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Communities resisting the devastating consumption pushed by corporations



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OUR VIEWPOINT



Corporate Consumption: What companies are hiding behind their discourse on sustainability



We already know that excessive levels of individual consumption, resulting from the capitalist economic system, involve massive destruction of territories, water sources, forests and the livelihoods of millions of people—mainly in the global South. In many people's minds, individual consumerism is what fuels this major destruction. However, in this bulletin we do not focus on individual consumerism, though it is surely important. Rather, we probe into what is behind industrial production processes. Seeking to answer this question, we identify another kind of consumption, one that is **massive and destructive: corporate consumption**. The capitalist economic model itself necessitates this systematic consumption. Because of its impacts, corporations seek to hide this consumption through public relations and advertising. Corporate or industrial consumption also reveals just how central consumption is to the accumulation of capital.

One article, for example, addresses pulp producers and exporters in Espírito Santo, Brazil. In addition to planting millions of hectares of eucalyptus in forests and community territories, these companies **are monopolizing the region's water supply** for their factories and associated industries, causing serious social and environmental impacts. Two other articles in the bulletin warn us how **public policies can also facilitate the domination of corporate consumption**. One article focuses on the meat production industry—a major cause of **deforestation and land grabbing**—, which has influenced subsidy and trade agreement policies for its own benefit, leading to a global increase in meat consumption. Another article points to the European Union's agrofuel policy as a driver of palm oil consumption in the region, causing the **destruction of tropical forests** on an alarming scale.

In the face of incessant corporate consumption and its associated destruction, affected communities—together with international networks—have given visibility and publicly denounced it as well as their resistance struggles. Since bad publicity can interfere with sales and drive away investors and lenders, companies and their allies have been forced to react.

Nowadays, the most destructive companies, with the help of large conservation NGOs, can obtain "green labels"; or they can finance "offset" projects, which theoretically restore lost biodiversity or counteract emissions. Every year, corporations spend trillions of dollars on advertising campaigns, public relations and lobbying activities. Their current strategy is to sell the idea that production and industrial consumption are "sustainable" or "green."

In this vein, an article on the OLAM International palm company exposes how, among other things, **certification processes actually benefit companies** and reinforce a model based on constant consumption. Another article on illegal logging in Papua New Guinea discusses how, despite existing regulatory policies, illegal timber—which involves criminalization and dispossession of forest peoples—has managed to enter the United States, Japanese and European Union markets.

In the face of this trend to sell polluters as "green" companies, people continue putting up a strong resistance. In this bulletin we present four examples of resistance that expose the destruction that industrial production and consumption processes cause: the Ngäbe-Buglé indigenous peoples of Panama, who have managed to **prohibit all mining**



and hydroelectric activity in their territories; the indigenous people—and in particular, women—of Sarayaku in the Ecuadorian Amazon, who for over 15 years have been **fighting to keep oil exploitation out of their forests**; the constant struggle of the Brazilian Small Farmers Movement, who assert that "**producing, selling and consuming healthy foods is a political act of profound resistance to the global order**, and directly challenges the agroindustrial logic promoted by capitalism"; and in Cameroon, **the growing organization of women** against oil palm plantations and their devastating consequences, especially for women.

Capitalist economic logic is based on the continuous accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, which also implies sustained production and consumption. New strategies of presenting corporations with "green labels" or using discourse on sustainability do nothing more than deepen the extractive model, making consumers believe that destruction is being "offset," or that a destructive project can somehow be "sustainable."

One way we can stand in solidarity with the many local struggles, is by directly challenging the capitalist economic model—by rejecting, denouncing and exposing the various corporate strategies that seek to cover up a system of non-stop extraction, pollution and destruction.

Happy reading!

COMMUNITIES RESISTING THE DEVASTATING CONSUMPTION PUSHED BY CORPORATIONS



Water and Pulp: The North's Thirst and the South's Resistance

About fifty years ago, Aracruz Celulose, now called Fibria, replaced original Atlantic Forest with the first fast-growing eucalyptus plantations in the northern part of Espírito Santo State, Brazil (1). Forty years ago, an industrial pulp complex— now owned by Fibria — was installed in the main Tupiniquim indigenous village (Macacos), in Barra



do Riacho, Aracruz district. Now in 2017, drought punishes the remaining villages and families in resistance, and contamination serves as a political weapon to expropriate their territories.

