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OUR VIEWPOINT

Why the forest concession model does not solve the structural problems of logging and wood extraction?

Historically, illegal forest exploitation to obtain economically valuable timber has been one of the activities with the highest impact on forests worldwide. Such exploitation facilitates the destruction and disappearance of forests in many regions. And the peoples that depend on them are not only affected by their destruction, but also by the violence and corruption involved in such exploitation. The forest concession model has been propagated as a solution. It would be the "road" to an allegedly "sustainability" of the activity. Forests would regenerate and the model would benefit local communities. But experience with the model shows that it has been unable to fulfil its promises. Neither the many reforms nor the reviews of the forestry sector and concession policy in several countries have managed to solve the problems, even though institutions like the World Bank have spent millions of dollars in this. Enough reasons to raise the question: Why the forest concession model does not solve the structural problems of logging and wood extraction?

The forest concession model keeps the centralized top-down policy, which decides on the use of forests. The model is promoted by the same international institutions, such as the World Bank, that already promoted the failed Tropical Forestry Action Plan, launched 30 years ago to fight against deforestation. Resources come largely from foreign governments, where companies with an interest in the logging sector have their headquarters, and from governments of countries exploiting timber. The forest concession model holds the discourse that timber exploitation is necessary to "develop" the country. But this does not take into account the voices of the peoples and populations who depend on forests, and thus, suffer from the terrible effects of this activity. Often concessions undermine the legitimate rights of peoples, the territories they occupy and forests they use.

While the forest concession model promises to redistribute resources from the sale of economically valuable tropical timber, this is a model that encourages the concentration of land. Through the concessions, logging companies obtain control of large areas of forest for long periods of time, even decades. They can own up to millions of hectares of land, increasing in this way their political and economic power, the complete opposite to a fair process of redistribution of wealth and benefits. Moreover, by granting concessions, the governments of forest countries also help companies to "protect" these concessions and associated industrial activities, usually bringing more violence to local populations.

The forest concession model should ensure a supposed legality for logging, with a State regulating the activity through its monitoring bodies and licenses. However, in practice there are still allegations of illegal, criminal practices, and even of war financing, as recently reported by the NGO Global Witness on the Central African Republic (1). One reason for why a serious and responsible governmental authorization and control process does not take place emerges from the general trend towards easing environmental legislation, one characteristic of neoliberal policy, which tends in this case to undermine the potential capacity of the State to monitor and ban large projects. In addition, logging and selling tropical timber of high commercial value is a relatively simple activity: the "product" is already "ready" to be removed from the forest, which encourages concessions holders from other industries (plantations, mining, etc.) to set their eyes on timber. Moreover, it is a highly lucrative activity in itself. Contextual factors explain much of the repeated complaints against stakeholders with the power to authorize and/or monitor concessions, who are also looking to get some profit out of the activity.

Another group benefiting from the model are the companies that guarantee the supposedly "sustainability" of the business by using green labels, such as the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council). The fact that the certifiers that work for these "green labels" are paid by the logging companies themselves, raise serious doubts about their objectivity in the certification process. It is therefore concluded that with the introduction of the forest concession model, the logging sector could adapt to the "new requirements" imposed, but illegal activities, criminal and immoral practices were not eradicated. And to the extent that the State further complicates industrial logging, the industry itself seeks to "adapt" once again, as shown by the allegations in countries where the sector appropriated licenses for non-business small-scale logging. (2)

Even under the concession model, the sector continues to display one of its main characteristics: to be a (neo-) colonial activity. In the past, when Brazil was still a colony, *pau Brazil* (Brazilwood), for example, was used to decorate churches and palaces within the colony but to a greater extent in the "motherland". With the current concession model, the most valuable timber, although not anymore the almost-extinct Brazilwood, is used for domestic consumption in urban centres, but mainly to be exported to supply the elite "demands" of urban consumption centres. Obviously, not everyone can purchase products based on commercially high value tropical timber, such as luxury furniture or cars' fine details. Yet, this happens at the same time that small local sawmills often cannot find the wood to meet local populations' demands.

The forest concession model should also ensure forest conservation through a "management plan" that ensures regeneration so that logging and wood extraction can continue in the future. But this is not the case. Increasingly, scientific studies (3) have emphasized the experiences and denunciations of forest-dependent communities who live in the concession areas and warn that despite the so-called "selective logging", forests are still being degraded and destroyed. The only difference is that it is happening at a slower pace. Supposedly more "sustainable" logging techniques, such as the "low impact" logging or "community forest management", are able to reduce impacts, but do not avoid them. They are still planned in a top-down way, causing other problems in the community such as the division between those in favour of "community forest management" and those who want to maintain a livelihood based on non-timber products and other practices, harvesting wood solely for their own use. But even those

who enter into the "community forest management" business benefit less than the owners of the logging companies. (4)

While the forest concession model should ensure improvements in the lives of the communities within the concession area, it must be emphasized that the community never has the option to disagree with the concession. When the company arrives in the community, it already has the concession license, and the indigenous peoples and other populations that depend on those forests were not involved, nor had any influence on the decision-making process for granting the concession. Therefore, the concession model makes a mockery of the principle of free, prior and informed consent.

When the company arrives in the community, it makes a sort of agreement; signing what in some countries is called a "social contract". However, in practice, logging companies do not respect any or barely any of the commitments agreed upon in the contract. (5) There are reports of criminalizing the communities who dare to complain when the contract is not respected by the company. Moreover, in the few cases where companies run a community program on health, education and so on, these are not a corporate priority; and the forest concession model is not changing that fact. We are talking about activities that should be undertaken by the State. This situation could begin to change if the millionaire funding used to boost the forestry sector was to be used to improve the capacity of the State to directly benefit the population, including people living in forests. There is no justification for transferring (privatizing) these obligations to a logging company, whose primary objective, according to its statute, is to make a profit.

For these reasons, this bulletin aims to reflect on the forest concession model, beginning with an introductory article that aims to deepen the concept: where does the idea of this model come from and its impact over the years, mainly in Africa. The articles from Cameroon and Cambodia tell stories of communities that had to deal with companies that were granted concessions by the governments of these countries on the forest areas that they depend upon. In both cases, forest communities were articulate and successful in their struggles against corporations and concessions. An article on Brazil cannot be missed since the government of this country, which just introduced the forest concession model, promised not to repeat the mistakes of other countries. But what is happening in the Amazon territory of the Mundukuru indigenous people, for example, belies this claim. Finally, the article on India shows how the concession model is now being promoted by a reforestation program: tree plantation, as compensation for the destruction planned by the increase in concession areas ceded by the government. These tree plantations and their capacity to absorb carbon and generate "carbon credits" - also show a direct link between the model of concessions and the destruction that it causes, with the phenomenon of the financialization of forests and territories.

