobilization led to the emergence of the Small Farmers Movement (MPA), the Mixed Agricultural Cooperative of Small Farmers of Southwest Bahia (COOPASUB), the Centre for Coexistence and Agroecological Development of Southwest Bahia (CEDASB), the Mata de Cipó (“Vine Forest”) Institute, and more recently, the Forum of Social Entities and Movements of Southwest Bahia. All of them share in the search for socially and environmentally sustainable alternatives for the region, and for many of them, this translates into explicit struggle against tree plantation agribusiness.

As a consequence, rising up against the deafening rumble of the tractors knocking down what is left

of the region's vine forests is the cry of "We can't eat paper or charcoal!" It is both a warning cry and a battle cry, which resulted in the union, symbolic and real, of the banners of the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST), the Small Farmers Movement (MPA), the Unemployed Workers Movement (MTD), the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB), the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), the Centre for Social Studies and Action (CEAS), and the other movements and organizations mentioned previously, at the First Regional Seminar Against Industrial Eucalyptus Plantations in 2001.

At the seminar, a strategy was outlined to stay a step ahead of the "forestry agribusiness" sector, through the occupation of rural estates that could be used to establish new eucalyptus plantations. Local seminars were also organized to discuss, with the affected communities, the issue of eucalyptus plantations and their impacts on health and the environment. Another important event was an exchange held in the traditional rural "geraisera" community of Rio Pardo de Minas, in northern Minas Gerais, in 2002, when the community was waging a hard-fought battle against the company Minas Floresta for the recovery and demarcation of its ancestral territories. In 2004, another exchange with the Centre for Alternative Agriculture of Northern Minas Gerais (CAA) and with the Peoples of the Cerrado contributed to forging closer links between the peoples of northern Minas Gerais and southwest Bahia in the fight against eucalyptus plantations and the search for socially, culturally, economically and environmentally sustainable alternatives.

The city of Vitória da Conquista, the hub of the southwest Bahia region, has been directly and indirectly affected by the expansion of pulp and paper giant Veracel. It has been heavily impacted by the expansion of eucalyptus plantations stimulated by the iron and steel industry centre in Betim, Minas Gerais, where there is a particular interest in eucalyptus wood for charcoal production. There are already nearly 35,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations in this municipality, and an estimated 15,000 hectares in Encruzilhada as well as more than 20,000 in the municipalities of Barra do Choça, Cordeiros, Piripá, Cândido Sales, Planalto and Poções, all located in the Planalto da Conquista region. It is estimated that there are some 658,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations in the state of Bahia as a whole, making it the country's third largest producer of industrially grown eucalyptus. Of this total, an estimated 70% of the plantations are in the south or extreme south of Bahia.

The abovementioned seminars and collective trajectory of organizations and social movements dealing with this problem led to the creation in 2011 of a space for discussion and action against these industrial tree plantation projects, called the Forum of Social Organizations and Movements of Southwest Bahia.

The creation of links between the Forum of Social Organizations and Movements of Southwest Bahia and other groups with considerable experience in fighting industrial eucalyptus plantations in the south and extreme south regions of the state – such as the Socio-Environmental Forum of Extreme Southern Bahia and the Forum for Work, Land, Employment and Citizenship of Southern Bahia – began in 2011, with joint preparation and coordinated participation in the public hearings held as part of the environmental licensing process for a proposed expansion project by Veracel. The company's expansion plans include the planting of eucalyptus on 50,900 hectares of land and the acquisition of a further 101,800 hectares of land (see the table below). These coordinated actions have contributed to a joining of forces and a qualitative change in efforts to confront these types of projects in the southwest region.

MUNICIPALITY LAND AREAS INVOLVED IN VERACEL'S EXPANSION PLANS (hectares)

	FOR PLANTING	FOR ACQUISITION*

Encruzilhada	4,000	8,000
Itapetinga	10,000	20,000
Macarani	10,000	20,000
Maiquinique	4,000	8,000
Itarantim	17,900	35,800
Potiraguá	5,000	10,000
TOTAL	50,900	101,800
(*) Veracel only reports the area planned for actual planting. The area it plans to acquire is an estimate based on data from the environmental impact assessment.		