Accessing water is an enormous sacrifice and challenge for the entire region. Rationing is constant. Inhabitants — whether from indigenous territories, other traditional groups like quilombolas (communities tracing their roots back to slaves who escaped captivity), or coastal, farming or fishing communities — are always concerned about water quality, since they live on the outskirts of peri-urban areas with industrial pulp and port facilities.

Because they are connected to the structurally unstable agrochemical industry, large-scale eucalyptus plantations provoke fear and distrust among people who live near them. For their own safety, whenever they can, villagers avoid drinking water from wells and streams that have survived the drought. They witness how the plantation operations require the intense and daily use of herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and fertilizers, and how subcontracted workers and animals are exposed to contamination. In industrial districts, pulp production and export monopolizes the region's water, which is used to supply the three factories and their associated industries (chlorine, peroxide, etc). These facilities use an amount of water equivalent to the entire population's consumption in the metropolitan region of the state's capital, Vitória (1.9 million inhabitants/IBGE, 2016).

Since the late 1960s, the industrial port complex for pulp, and eucalyptus monoculture — which occupies a large portion of the Conceição da Barra, São Mateus, Linhares and Aracruz municipalities — have subjected rivers, streams, springs, lakes and seas to the demands of Northern consumption. In Espírito Santo, one can see the tragic results and effects of this trend: the growing aridity of the climate, the pollution and drying up of water, and the thirst of nature and the people who live there. While exports to the United States and China are increasing, the European consumer market continues to be the main source of Fibria Celulose's profits, financing this company's war for water.

In the global North there is another type of thirst and pollution, one of an existential nature. It involves the manipulation and standardization of desires. In the global North, people are thirsty for more toilet paper and packaging material — packaging carrying, for example, the *greenwashing* FSC label. (2) By mentally habituating people to stratospheric levels of consumption, the so-called Green Economy provides an escape from the boredom and nihilism of the Old World. People believe that water will always be available in one-way PET bottles, that is, in disposable containers.

In the tropical South, the opposite is already occurring. Resistance does not believe in development as the path to good life. And it has many aspirations: it wants to revise and reinvent its historical destiny; it wants to create and try out post-eucalyptus transition technologies; it wants to denounce violations of human rights and nature; and it wants to protect and care for water and life. It cannot live on the margins of its own (unjust) planet, which it shares with the global North. An anti-capitalist counterculture is committed to protecting water and the climate — which are currently threatened by international agreements; financial, economic and technological corporations; and European-style development policies. Without a doubt, the Green Economy has not been designed for people in the global South.



This is the case, for example, in the quilombola territories of Sapê do Norte in Espírito Santo. Surrounded by huge eucalyptus plantations and oil and gas boreholes, the 33 Quilombola communities living there experience and suffer from the disappearance and contamination of their streams and springs, forests and seeds, and fish and hunting possibilities. In 2015, when the State declared a state of public emergency — due to months without rain and a widespread water crisis—Fibria's subcontractors (Plantar, Emflora, and others) were using dozens of agrochemical tankers to extract the little water that remained in the São Domingos River, in order to irrigate their recent eucalyptus plantings. Meanwhile, in the Linharinho quilombo, those who depended on river water could not irrigate their fields and forest gardens or their agroforestry micro-systems, which both provide them with food and income, and protect the riparian vegetation from the criminal invasion of eucalyptus. In their public statement at a CONSEA hearing (National Council for Food and Nutrition Security), in front of the State Government and Federal Public Ministry, Sapezeiro and Joice, members of the Sapê do Norte Quilombola Commission, explained how there was not enough water even to wash their children's clothes, to bathe, or for their animals during the 2015 drought.

In the riverside quilombola community of Angelim do Meio in Conceição da Barra, it has become impossible to access water from the river, ever since the arrival of eucalyptus trees and sugar cane fields that surround them. This is due to massive contamination from agrochemicals, and to constant spillage of waste products from the alcohol and sugar industries that are located in the far North of Espírito Santo. With CONSEA's support, the situation in Angelim do Meio has been denounced since 2014 in reports on violations of the human right to adequate food, in Brasilia and Espírito Santo. Yet in 2017, the situation remains serious. It is a social and environmental crime for which no one has been held to account; because although the community successfully obtained a water storage tank, it still depends on the supply of water from tanks, whether from the municipality or from eucalyptus or sugar cane companies.