Experiences with the forest concession model shows that it would be naive to believe that logging companies can fulfil the current role of thousands of communities that have depended for many generations on forests: that is, to be guardians of the forests. If those promoting the forest concession model really want to listen and learn from the experience of these communities to inform their decisions, logging for industrial purposes should stop immediately and at the same time, the forest-dependent communities should be allowed to continue in their role as the guardians of these territories, guaranteeing in this way their conservation.

- (1) <https://www.globalwitness.org/reports/bloodtimber/>
 - (2) <https://www.globalwitness.org/archive/africas-logging-permit-crisis-puts-eu-risk-laundering-illegal-timber-imports/>
 - (3) <http://news.mongabay.com/2015/02/selective-logging-causes-long-term-changes-to-forest-structure/>
 - (4) <http://wrm.org.uy/pt/artigos-do-boletim-do-wrm/secao1/brasil-vozes-de-comunidades-no-acre-alertam-sobre-as-violacoes-envolvidas-no-manejo-florestal-sustentavel-comunitario/>
 - (5) See stories of the communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo, see also in the section: recommended: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxn5jfgED1w>
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FORESTRY CONCESSIONS: AN IMPOSED MODEL THAT BENEFITS INDUSTRY

Logging concessions; basis of an industry, or political control?

“Over the last two decades, massive tracts of virgin tropical forests have come under exploitation, in all three underdeveloped regions. That exploitation, with a few honourable exceptions, has been reckless, wasteful, even devastating. Nearly all the operations have been enclavistic, that is to say they have had no profound or durable impact on the social and economic life of the countries where they have taken place... Local needs are not being met; the employment opportunities are trifling. A significant part of the exports, as logs or as primary processed timber, is exported within the firm, and transfer values are fixed to facilitate the accumulation of profits outside the country... The contribution of forestry to improving the lot of the common people has been negligible so far”.

Jack Westoby, *The Purpose of Forests*, 1987, Page 264-5.

When Jack Westoby wrote the above, it was not only a deep snub to the prevailing orthodoxy of forest exploitation as a tool for ‘development’ of poor countries, but also an honest admission of the failure of policies which, as Director of Forestry for the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) he himself had promoted. For, from the late 1950s, Westoby had been in the forefront of international efforts to use the timber industry as a means of kick-starting the economies of developing countries, almost exclusively through the allocation of large tracts of land to commercial forestry operators, hopefully accompanied by the growth of nearby manufacturing bases.

But the origin of the large-scale concession long predates the period to which Westoby referred. The concept means “a territory within a country that is administered by an entity other than the state which holds sovereignty over it” – often primarily for the production or extraction of a specific commodity. It pre-dates the colonial era, and is rooted in European imperial expansion to the New World, Africa and parts of southern and south-east Asia, though perhaps found its strongest expression in the 19th century. The term derives from the same Latin root as “concede”, and is an arrangement that usually results from the surrender by a weaker state to a stronger power.

Possibly the first example of a concession specifically for logging was the East India Company's acquisition of rights from the British crown to the teak forests of the Malabar region in south-western India in the early 1800s, mainly for the purpose of supplying the shipbuilders for the British Navy. By then, though, huge areas of tropical forest had already been cleared under agricultural (especially sugar-growing) concessions in the new world.

As Westoby well understood, forestry is a *political* activity, and there was nothing more political than imposing privatised administrative control over large tracts of land in weaker countries for the purpose of resource extraction. But by the time Westoby had joined the FAO, technology had also started to greatly change the way timber extraction was being done in the tropics and elsewhere. The development, following the Second World War, of high-powered diesel-driven tank-tracked bulldozers and tractors, and large portable chainsaws, meant that logging operations could penetrate areas of tropical forest previously impossible to operate. Much larger trees could be felled and handled. Rapidly expanding consumption and wealth in Europe, North America and Japan and the development there of large-scale integrated wood products' manufacturers, meant that tropical timbers were not only being used for mostly artisanal high quality joinery, and became relied on for their consistency and stability, ideal for production-line mass processing. Linked with a long-standing European tradition of 'sustainable' natural forest management for wood production, the notion evolved that the forests of some poor tropical areas, most of which were still under colonial rule, could become long-term providers of the raw material for wood-based industries.

From being an essentially pre-colonial construct for territorial conquest and pacification, the 'concession' had thus become a central part of the strategy for what was believed to be an emerging global forest economy. However, the incorporation of the concession system as a basis for this new wealth-generating 'industry' rested on a huge, untested and, as it turns out, fallacious, assumption: that the conditions which permitted temperate zone forests to be (very broadly speaking), managed and sustained over long periods of time for timber production, could be translated wholesale to the tropics. In doing so, foresters had underestimated the ecological and silvicultural challenges of tropical forests, and did not foresee the consequences of huge expansions in developing country populations linked with universally insecure tenure rights for peasant farmers. Most importantly (and perhaps most understandably), they failed to understand the realities of the rapidly changing political dynamic of 'decolonialisation' within which they were operating. Talking of the cadre of foresters that emerged to administer the forest resources of the newly independent countries, which were increasingly being parcelled up into concessions, Westoby wrote in his final work that "though forest services were built up, their principle task was to facilitate the operations of the loggers, native or foreign. It was no fault of young foresters that many of them became unwilling accessories to the reckless depletion of their natural resource heritage". (1) In short, the new forestry administrations became the handmaidens of the concessionaires; many of them remain so.

The large-scale logging concession, though it could never succeed as a basis for sustainable timber production and economic growth, was itself a highly valuable commodity in the internal power struggles and elite ascendancies which came to dominate the politics of many post-colonial countries, especially in Africa. In a 2007 essay, myself and Arnaud Labrousse, a French researcher, expert and writer on

Francophone African logging, attempted to list the *real* purposes that logging concessions are fulfilling in the political economy of Central Africa. (2) It was a long list, which included: enriching the Presidential family and his extended clan; rewarding political and business cronies for services rendered; financing "election" campaigns; encouraging loyalty among high and middle-ranking military and police officials; placating or co-opting potential political rivals or opponents; supplementing the legal income of senior members of government, often including the Forestry Minister and his senior staff; facilitating the trade and supply of bushmeat; legitimising "forest sector investments" of international donor agencies such as the World Bank; camouflaging unlicensed and illegal extraction of other precious resources, such as diamonds and gold; developing infrastructure and services in favoured areas, such as the President's or a Minister's home region; repopulating rebellious or unstable regions with pro-regime families; sedentarising nomadic peoples; "reimbursing" regional allies for military assistance; providing a means to embezzle foreign aid; creating a pretext for international conservation initiatives, the funds of which can also be embezzled; laundering the proceeds of international crime, and; purchasing weapons.

All of the above could be illustrated with examples from within just the few countries of the Congo Basin. Further reasons for the continued existence of logging concessions could no doubt be added from other regions, such as their allocation in areas in which foreign corporations or international agencies like the World Bank had a particular interest, and providing a vehicle for donor agencies to continue their financing of a development model based on large-scale concessions for export crops or resources.