Faced with this threat, civil society mobilization is needed to impose limits on corporate activities, protect collective interests and defend the environment. For this purpose, the CEAS and CPT joined with other groups and entities in the towns of Maiquinice, Itarantim, Barra do Choça and Cordeiros to draft the Popular Initiative Laws, aimed not only at restricting the establishment of plantations of exotic trees, but also at creating municipal environmental codes to regulate all environmental activities in these towns.

In 2012 the First Regional Seminar on Eucalyptus Plantations was held in Vitória da Conquista. The presentations included accounts of the experiences of popular opposition by organizations from the south and extreme south of the state of Bahia, such as CEPEDES (the Centre for Studies and Research for Development of the Extreme South of Bahia) and organizations from northern Minas Gerais, such as MAB (the Movement of People Affected by Dams), as well as the experiences of drafting the Popular Initiative Laws in southwest Bahia. Other participants included important academic sectors such as the UFBA Geografar Project and UESB students, federal and state public prosecutors, and various social organizations from the Planalto da Conquista region. The seminar served as a forum for strengthening links and coordination among these different actors and developing a common agenda for confronting the problem.

So far, the towns of Itarantim, Maiquinique and Barra do Choça have approved the Popular Initiative Laws and are now working on the consolidation and strengthening of Environmental Defence Councils to make it possible to exercise popular control and evaluate proposals for environmental and land management.

These initiatives emerged as alternatives against the expansion of eucalyptus plantations in the region, and have also given rise to benefits such as community involvement, as well as the strengthening and, in some cases, the creation of Environmental Defence Councils which make it possible to enforce the individual and collective rights of local populations.

These experiences in southwest Bahia have led to the cultivation of other plants in addition to eucalyptus trees, providing local groups with knowledge and an organized process of struggle, while disorganizing the agribusiness order in the region.

By Maicon Leopoldino de Andrade, Master's student in Geography (POSGEO/UFBA); Daniel Piccoli, Collaborator with the Centro de Estudios e Acción Social (CEAS) and member of the Fórum de Entidades y Movimientos Sociales del Sudoeste Bahiano; Gilca Garcia de Oliveira, PhD in Rural Economics and professor in the Post-Graduate Programme in Geography and the Master's

- The RSPO challenged in Honduras and Germany



Millions of hectares of industrial oil palm plantations have been expanding in many countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America with a well documented history of tropical deforestation –including enormous fires- and a sad toll of human rights violations.

However, the powerful interests behind this business continue actively promoting this crop, against a background of growing opposition at the local level.

Within this context the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) was created. The RSPO is a stakeholder forum which provides voluntary certification for the management of oil palm plantations and processing plants of palm oil, and whose great majority of members represent industry interests like Nestlé, Rabobank and Unilever - all linked to cases of land-grabbing in Asia, Latin America and Africa.

Indeed, the RSPO acts as a greenwashing tool, aiming at ensuring consumers that the palm oil they consume –in foodstuffs, soap, cosmetics or fuel- has been produced in a “sustainable manner” despite the hundreds of conflicts that their plantations have created with local communities wherever they are established. The RSPO wants to certify the uncertifiable, trying to conceal the inherent unsustainability of large scale monoculture oil palms. The “sustainability” label is used to cover up the serious social and environmental impacts of large-scale oil palm plantations on local communities and livelihoods.

Facing the RSPO in Honduras

On 6th-8th August, the Fourth Latin American Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil took place in Honduras, organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock and the Federation of Industrial Oil Palm Producers.

Environmental and social campaigners have been shocked to learn that one event sponsor is the palm oil company Dinant Corporation, owned and controlled by Miguel Facusse, the largest landowner in Honduras. Facusse, one of the three mayor oil palm growers, has been linked to the

targeted killing of more than 88 members and supporters of peasant organisations since June 2009 in the Aguan Valley, one of the main palm oil producing regions in Honduras.