Coastal and fishing communities in Linhares are also living with drought and contamination. In between Regência and Povoação districts, the mouth of the Doce River—the main river basin of Espírito Santo — was no longer reaching the Atlantic Ocean shortly before the largest environmental crime in Brazilian history took place. This was in late 2015, when mining company Samarco (owned by BHP and Vale) spilled 40 million liters of toxic sludge into the Doce River. There was once again a state of emergency. Since 2016, hundreds of coastal peoples, fisherfolk, farmers and rural landless workers have been forced to move to less contaminated neighboring regions, where they occupy areas in dispute with Fibria and Petrobras. The State, large companies, the local press and management of public conservation units criminalize them — *these people*, who did not even receive necessary reparations for the successive environmental crimes of Samarco, Fibria and Petrobras!

When Fibria opened its third pulp mill in 2002 in the Barra do Riacho district in Aracruz, the company already perceived a regional water collapse. It also perceived that, due to expanding demand, it had to seek water even further away from its industrial plant. The Caboclo Bernardo Canal — built with a highly suspicious environmental license, inaugurated in a hurry and strongly criticized by social movements, civil society organizations, lawyers, technicians and academic researchers



— began to divert waters from the Doce River to the company, by interconnecting micro-basins to Fibria's industrial water reserve. At that time, the company and governors justified the canal by saying it would supply water to residents of Barra do Riacho and Vila do Riacho, two districts located near the factories and pulp port. Pure charades!

Fifteen years later, in these very districts, water rationing is constant, and the population cannot use the salinized and polluted canal water. Not even the pulp mills can use the contaminated water of the Doce River since the spill from the mine, without first applying a chemical cocktail that brings it up to standards for the machinery, according to reports from workers of the industrial pulp complex itself. Coastal peoples, fisherfolk, landless peasants and the leaders of Barra and Vila do Riacho, also witnessed the massive death of fish in the Caboclo Bernardo Canal in 2016.

Seeking to adapt to the State's water collapse—and to the detriment of the local population's water supply—the company has begun to build very deep and wide artesian wells within its own industrial plant. Indigenous leaders from the village of Tupiniquim de Pau, Brazil, and residents and fisherfolk from Barra do Riacho, fear a worsening of the drought that affects their rivers and streams.

The agroindustrial pulp complex's monopoly on water has caused serious social and environmental impacts throughout the northern region of Espírito Santo. In order to contain a growing upwell of rebellion, the company is using subcontracted state security forces, further exacerbating existing conflicts. Its policy of social responsibility alternates between violent threats of eviction, and manipulation of inter-community conflicts — or in some cases, conflicts within a single community. Modernizing the ecological curse of Aracruz Celulose, the current owner Fibria is confirming the forecast of naturalist Augusto Ruschi, who in the 1960s and 1970s coined the term "green desert" in reference to eucalyptus plantations.

While the global North continues with its rampant consumption of paper, people throughout Espírito Santo are resisting, to defend their territories and protect their water. They are reoccupying traditional lands and reconverting eucalyptus groves into food-producing agroecological gardens; they are bringing back vegetation invaded by monoculture, and implementing agroforestry systems; they are monitoring and denouncing violations of human rights and the rights of nature; they are learning technologies that allow them to live with drought; they are facing violence from private and military police forces; they are setting up camps to take back land. They survived the first 50 years. And they will be there after the company closes its first factory, due to lack of water.

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(1) See more information on the resistance to Aracruz Celulose / Fibria, at:

<http://wrm.org.uy/?s=Fibria+Aracruz>

(2) See more information on plantation certification models at:

<http://wrm.org.uy/browse-by-subject/tree-plantations/certification/>



Manufactured demand: The policy drivers behind the relentless growth of palm oil

In Indonesia, the world's biggest palm oil producer, oil palm plantations expanded ten-fold between 1985 and 2005/06, to 6.4 million hectares, an area which has since doubled to 13.5 million hectares, and which is growing by half a million hectares every year. Globally, oil palm plantations now cover an area larger than New Zealand [1], with major expansions underway across the tropics, including in the Philippines, Cameroon, DR Congo, the Republic of Congo, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil, Honduras, and Guatemala.

Palm oil is the cheapest globally traded vegetable oil [2], and this has made palm oil demand impervious to prices going up or down, unlike palm oil smallholders, whose livelihoods can be destroyed when prices fall. Plantation companies and traders are confident that global palm oil consumption will continue to grow unabated, and there are no reasons to doubt them. Yet the palm oil industry is not simply responding to a growing demand for its products: it has helped to manufacture the unending growth in demand in the first place, in close collaboration with governments and other political actors.

The recent record rate of oil palm expansion correlates with the massive expansion in EU agrofuel use. EU agrofuel policies have been rightly blamed for fuelling the destructive palm oil boom across the tropics, yet the mechanisms by which agrofuels are driving the growth in oil palm plantations are complex. Their impact is further complemented by that of domestic agrofuel policies, especially in Indonesia and by the ongoing "free trade" and pro-agribusiness policies destroying food sovereignty in India, China and elsewhere.