This helps to explain why efforts such as the development of concepts like 'sustained yield', 'sustainable forest management', 'multi-stakeholder management' 'certification' etc. have failed to make any significant changes to the overall outcomes of logging concessions in the developing world; they assume that the over-riding purpose of the logging concession is for the production of timber, which with the right technical tweaks can be made ecologically and economically sustainable and socially beneficial - whereas it is in fact primarily an expression of, and used to maintain, inequity in power and wealth. It is like trying to collect water from a stream more efficiently by improving the design of a pitchfork.

Seen in this light, some of the more recent dismally failed attempts to use the logging concession system as a positive driver of economic growth and environmental sustainability are a little easier to understand. In the Democratic Republic of Congo in the early 2000s, for example, the World Bank set out projections that could have led to the creation of up to 60 million hectares of new logging concessions, promising the country to become the continent's largest timber exporter and benefiting from hundreds of millions of dollars in annual revenues. The Bank's plans were curtailed by a successful appeal by local indigenous peoples' organisations to the World Bank Inspection Panel, but the 15 million or so hectares of concessions which did materialise are, between them, generating only a minuscule US\$2 million per year in governmental taxes, and the sector remains mired in illegalities, corruption, human rights abuses and malpractices. In Peru, from 1999 onwards, the World Bank-WWF Forest Alliance set out to 'regularise' rampant illegal logging by creating 3.2 million hectares of new concessions for "sustainable management", yet within 10 years it had become clear that illegal logging had if anything worsened, with up to 90% of exported mahogany originating from illegal sources.

Why do agencies such as the World Bank continue to promote this self-evidently flawed model? There seem to be two basic ways of answering this. The first, most generous, explanation is that, despite what Westoby realised more than 40 years ago, economists and technicians from Washington, Paris, Rome and Tokyo, still believe that large-scale temporary forest land-holdings by mostly foreign—owned companies can help ‘kick-start’ the economies of poor countries. In purely economic terms, natural forests are an unused asset, which should be exploited to improve the national balance sheet. The logging of natural forests is extremely attractive to some development economists, because it is a very easy business to enter; it requires little expertise or capital investment, relies mostly on cheap labour, has reliable markets, is generally poorly regulated, and carries relatively little risk.

A second explanation is that, in some cases, the international promoters of the logging concession system are well aware of its shortcomings; indeed, they have decades of empirical evidence, files full of project completion reports, evaluations on forest sector interventions and wood industry development schemes and attempts to re-organise forestry into ‘sustainable concessions’ that conclude, at best, “*Only moderately successful*”. But they are also aware of the deeper reality of tropical forest logging concessions: the vested interests in them held by decision-makers (which is one of the key factors rendering them ungovernable), and the money which illicitly flows from them to the private bank accounts of ministers and heads of state and their cronies and families is *precisely* what is of most value. Viewed cynically, in serving this role, they help maintain the status quo in often fundamentally unstable governments. They are grease in the cogs of patron-client power structures. They help ensure misgoverned countries do not collapse completely into anarchy and conflict, can repay their international debts and remain accessible to national and transnational corporations interested in the resources extracted from these concessions areas. In fact the very factors which make logging concessions attractive to economists are also what make them uniquely prone to political patronage, intervention and outright corruption. The persistent ungovernability of the landmass covered by concessions is thus viewed as an unfortunate but unavoidable side-effect in service of a much greater cause. Hence, for example, the refusal of agencies such as the World Bank to uphold conditionalities or rigorously pursue programme objectives in the face of egregious non-compliance with forest sector reforms by local governments.

Jack Westoby had already realised before he retired from the FAO in 1974 that the good intentions of his earlier career had foundered on hard reality. Were he still alive (he died in 1988) he might be astonished that global institutions such as the World Bank and the FAO have continued to this day in promoting the large-scale industrial tropical forest concession model. That the concept still remains the dominant tenure/exploitation model for tropical forests more than 40 years later, despite the mountain of evidence as to its wholesale failure, attests to its utility as a political instrument and mechanism for capturing and then securing land, and expressing political dominance and patronage. The mistake is ever to confuse it with the basis for a rational ‘industry’ that might benefit poor communities in poor countries.

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- (1) Westoby, J 1987, Introduction to World Forestry, 1989, Wiley.
 - (2) Counsell S and Labrousse A, 2007, The political economy of the African logging concession system and the complicity of international donors, in RFUK and Forests Monitor, Concessions to Poverty; The environmental, social and economic impacts of industrial logging concessions in Africa's rainforests, February 2007, London and Cambridge.
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Cambodia: Steps to Victory

After several years of struggle, rural communities in the province of Oddar Meanchey, Cambodia, are seeing signs of victory. Three private companies that had acquired approximately 20,000 hectares of farm- and forestland for sugarcane plantations have withdrawn and their concessions have been cancelled. The companies are “Angkor Sugar Company Ltd” and “Cambodia Cane and Sugar Valley Company Ltd” in Kounkriel Commune, Samraung District, and “Tonle Sugar Cane Company Ltd” in Pong Ro Commune, Changkal District.

In November 2014, representatives from communities affected by the sugarcane plantations heard from the Oddar Meanchey Provincial Governor’s office that the companies would be asked to shut down their operations. By December 2014, the machinery and workers in all three plantations were gone, although surrounding communities did not have a clear indication from the government whether the concessions had indeed been cancelled. In March 2015, the communities were informed that the Cambodian Government had issued a special order (*sor chor nor*) claiming all the land in the concession areas back as state land. At the time of writing, however, the communities have not yet seen this order.

Local peoples’ struggles against these companies and against sugarcane plantations in Cambodia have been long and hard. The above mentioned sugarcane plantations in Oddar Meanchey started in 2007, with major shares owned by “Mitr Phol Sugar Group”, a multinational corporation from Thailand. The concessions were also linked to the “L.Y.P Group Co. Ltd”, a Cambodian corporation owned by wealthy Cambodian tycoon and senator Ly Yong Phat. Although the L.Y.P Group denied direct investment in the above concessions, District authorities told affected communities that the senator was in charge of managing all these concessions.

In April 2008 and October 2009, villagers in Bos and O’Bat Moan villages were violently evicted and left homeless and landless. Village lands and houses of 254 families were burned and bulldozed by hired workers supervised by military police and Cambodian army troops from Brigade 42, known to be supported by the L.Y.P. Group. The evicted families were left in extremely precarious conditions without food, water or shelter, and to date have yet to receive compensation or reparations for this injustice. Acts of violence and intimidation against local people continued by hired staff of the three companies and the police assigned to protect them. The concessions encroached into community forests and cut off local peoples’ access to forests and farmlands.

Affected communities organized in the province and nationally with the support of community based networks and NGOs supporting struggles for justice. They filed petitions and complaints in the Oddar Meanchey courts, governor’s office and to

national authorities seeking compensation for those evicted, for confiscated farmlands and to prevent further encroachment by the companies into their community forests. Affected communities also sought and received support from networks and NGOs in Thailand, which publicly questioned the bad conduct of a Thai company in a neighboring country. In 2013, a petition demanding that the Angkor Sugar Company compensate the people evicted from Bos/O'Batmon area in Kounkriel was submitted to the Human Rights Commission of Thailand.