On the occasion of the RSPO's Latin American Conference, WRM issued a press release denouncing that "certification schemes like the RSPO undermine the ability of communities to defend their territories and forests and fight back against the expansion of industrial plantations. They also obstruct the urgent need to develop different models of production and consumption that do not depend on the ever greater consumption of palm oil and other raw materials, as in the case of the current corporate and centralized model of production that dominates the world markets and patterns of consumption and is destroying the planet." See: RSPO: 'greenwashing' of industrial oil palm plantations, at http://www.wrm.org.uy/oldsite/plantations/RSPO_greenwashing.html

Also, the international organisations Rights Action, Rainforest Rescue, Biofuelwatch and Food First condemned in a press release the Latin American Conference on so-called sustainable palm oil. They are calling World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and three other big NGOs to withdraw from and denounce the conference being held in Honduras. See "Expanding palm oil empires in the name of 'green energy' and 'sustainable development'", <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/RSPO-Honduras-PR.pdf>

As a way to denounce the RSPO's Latin American conference, the trade union organization Rel-UITA interviewed Gilberto Rios and Alba Ochoa, from FIAN Honduras, who stated that the conference is a fake because its real goals have nothing to do with sustainability and responsibility and let alone with the defense of the environment, human rights and food sovereignty. They assure that RSPO's goals are merely commercial and the conference is just a tool to expand oil palm's trade. See "La farsadelaceite de palmasostenible. Certificaciones, negocios y lavado de imagenparaempresariospalmeros", at <http://www.rel-uita.org/index.php/es/derechos-humanos/item/3618-rspo-la-farsa-del-aceite-de-palma-sostenible>

Facing the RSPO in Germany: Scrubbing off the greenwash

Activists from environmental and human rights organisations staged protests against the RSPO greenwashing of large scale oil palm plantations at two high-profile meetings on oil palm on 2 and 3 September in Berlin, Germany. On 2 September participants arriving for the launch of the so-called 'Forum for Sustainable Palm Oil' were greeted by activists equipped with brushes, buckets and green washing liquid. They were scrubbing off the layer of greenwash provided by the certification scheme to expose the unsustainability and continued destruction involved in the production of palm oil, certified or not. Activists continued their scrubbing at the European meeting of the 'Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil', RSPO, on 3 September at the Estrel Hotel in Berlin.

In the joint action, Watch Indonesia, Urgewald, Robin Wood, Rettet den Regenwald, and the Society for Threatened Peoples showed that "cheap palm oil has a high price." Activists from Indonesia shared how this high price is paid by people who are robbed of their land and livelihood, and by forests that continue to be destroyed as the expansion of oil palm plantations advances. They called on the German government to halt import of destructive palm oil instead of launching yet another greenwashing forum. "The German government is pulling the palm oil lobby's cart. Human rights violations are inextricably linked with palm oil in Indonesia and Malaysia, where 90% of the world's palm oil is produced," the groups said in a joint press release. For more information see <http://urgewald.org/artikel/protest-gegen-palmoel>

- Brazil: State government incentives for the expansion of industrial tree plantations in the state of Rio de Janeiro



The government of the state of Rio de Janeiro has adopted various initiatives since 2001 to promote the expansion of large-scale monoculture tree plantations in the state. It would seem that its intention is to recreate in Rio de Janeiro the green deserts that are laying waste to the north of the state of Espírito Santo, the extreme south of the state of Bahia, the north of Minas Gerais, the states of São Paulo and Paraná, the south of Rio Grande do Sul, and more recently, different parts of the states of Maranhão, Piauí and Mato Grosso do Sul.

In 2001, the state government and the pulp and paper company Aracruz Celulose (now Fibria) signed a protocol of intent through which the government committed to supporting the extensive planting of trees to supply the company's pulp mill in the state of Espírito Santo. From that point on, Aracruz Celulose began to aggressively lobby municipal governments in the north and northwest regions of the state, and succeeded in gaining public commitments from a number of these governments to allocate areas in their municipalities for the establishment of eucalyptus plantations by the company.