In December 2013, affected communities filed a petition with the Cambodian Ministry of Agriculture asking for cancellation of the concession agreements signed with Angkor Sugar, Cambodia Cane and Sugar Valley and Tonle Sugar. The petition claimed that the companies were not following the relevant laws and sub-decrees and had large tracts of land unused within their concession areas. Therefore, the Cambodian Government should cancel the concession contracts of the three companies and return all the lands to the communities for use as community forests, farming and common/public lands.

Affected communities in Oddar Meanchey also joined with their counterparts in Koh Kong province to file petitions with the European Union (EU) since sugar produced from sugarcane in these plantations had duty-free access to European markets under the "Everything But Arms" initiative of the EU (1). In January 2014, an EU delegation went to visit these concession areas and met representatives of the affected communities.

The struggles of people in Oddar Meanchey to reclaim lands and get justice have included actions and campaigning at multiple levels and fronts, which have finally paid off. Village residents have started to make plans for land use and management for the approximately 20,000 hectares released from the concessions. These include restoration of farm, home and village lands for those who were evicted and/or lost part of their land to encroachment; revitalization of community forests and; building collective farming activities as a buffer against future crises. They are also continuing to press Angkor Sugar Company and Mitr Phol Sugar Group to pay compensation to those who were evicted from Bos/O'Bat Moan.

The battle, however, is far from over. While the provincial authorities have expressed verbal support for the plans of the local communities, there is as yet no official communication from them permitting these plans to be operationalized. A persisting threat in Oddar Meanchey is the military, which has set up camps in numerous forests in the province. Many of these forests were included in the Oddar Meanchey REDD project and have already been destroyed by the establishment of camps, roads and housing for soldiers' families. The military has expressed intent to establish bases and villages for their soldiers in the areas vacated by the companies, which include community forests. In July 2015, the provincial governor ordered district authorities and all relevant departments to work with local communities in mapping their community forests. However, community leaders report that such processes turn out to be expensive since they are expected to host and cover the costs of the officials involved in the mapping.

The village residents are committed to continue the process of negotiating with national and provincial authorities to limit military and corporate presence and maximize community governance of the lands.

Focus on the Global South, <http://focusweb.org/>
Cambodia, August 13 2015

(1) “Everything But Arms” is a trade initiative of the European Union adopted in 2001 to give least developed countries full duty-free and quota-free access to the EU for exports other than arms and armaments. The initiative has been surrounded with human rights abuses and land evictions associated with the products exported to the EU under this initiative.

Deforestation funds more plantations: The new Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill in India

Giving away India’s forests

On August 13, 2015, Prakash Javadekar, India’s Minister of the Environment, informed the Upper House of the Indian parliament that “during the last five years and current year, the central government has accorded approvals to over 184,393 hectares of forest land in 7,716 cases for various developmental activities...” (1) This means that more than 1.8 million hectares of forests have been leased out to miners, dam builders, urban land developers and so on. In 2014, 35,867 hectares of forests were diverted for non-forest use, according to another statement made by the same minister to the parliament on April 28 (2).

One of the most visible policies of the far right National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has consisted of making the forest and environment clearance process ‘easier’. A persistent top-down administrative process has diluted the entire body of existing laws for environmental protection. Reportedly, the Prime Minister’s Office instructed 60 separate amendments to the existing legal regime to the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), and by the end of January 2015, 50 of those were accepted (3). Though the majority of these changes concerned the Environmental Protection Act of 1986, a separate process started for diluting the landmark “Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers” (Recognition of Forest Rights Act, better known as FRA) (for more information on FRA, see article from the [August WRM Bulletin](#)) - particularly, by scrapping the provision for empowering community institutions like the *Gram Sabha* (4) to monitor, control and if necessary, stop any development project in the forest areas in their jurisdiction (5).

At the same time, the government is talking about spending a colossal US\$ 15 billion for afforestation during the next four years: once again, the Minister of the Environment, in his Independence Day message this year, said: “Funds to the tune of US\$ 9 billion by the 14th Finance Commission and US\$ 6 billion through *Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill will soon be made available... US\$15 billion...for the real afforestation of the country, which will definitely increase our green stock, that is the carbon sink we are creating*” (italics added). (6)

Compensatory Afforestation and the new Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill

The new Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) Bill has an interesting history. The fund itself is the result of a disguised forest offset process in India, on-going for most of the last two decades and perhaps more. The present system of compensatory afforestation grew out from a tangled process of environmental legislations and judicial interventions. In its present form, it calls to establish tree plantations in non-forest land for at least an equivalent amount (in case of public sector projects) of each separate instance of forest diversion. In case of private sector projects, plantations must be established on twice the diverted area. Plantations which thus come up in cleared forests are known as Compensatory Afforestation (CA). But the term has become generic: it now includes a range of other mechanisms/concepts besides plantations. Other than making lands available for new 'compensatory' plantations, the 'user agencies' (those who apply for concessions/leases on forest land for taking up non-forest activities), must pay the entire costs for raising the plantations, along with a 'Net Present Value' (NPV) of the forest being diverted, and costs for the 'Catchment Area Treatment' (CAT). The 'Net Present Value' is apparently calculated and fixed following a typical economic valuation exercise that takes into account the entire spectrum of 'ecosystem services'. These separate payments towards Compensatory Afforestation- including NPV and CAT - are deposited in the ad-hoc CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation Management Planning Authority) fund, a mechanism created directly through judicial intervention when the Compensatory Afforestation Fund was established as part of the Forest (Conservation) Act in 1980. In the present system, the money comes to state level bodies but spending needs approval of the central body and the Supreme Court of India. According to the latest estimate, the CAMPA Fund holds unspent funds amounting to Rupees 38,000 crores (7) (roughly US\$ 6 billion). And counting- because each year more forest areas are leased out anew to various private and public agencies.

“Deforestation is Reforestation”: Environmental offsetting at its bluntest

Unabashedly, the Minister of the Environment defends the fast-track forest clearance policy of his government. A reported memo issued on July 16 by the Minister's private secretary Vinay Srivastava said, "Hon'ble minister has desired that henceforth in all communication the word 'Clearance' should be replaced by 'Approval with Adequate Environmental Safeguards' and the word 'Diversion' should be replaced by 'Reforestation'." The Minister affirmed saying: "For every diversion of forest land for a project...compensatory afforestation on equal area of non-forest land is a must...ultimately, it is reforestation only. This is all about thinking positive and using the right expression." (8)

This is the offset logic at its bluntest. Notwithstanding the reality that not even a tiniest fraction of the obligatory compensatory plantations has come up so far, and the environmental fact that a forest can neither be recreated through plantations nor compensated by monetary means, the government is determined to push its neo-liberal agenda of no-holds-barred economic growth.

This process victimizes forests, forest communities, and a large section of the rural poor of India, twice. First, forests are often where communities live, their homes. Besides, forests provide sustenance not only to forest communities, but also to a huge number of rural poor living in the vicinity of those. Loss of forests therefore means loss of livelihoods and food security and also, more generally, sovereignty. Though the money collected as 'Net Present Value' includes costs for services such as the collection of

Non-Timber Forest Products, no money has ever come back to the communities. Instead, the money continues to incentivize and directly fund more land grabs, which is the second layer of victimization. An unpublished study (9) carried out by independent researchers and civil society organisations in 2013-14 pointed out that both the concept of 'no net loss' or 'compensatory forests' and the money it produces are being used against forest communities. Community-held forested lands as well as agricultural and pasture areas are being acquired by the state and user agencies to get land for plantations. The money in the CAMPA fund is being used to expand the territorial limits of existing wildlife conservation areas like wildlife sanctuaries, national parks and critical tiger habitats, encroaching community lands and facilitating displacement of forest communities. These processes impinge upon a range of old and new community rights-land tenures, among others-severely curtailing community access to forests.

Most importantly, the illusion that money or plantations can compensate destruction of forests legitimizes and green-washes, ecologically and socially impermissible deforestation events.

This leads to the Compensatory Afforestation Bill of 2015, which the Indian Parliament is now discussing.

Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill, 2015: A critique

The bulk of the text in the new Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill deals with institutional mechanisms for utilizing money currently deposited in CAMPA. The following critique derives from the official submission by All India Forum of Forest Movements (AIFFM) to the Parliamentary Standing Committee that is currently examining it.

Preamble

The Preamble to the Bill states that the money received from the user agencies towards all compensatory initiatives in question will be for "...undertaking artificial regeneration (plantations), assisted natural regeneration, protection of forests, forest related infrastructure development, Green India Programme, wildlife protection and *other related activities and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto*"(italics added). The last phrase gives the widest possible latitude to proposed disbursement and utilization of funds, meaning that any and all sorts of activities can be sponsored through these funds.

The Preamble also states that "the absence of a permanent institutional mechanism for utilisation of funds... is the main reason for accumulation of huge unspent funds". This is an evident lie. In 2013, a report compiled by the office of Comptroller and Auditor General, India, on Compensatory Afforestation and CAMPA (10) pointed out that even in cases where state forest departments had money for plantations, not much could be shown on the ground. Instead, CAMPA funds have been used for highly questionable purchases or in questionable manner. A recent newspaper report, citing a monitoring report prepared by the Maharashtra State Forest Department, reiterates that most of the 'compensatory' plantations shown on paper do not actually exist (11). The independent study from 2013-14 (12), bears this out not only for Maharashtra but for several other states. The gross reality is that the very Compensatory Afforestation process is a lie: it helps sustain the myth of offsets by promoting the idea that forests lost at one place can

be replaced by raising plantations at another: Plantations are not forests! It is also a scam: plantations seldom come up; the money for that is either used for other purposes or grossly misappropriated.

Definitions

The Bill defines 'Compensatory Afforestation' as "afforestation done in lieu of the diversion of forestland for non-forestry use under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980". However, the Forest (Conservation) Act, does not provide for such afforestation. This came much later in subsequent rules and elaborated upon partly as a result of judicial interventions. Moreover, the Bill brackets a wide assortment of things naturally found within forests and a body of concepts and ideas, as 'environmental services' - such as "provision of goods such as wood, non-timber forest products, fuel, fodder, water...", "regulating services such as climate regulation, disease control, flood moderation...", "non-material benefits obtained from ecosystems, spiritual, recreational..." and "supporting such other services necessary for the production of ecosystem services, biodiversity, nutrient cycling and primary production".

But is 'environmental services' a term which should be used in a law? There are at present no scientific and standardized definitions of what constitutes such 'services,' or whether a forest ecosystem can be thus defined in terms of separate, compartmentalized and precisely identifiable 'services'. A forest is an ecological continuum and whole, which supports and contains material things as well as concepts. Its so-called 'services' distinguish the natural system, but cannot be rationally alienated from it as 'services'. This becomes important because the definition of 'ecosystem services' informs the definition of 'net present value', which is another questionable term that cannot have any place in law.

Valuation of forests is at best a controversial process, existing models for which fail to understand, let alone quantify, the myriad tangible and intangible values, most of those non-commercial, and not economic or financial in any definable way, a forest system contains in a given point of time. If the definition of environmental services includes "non-material benefits obtained from ecosystems, spiritual, recreational, aesthetic, inspirational, educational and symbolic" , how can one assign monetary values to these?

Final Observations

The *Statement of Objects and Reasons* appended to the Bill repeatedly mentions the Comptroller and Auditor General, India's observations about Compensatory Afforestation and ad-hoc CAMPA, and states that the present Bill has been framed keeping in mind and in accordance with those. However, the Bill is not creating anything substantially different from CAMPA, other than handing over to state forest departments almost total control of funds held by the body, also any new money that might be deposited. The Bill effectively takes the fund and its disbursement away from judicial scrutiny and legitimizes an institutional structure that allows for more corruption and financial irregularities. It potentially empowers the state forest departments and the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change to utilize the funds for any purpose they deem fit, thus excluding and hurting interests of communities who lose most in both deforestation and afforestation.

If at all, the funds need to be utilized for the welfare of dispossessed communities, in consultation with them, and through their direct agency. The same holds true for Compensatory Afforestation – let *Gram Sabhas* demarcate lands, and take up forest restoration and regeneration activities in a manner that suits the communities and their ecology best. So much additional funds in the hands of the strong forest bureaucracy in the country will only facilitate a scenario of yet more injustice and rights denial at the grassroots. Further, it will undermine the implementation of the Forest Rights Act.

Raising a number of valid objections to the process of Compensatory Afforestation and the Compensatory Afforestation Bill, two major alliances of forest movements and community groups in India demanded that the bill must be scrapped (13).