The signing of this protocol of intent sparked an immediate reaction from the social movements that make up the Alert Against the Green Desert Network of Rio de Janeiro, who staged demonstrations to expose the severe social and environmental impacts caused by industrial tree plantations in the states of Espírito Santo, Bahia and Minas Gerais. This popular resistance resulted in the cancellation of the protocol of intent as well as the adoption in 2003 of State Law 4063, which imposed restrictions on the establishment of tree plantations. Nevertheless, in spite of the significant popular mobilization, in 2007 the state government adopted State Law 5067, which relaxed the rules for the expansion of industrial tree plantations, facilitating the establishment of these plantations in 90 of the 92 municipalities in the state. The bill that gave rise to Law 5067/2007 was submitted to the legislative assembly by the state governor as an "urgent" measure, which means that it was voted on without the necessary prior discussion, but with the full support of the state secretary of the environment at the time, Carlos Minc. This law linked the environmental-economic zoning process in the state to the plantation industry, and eliminated the requirement to conduct environmental impact assessments for areas of less than 400 hectares in the north and northwest regions of the state. This constituted a violation of the Federal Constitution, which stipulates that any projects that generate impacts on the environment must be preceded by an environmental evaluation. From this point on, plantation silviculture became a strategic policy of the state government, backed by its own specific legislation.

As a result, more than 65% of the eucalyptus plantations in the northwest region of the state were established after the adoption of Law 5067/2007, most of them without fulfilling the environmental requirements stipulated by this law.

The financial crisis of 2008, however, slowed down the expansion of large-scale tree plantations in the state. As a means of reviving the sector, in 2011 the state government launched the Basic Plan for the Development of Sustainable Silviculture, in an unusual partnership with Petrobras, Brazil's largest oil and gas company. Petrobras' participation in the project, according to the introduction to the plan, was intended as a means of offsetting the social and environmental impacts of its activities in the state. Under the plan, up to 1.5 million hectares of land in the state, roughly 35% of its entire territory, could potentially be used for commercial silviculture. The discourse used by the state government to promote the plan focused on the promise of jobs and income, and its supposed contribution to social inclusion, the recovery of areas of land degraded by cattle grazing, and the absorption of CO₂, in addition to the partial recovery of native forest – which would be limited to a mere 11% of the areas occupied by eucalyptus plantations.

Nevertheless, all of these incentives are apparently insufficient. Despite its relaxation, the state law regulating commercial silviculture remains complex, according to some representatives of the sector, since it requires the licensing of plantations by the State Environmental Institute. As a result, the secretary of the environment, Carlos Minc, recently announced that the state government will pass a decree that will even further facilitate the concession of environmental licences for commercial tree plantations, through the creation of “forestry districts” – large areas made up of smaller landholdings, which will no longer require individual environmental impact assessments. The goal is to establish 100,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations in the next five years, in the south, north and northwest regions of the state, “contributing to the country's exports and increased tax revenues.” Today, in the state of Rio de Janeiro, there are 18,000 hectares of tree plantations. The low level of local wood production is the main argument used to justify the government's incentives for the sector. The state imports around 90% of the wood consumed by industries, being one of the country's biggest consumers of wood-based products. Of the total consumed, 29% is wood burned for the generation of power by industries, while 23% is used in civil construction, according to the Federation of Industries of the State of Rio de Janeiro (FIRJAN). Local wood production would reduce the current dependence on wood products from Bahia, Espírito Santo, São Paulo and Minas Gerais.

The state of Rio de Janeiro now constitutes a frontier of the expansion of tree plantations in Brazil. The relaxation of state legislation regulating the sector, the establishment of charcoal-burning iron and steel foundries in the state, and the implementation of the Basic Plan for the Development of Sustainable Silviculture, combined with the potential for exports through the entry into operation of port complexes like Açu and Kennedy, will drive the expansion of production chains linked to eucalyptus plantations in the state. Added to this is the political co-optation of municipal government representatives, civil society, and public officials involved in rural extension.

In view of the above, it is obvious that the decision-making processes adopted by the state government of Rio de Janeiro have excluded the participation and disregarded the interests of those who will be primarily affected by this model of development based on industrial tree plantations: small rural communities. The government's promotion of industrial silviculture has not been weighed against alternatives like agrarian reform and agro-ecology. These proposals have never even been discussed at the local level as a model for the development of the rural areas of the state of Rio de Janeiro. But there is something that makes the situation even worse: according to INCRA, the

government agency responsible for implementing agrarian reform measures, the priority areas for the expansion of industrial tree plantations identified by the state government and its private partners are precisely the areas of social conflict in the countryside and popular struggle to demand agrarian reform.