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- (1) Press Trust of India, New Delhi, August 13, 2015. See http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/1-84-lakh-hectare-of-forest-land-diverted-for-non-forest-use-115081301268_1.html, accessed on August 19, 2015
- (2) Press Trust of India, New Delhi, April 28, 2015. See http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/diversion-of-35-867-ha-of-forest-land-okayed-in-2014-govt-115042800615_1.html, accessed on August 19, 2015
- (3) Sethi, N, *PMO orders 60 changes...*, in Business Standard, January 20, 2015. See http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/pmo-ordered-60-changes-to-green-clearances-environment-ministry-delivered-on-most-115012001495_1.html, accessed on August 19, 2015
- (4) As defined in FRA, the *Gram Sabha* is the open assembly of all adult residents in a 'gram' or village. It is an independent body and can come up in all forest areas with a population of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and/or other traditional forest dwellers, irrespective of whether such forest settlements are officially recognized as villages.
- (5) Sethi, N, *Forest Land: Govt finalising dilution of tribal rights*, in Business Standard, January 20, 2015. See http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/forest-land-govt-finalising-dilution-of-tribal-rights-115010100027_1.html, accessed on August 19, 2015
- (6) Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Environment and Forests, *Environment Minister's Message on the Occasion of Independence Day*, August 15, 2015
- (7) Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Environment and Forests, April 29, 2015, *Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill, 2015*, see <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=119907>, accessed on 19 August, 2015
- (8) See <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/dont-say-diversion-of-forest-land-say-reforestation-prakash-javadekar/#sthash.MyGASSx3.dpuf>, accessed on 19 August, 2015
- (9) Ghosh, S, Basavaptna, S et al, *Multiple Displacements: A critical look into cases of forest diversion and allocation of land for Compensatory Afforestation (CA) in India*, forthcoming.
- (10) Report no.-21 of 2013-Union Government (Ministry of Environment and Forests) - Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on Compensatory Afforestation in India, available at http://www.saiindia.gov.in/english/home/our_products/Audit_Report/Government_Wis

[e/union_audit/recent_reports/union_compliance/2013/Civil/Report_21/Report_21.html](http://union_audit/recent_reports/union_compliance/2013/Civil/Report_21/Report_21.html), last accessed on 19 August, 2015

(11) Pinjarkar, V, *Forest officials spend crores on plantation with nothing to show for it*, in The Times of India, Nagpur, May 12, 2015. See

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/Forest-officials-spend-crores-on-plantation-with-nothing-to-show-for-it/articleshow/47239889.cms>, accessed on 19 August, 2015

(12) Ghosh, S, Basavaptna, S et al, Ibid

(13) *A Scam and a Land Acquisition Fiasco Rolled Into One – The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill*, Joint Press Release issued by Campaign for Survival and Dignity(CSD) and All India Forum of Forest Movements(AIFFM), July 31, 2015

Palm oil concessions for logging: the case of Herakles Farms in Cameroon

With palm oil consumption predicted to triple by 2050 – and with current production mostly concentrated in Indonesia and Malaysia -, foreign capital seeking land for expanding industrial oil palm plantations is looking into the Congo Basin region. Oil palm plantation companies are targeting forests also to generate profits from the timber they can sell to mills and to the pulp and paper industry, further threatening tropical forests and forest-dependant populations. In Cameroon, the financial company Herakles Farms has been under the spotlight of increasing local and international opposition for its intention to establish oil palm plantations in forests and inhabited territories.

An important reason for many palm oil operators to get concessions in forested areas is to profit from logging, with timber often sold illegally. Profits usually subsidize further palm oil development and expansion. In this context, the US investment firm Herakles Farms, with its local subsidiary SG Sustainable Oils Cameroon (SGSOC), signed a contract in 2009 with the Cameroonian Ministry of Economy to develop an oil palm plantation in the Mundemba and Toko concession, located astride the Korup National Park and Rumpi Hills Forest Reserve. The latter being a complex watershed formation with all the freshwater from it draining into the Korup National Park. The oil palm project has been surrounded with controversy from the beginning.

Despite public statements from Herakles Farms claiming that it did not intend to benefit from the sale of any wood cut on its concession, it is now evident that this was from the beginning an integral part of its business plan. In order to be able to sell wood, Herakles Farms needed a “front company” since it is not registered as a timber company in Cameroon. In March 2013, its local subsidiary SGSOC Cameroon acquired Unic Province, a company that began transporting illegal wood from the Herakles Farms oil palm nurseries to the port in Douala. Almost the entire timber stock was felled illegally between 2010 and 2013 by SGSOC. A substantial part of this timber was to be exported to China (1).

A story of imposition and deceit

In April 2015, the people and chief of Mokange village in the Mundemba subdivision of Cameroon spotted unidentified persons conducting land demarcations of their forest and detected some 30 persons working for Herakles Farms in the Talangaye area. The

villagers contacted the Divisional Officer for Mundemba, who said his office was not aware of the demarcation activities. As tensions heightened, the company dispatched its Community Relations Manager, Daniel Agoons, to appease the concerned villages. He visited four villages - Mokange, Lipenja II, Kuma and Esoki Bima - and apologized on behalf of Herakles Farms for demarcating their lands without consulting or informing the people. He also disclosed that Herakles Farms is almost on the brink of collapse following the withdrawal of investors and the lack of new investors for their oil palm project. He added that Herakles Farms has only survived thanks to its partnership with Unic Province, the timber exploitation company. But he did not inform the people that Unic Province is solely owned by Herakles for the purpose of exploiting and exporting timber to raise money for its oil palm project.

Agoons, together with Herakles' employee Mbangwe Lovett, carried eight crates of beer to each village, which they dispersed among the people before speaking to them. Agoons told the villagers that Herakles Farms will assist them to develop at least 5 hectares of oil palm plantations, and that the felling of trees for those plantations would be done by Unic Province. Herakles Farms, he said, would supply them with the palm seedlings and that the payment for the seedlings would be loans that can be paid after six years from the time of planting. Herakles Farms had previously promised to pay the villagers 50,000 francs per month (around US\$ 86), starting in 2010, but no payment has been made. Agoons told the villagers that this amount would be paid as arrears but did not specify when.

Agoons nonetheless surprised the villagers by saying that Herakles Farms have started paying money into the bank accounts of each village in the concession area since January 2015. He then handed an ECObank cheque booklet to the chief of Esoki village saying that there are 150,000 francs in the account, based on the payments of 50,000 francs for January, February and March 2015. However, the villagers questioned the authenticity of the bank accounts since they had never met with Herakles officials to discuss this. Besides, villagers also wondered who the signatories to these bank accounts were and they were concerned that the signatures might have been falsified. They also mistrusted that Herakles would only provide payments now that they want to extract timber and after the villagers' protests. The fact that the cheque booklets were given only to the four villages where exploitation of timber by Heracles Farms has further heightened concerns and many consider it to be an act of bribery.

The villagers in Esoki mobilised and stopped Herakles Farms workers from advancing with the demarcation exercise. They were angry that the workers were unidentified and that the land being demarcated was close to the village and went beyond the area of land that had previously been allocated to the company. On April 16 however, Herakles workers went back to continue with the demarcation but were stopped by angry villagers who said they had no knowledge of Unic Province or Herakles and needed time to better know these companies' activities, which will negatively impact their wellbeing. *"Since the Herakles people started coming to our village they have never giving prior information to us of any meeting. It seems their plan is to hold unannounced meetings so that we can make foolish decisions to their advantage. Despite several appeals to them to notify the village of any meeting and its agenda at least a month before the meeting so that we can consult experts to advise us but they have refused to yield to our appeals"*, lamented a youth of Esoki village. He added that they will continue defending their land and livelihoods despite the odds.

On April 20, the chief of Esoki Village visited the office of the NGO SEFE (Struggle to Economise Future Environment) following the tension with Herakles' workers who were carrying out the demarcation of land. He told SEFE that Herakles was now asking for 3000 hectares of land, beyond the 620 hectares that were given to them through the presidential decrees in 2013. The company claims that the 620 hectares are not enough since they have to remove waterways and hills and that the 3000 hectares, excluding high value conservation areas, hills and waterways, will provide them with sufficient land. The chief was very surprised that Herakles was asking for more land and had even gone to his village without notifying him and was already demarcating large expanses of land. He said that he now realizes that Herakles' plantation project was never in the interest of the people but only for its own profits and that there is no way the company will get the 3000 hectares they are seeking.

It is worth noting that the 2013 presidential decrees attributing land to Herakles clearly stated that the company cannot renegotiate for land beyond the limit of what was allocated to them. The chief acknowledged that the village does not have the capacity to negotiate with the personnel of Herakles and therefore asked for assistance from SEFE. He also requested help from SEFE for creating a map of the Esoki village.

Besides, the Ndiba village also confronts problems with Herakles. The chief Divine Moto (once a Herakles supporter) told SEFE that there is tension over Herakles current concessions because the company has encroached onto land belonging to other villages not established in the decrees of 2013. He told SEFE there was a need to identify the limits of each village in order to avoid a crisis. He expressed dismay with Herakles' attitude in its unilateral demarcation activities without consulting concerned villages.

The people of the Lipenja II village currently do not have a chief and are in the process of getting a new one after the death of Chief Masumbe three years ago. Meanwhile, a Herakles supporter is dealing with the company. However, the village considers the handing of the ECObank cheque booklet and any negotiations between Herakles and him as not legitimate and risky.

One person told SEFE that the people of Lipenja II village have realised that the person signing documents on their behalf is an impostor and that Herakles Farms was creating confusion by backing and fortifying him in the on-going chieftaincy succession process. The decision to give land or not to give land is collective and Herakles has not formally approached the village for negotiation. A woman from this village told SEFE that they are angry because Herakles Farms is going beyond the land previously allocated to the company and is moving towards farmlands and forests where they gather non-timber resources. She said that women are excluded from the talks with Herakles and therefore women only know that Herakles wants to grow palm oil plantations here, which, she added, will ultimately destroy their livelihoods.

It is noteworthy to mention that Herakles has since the beginning vehemently refused to conduct the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) process. Chiefs who spoke with SEFE said that during a Land Consultative Board Meeting held in Mundemba in June 2013, they were deceived into signing a report and maps produced by Herakles Farms in order to enable the company to get the land leases first and then come back for more negotiations. They are surprised that the company just started demarcating the land

without providing prior information to the villagers. Some chiefs have realised that opening village bank accounts was a trick used by Herakles during the so-called Land Consultative Board Meeting to lure them into having their signatures on the report and maps that enable Herakles to apply for land leases.

Finally on May 2015, Herakles Farms announced that it abandoned all operations in the Mundemba and Toko Subdivisions and in the Ndian Division. The workers said the reason given for suspending operations was to enable Herakles to intensify planting of palms in the Nguti area before returning to the Mundemba and Toko concessions in 2017 or 2018. The company's spokesperson blamed current management for prioritising timber extraction over planting of palms.

This article is based on two publications of Nasako Besingi from the NGO Struggle to Economise Future Environment (SEFE), Cameroon:

** SEFE, Unilateral Boundary Demarcation by Herakles Farms Causes Tensions in Mundemba Subdivision, Cameroon, April 22, 2015*

** SEFE, Herakles abandons all operations in mundemba and toko concessions area, May 31, 2015*

(1)

<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/publications/forests/2014/Licence-to-Launder.pdf>

The Mundukuru peoples in Brazil: forestry concessions imposed on indigenous lands

In the history of the peoples who have been living in the Amazon since before the arrival of European colonizers, the invasion of their territories has been a constant fact of life. For the indigenous Mundukuru peoples, the most serious threat currently comes from the building of seven new hydropower dams: the Tapajós complex. Other threats come from the "garimpeiros" ('artisanal' gold miners), loggers, and even an overseas company which through a forest carbon (REDD) project wanted to take control of their territory. They opposed all these threats and are now mobilizing against yet another: three forestry concessions that the government intends to grant even though the Mundukuru are mobilizing to have their territorial rights recognized and have been carrying out self-demarcation of their territory.

The Mundukuru who live in the Tapajós River region are in a struggle for the formal recognition of their territory. Currently, one of the main frontiers in the struggle is the demarcation of the territory they have traditionally used and which is known as *Sawré Muyby*. The traditional occupation was confirmed in a report prepared by government technicians. Therefore, the federal government has a constitutional duty to formalize recognition of the territory without delay, so that the Mundukuru who live there have their future survival guaranteed.

But that same government has not complied with either national legislation or international treaties on indigenous rights. There is a very clear reason for its actions. The territory that the Mundukuru want to preserve for their children's future falls within an area which will be seriously affected by the largest hydropower plant that the

Brazilian government has planned for the coming years: the Tapajós hydropower complex. This hydropower complex would flood large areas of indigenous territory, making it impossible for the Munduruku to continue living there. The economic-financial interests behind this multi-billion dollar project, justified by the government as necessary for the "development" of the country, seek to prevail over the interests of the Mundukuru.

In 2014, in a clear attempt to intimidate the Mundukuru and suppress their resistance movement even further, the federal government announced it would auction forestry concessions in the national forests Itaituba I and II to private logging companies. The concept of forestry concessions is a relatively new instrument in Brazil introduced by the federal government. They promised not to repeat the same mistakes and problems that have been experienced in other countries, by ensuring they listen to local peoples, by introducing social and environmental guarantees, and bringing "development" to the region while maintaining forest conservation (1).

However, as the case of the Mundukuru demonstrates, implementation of the instrument of forestry concessions does not fulfill any of these promises. It appears to be applied mainly to attend to certain political and economic interests and in clear violation of these peoples' collective rights. In an open letter, the Mundukuru peoples ask, "Could government authorities and the federal justice system agree to hand out concessions that will destroy part of our native land? They confirm that villages are located near the border of concessions and that the forests that are to be logged are important to their people, for fishing, hunting and agriculture activities. (2)

The Public Federal Ministry (MPF) of Pará gave its support to the Mundukuru, taking legal action in March 2015 in which it calls on the Brazilian judiciary to suspend the tender which would grant logging concessions affecting the Mundukuru. The MPF argues that the "call for tender ignored information from its own management plan that states there are indigenous and non-indigenous families and archaeological sites in these areas." The MPF also argues that "one of the omissions of the call for tender is the reference to the Sawré Muybu land management plan, land traditionally occupied by the indigenous Munduruku peoples. The process of demarcation of this particular area has been dragging on for 14 years and was paralyzed inexplicably in 2013, when almost all administrative procedures were already completed." In another dispute with the Brazilian judiciary, the MPF requests that the federal government conclude the demarcation of this territory. (3)

Finally, it is important to remember that the federal government announcement that it would issue permits to exploit wood that would affect the Mundukuru was made shortly after the Mundukuru began self-demarcation of the Sawré Muyby territory. Tired of waiting for the federal government, they decided to organize and enter the forests and carry out the demarcation of the territory on their own. That tactic has been practiced by many indigenous peoples faced with government delays in ensuring their rights.