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By Marina Castro – Alert Against the Green Desert Network of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, e-mail: marinaeea@yahoo.com.br

[index](#)

- Guatemala: The silent advance of industrial rubber tree plantations



Hevea brasiliensis, known as the Pará rubber tree or, most commonly, the rubber tree, is native to South America. It is the member of the genus *Hevea* most frequently exploited industrially, as the milky latex extracted from the tree is the primary source of natural rubber.

Rubber tree cultivation was introduced in Guatemala in 1940 through an initiative of the United States Department of Agriculture. Fifteen years later, the first census of plantations in the country reported some 10,000 hectares of rubber trees. In 2003, that area had increased to 52,000 hectares. By 2012, there were over 100,000 hectares of rubber tree plantations, located primarily in the departments of Retalhuleu and Suchitepéquez, on Guatemala's southern coast. Of these, 55,000 hectares were

occupied by trees in the productive phase while the other 45,000 hectares of trees were still immature.

According to a map of "Areas suitable for the development of rubber tree cultivation" prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of Guatemala, there are more than 400,000 hectares of land in the country suited to growing rubber trees. The areas identified are located in the so-called Northern Transversal Strip and on the southern coast of the country, in addition to parts of the departments of Izabal and Alta Verapaz. However, the expansion of rubber tree plantations based on these projections should be subject to serious analysis and reflection, particularly because of competition with other land uses and the land grabbing that could be driven by the growth of these industrial plantations, in a country where there are already high levels of conflict over land access and tenure.

An erroneous concept spread by the promoters of rubber tree plantations is that these constitute planted "forests". In fact, tree plantations cannot be compared to actual forests, with their wealth of biological diversity and complex interactions. In most cases, plantations are established in accordance with a market-based logic, which means the lives of these plantations are also regulated by international prices and demand.

Guatemala is one of the main producers and exporters of natural rubber in the Americas. The environmental and social impact that could result from the expansion of rubber tree plantations is another factor that must be considered if the areas to be planted with these trees are currently areas with forest cover, which is at risk of being destroyed, since during the preparation of land for the planting of rubber trees, "trees and shrubs must be eliminated because the growth of *Hevea* requires full exposure to sunlight," according to the National Coffee Association in its 2004 report, "Cultivo de Hule" (Rubber Tree Cultivation).

Rubber tree cultivation can also be used to take advantage of the carbon market, where these plantations could sell "credits" for the carbon they absorb and store, providing yet another business opportunity for the rubber tree plantation owners. But this trade mechanism is criticized by environmental groups because it does not represent a genuine solution to the climate crisis, since it does not contribute to reducing the pollution generated by the current productive practices of companies.

In 2010, the first international sale of carbon credits from rubber tree plantations was announced by the Guatemalan company Grupo Agroindustrial de Occidente (GAO), and involved the establishment of 2,500 hectares of new plantations. According to the newspaper *El Periódico*, in an article published on June 10, 2010, an agreement for the purchase of "verified emissions reductions" was signed between the Swiss firm FirstClimate and the GAO subsidiary Pica de Hule Natural, S.A. The agreement was signed during the Carbon Expo international trade fair and conference, which was held in Cologne, Germany in 2010. The deal will give the Guatemalan business group access to sources of financing from international incentives that promote reforestation and allegedly "contribute to the reduction of climate change," according to the article.

Developments like these raise serious concerns over the social and environmental impacts that could result from the expansion of rubber tree plantations onto thousands of hectares of new lands. It is also troubling that the country continues to promote a model based on land use for production geared to export, as opposed to more environmentally just land use practices geared to promoting the peasant farming economy, crop diversification and agro-ecology.

Carlos Salvatierra, SAVIA, focal point of the Latin America Network against Tree Plantations (RECOMA) in Guatemala, email salvatierraleal@gmail.com

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index

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index

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index