In an open letter, the Mundukuru write: "In the Tapajós region, while every day more and more forests are killed, loggers invade Reserves and National Parks, even on the land that we have been demarcating ourselves, and while there is an increase in the number of gold miners killing the Tapajós River, opposite the Amazon National Park, the government busies itself attacking the Munduruku, denying our right to traditional

lands, rather than exercising its obligation to protect the environment which belongs to all Brazilians. If they think we're going to give up the fight for our land, for the protection of forests and of all beings living within them, the struggle for the future of our children, they are wrong. We remain united and strengthened by the wisdom of our shamans and “caciques” [traditional leaders], and by the union with nature and the spirits that the Karosakaybu [the Mundukuru gods] taught us” (4).

Watch the documentary "Munduruku: Weaving Resistance" in <https://vimeo.com/112230009>

- (1) <http://www.ipam.org.br/uploads/conteudos/fbb5e4f19476726c709621762f95267d45216837.pdf>.
- (2) <https://autodemarcacaonotapajos.wordpress.com/2014/11/24/carta-ii-da-autodemarcacao/>
- (3) <http://www.prpa.mpf.mp.br/news/2015/mpf-pede-suspensao-da-concessao-das-florestas-nacionais-itaituba-i-e-ii>
- (4) <https://autodemarcacaonotapajos.wordpress.com/2014/11/24/carta-ii-da-autodemarcacao/>

PEOPLES IN ACTION

Plantations are not forests!

In September 2015, the UN Organization for Food and Agriculture (FAO) will held the World Forestry Congress in Durban, South Africa, on the “Sustainable Future” of the world’s forests. Policy makers will also attend this meeting, controlled by the timber industry. The FAO definition of forests used in the UN climate negotiations opens the door to the destruction of forests by allowing their replacement with industrial tree plantations. Forests are home to a priceless biodiversity and as such support a myriad of life forms, including not just flora and fauna but the millions of people who depend on them too. Support the petition to be delivered in the World Forestry Congress to challenge the FAO definition. You can sign up here:

<https://www.rainforest-rescue.org/petitions/1013/tell-the-united-nations-plantations-are-crops-not-forests>

Blood Timber: How Europe played a significant role in funding war in Central African Republic

In 2013, the Central African Republic was plunged into a conflict that has cost over 5,000 lives and displaced more than a million people. When the insurgent group Seleka seized power in a bloody coup d’état, Seleka rebels were dispatched to the country’s rainforests. Here they struck lucrative deals with logging companies that helped bankroll a fierce campaign of violence against the country’s population. The NGO Global Witness carried out an investigation which revealed how these logging companies have paid millions of euros into the hands of rebels guilty of mass murder, kidnappings, rapes and the forced recruitment of child soldiers. Urgent action is required to cut trade and aid ties to Central African Republic’s logging companies that have paid millions to militia guilty of mass murder and war crimes. See further (in English and French): <https://www.globalwitness.org/reports/bloodtimber/>

Large-scale logging in the Democratic Republic of Congo

A video from the NGO Global Witness, who visited many communities in DRC directly impacted by the logging industry, shows the reality of these concessions on the ground. Mostly, the same story repeated itself. Communities have had no positive effects since logging companies started operating, resources they depend upon have become scarce and rivers are drying up, while promises of developmental projects and employment have vanished. “We have no voice. We are like people who are already sold”, sates one person in the video. Besides, the communities resisting the logging operations have confronted conflicts and violence from security forces. See the video at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxn5jfgED1w>

RECOMMENDED

Indonesia’s Forest Law criminalizes Indigenous and local communities

Hundreds of people are detained in Indonesia for having claimed their rights on their land, forests and other resources while resisting eviction and land grabs. The reality is that Indonesia’s Forest Law on Prevention and Eradication of Forest Destruction, ostensibly intended to protect the forests from organized crime and illegal logging, is instead being used to criminalize Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Few have the monetary resources necessary to defend their rights against powerful and sometimes corrupt interests that seek to control Indonesia’s forests, the same land where many have lived off and protected for generations. See full article (in English) at:

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/08/16/how-indonesian-forest-law-being-used-against-poor-people.html#sthash.i7NsgXxn.dpuf>

Women in logging campsites: muted abuse

An investigation focused on the river port of Pucallpa, Ucayali, in the Peruvian Amazon, reveals that women serving in the bars around the harbor and those dedicated to the work in logging camp kitchens (legal and illegal) have been continuously sexually exploited, and many of them are also victims of sex trafficking. The author Jaris Mujica, of the Catholic University of Peru, reconstructs the patterns and the cyclical reproduction of these types of exploitation, framed by a background of more structural exploitation. Read the article (in Spanish) here:

<http://revistas.pucp.edu.pe/index.php/antropologica/article/view/11330/11839>

Community-based Forest Management in the Congo Basin

A report from the Rainforest Foundation UK, shows how attempts of community based forest management in the Congo Basin thus far have not been able to transfer meaningful rights or benefits to local communities. Only around 1% of the total Congo Basin is under the formal control or management of local communities while industrial-scale logging represents by far the biggest land use in the region. Evidence strongly suggests that the best outcomes emerge where community forest policies are grounded in widely recognised, legally-enforced and secure rights which allow communities themselves to establish and enforce rules governing the access and use of forests. This report shows that customary systems in the Congo Basin have remained generally stable and resilient to colonial forces and the extractive industries – and should be recognised as valid forms of forest management in their own right. The report finds that there is however still much to play for as ‘new approaches’ emerge in international policy-making. See full report in English here:

<http://www.mappingforrights.org/files/37803%20RFUK%20CBFM%20report%202014%20Online.pdf>

Timber business over Cambodia's "protected" forests

Ancient forests are being lost at an "unprecedented" rate from protected lands in Cambodia, according to a new report from the group Forest Trends. The Cambodian government has in recent years granted what are termed Economic Land Concessions (ELC) to large agri-business companies who want to develop the land. Under the guise of creating a rubber plantation for instance, the trees are cleared and exported. With an ELC licence, companies can clear cut the forest stating that they will plant something but on many occasions, the plantations never materialise. Read full article (in English) at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-33702814>

Impacts of industrial logging concessions in Africa's rainforests

Most of the Congo Basin's forests have been divided up into concessions, conservation areas and community use, with most of Central Africa's forests being under industrial forest concessions. Forest-dependant communities have been totally excluded from decision-making processes. Zoning, in the way it is currently implemented, is potentially creating future legal and social conflict by ignoring pre-existing forest use and management patterns that are far more complex and nuanced than "logging", "conservation" and "community use". Read full report (in English and in French) here: <http://www.forestsmonitor.org/en/reports/551571>

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