First, let's look at the role of EU agrofuel policies: The EU has long been the world leader in agrodiesel production, which is mostly made from plant oils. In 1997, the EU produced around 475,000 tonnes of agrodiesel, most of it from rapeseed oil produced in Germany. By 2010, EU agrodiesel production had risen to 9.5 million tonnes, and by 2016 to an estimated 13.7 million tonnes [3]. This growth can be solely attributed to subsidies, including targets: The first non-binding agrofuel target was introduced in 2003; in 2005, a Biomass Action Plan was adopted, and in 2009, the EU approved the Renewable Energy Directive which set a 10 per cent agrofuel target by 2020, as well as



a 20 per cent overall renewable energy target, two thirds of which have so far been met from bioenergy, which includes wood as well as agrofuels such as those made from palm oil. Without mandatory targets and subsidies, the EU agrofuels market would collapse.

EU agrofuel policies were the result of concerted lobbying efforts by converging interest groups, ranging from larger European farmers, to car manufacturers (who used agrofuels as a means to avoid stricter car efficiency standards), oil companies investing in agrofuels, and agribusiness.

Between 2000 and 2006, EU palm oil imports doubled for two reasons: The first and main one was that the EU was burning so much rapeseed oil as agrodiesel that it turned from a net exporter to a net importer of that vegetable oil. As a result, the food industry substituted palm for rapeseed oil. Palm oil itself accounted for a negligible 1 per cent of EU agrodiesel in 2006 [5]. Although cheaper than other plant oils, it was not a popular agrodiesel feedstock because palm oil and the agrodiesel made from it solidifies at European winter temperatures, which is bad news for car engines. Secondly, palm oil was becoming a popular source of “renewable” heat and power. In 2007, Germany burned 57 per cent of its palm oil imports, almost one million tonnes, in combined heat and power plants [6], and large amounts were co-fired in Dutch power stations. Following a spike in palm oil prices in 2008 and NGO and activist campaigns winning reforms to subsidies, this particular market for palm oil collapsed in both countries.

As of 2015, some 650,000 tonnes of palm oil were still being burned in heat and power plants [7], most of those probably in Italy, but far more is being used in transport agrofuels. In the same year, 3.35 million tonnes of palm oil were used for cars, and a total of 54 per cent (4 million tonnes) of all EU palm oil imports went towards agrofuels, including for heat and electricity. These figures are conclusive evidence that the EU’s agrofuel sustainability standards have had no effect on agrofuel sourcing or deforestation from palm oil at all: almost all of it comes from Southeast Asia, where palm oil has been the single biggest cause of the accelerating rainforest destruction and emissions from drained and burning peatlands, especially in Indonesia. At the same time, as the earlier trends show, it makes no obvious difference whether the EU burns palm oil or rapeseed oil in cars: both equally cause oil palm expansion, either directly or indirectly.

A key reason for palm oil’s growing popularity with EU agrofuel producers is “technical progress”: In 2007, the Finnish oil company Neste Oil opened the world’s first refinery which produced a new type of agrofuel made from the same feedstocks as agrodiesel: Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO). HVO is refined in oil refineries and HVO diesel is interchangeable with fossil fuel diesel. It overcomes the problem of palm oil freezing in winter. By 2011, Neste Oil had opened three large HVO refineries, using mainly palm oil. Since then, it claims to have shifted most of its HVO production from crude palm oil to ‘wastes and residues’. Yet, an undisclosed proportion of their ‘residues’ is in fact made straight from Crude Palm Oil, which several countries, including Sweden and Germany, rightly classify as virgin palm oil [8]. At least three other European oil companies, Eni, Repsol and Total, are ramping up HVO production from palm oil. Galp Energia, which owns oil palm plantations in Brazil, is also building HVO refining capacity. Worryingly, HVO is the only commercially viable technology for aviation agrofuels [9]. The current push by the aviation industry and the specialist



UN agency ICAO for aviation agrofuels could thus create yet another market for palm oil, though airlines have so far been careful to avoid palm oil, due to fear of bad publicity.

In theory, Europe's virgin vegetable oil demand for agrofuels should eventually level out or even shrink: In 2015, the EU agreed to cap the contribution of land-based agrofuels to 7 per cent of all transport fuels. This is still considerably higher than current agrofuel use, but the European Commission has proposed to gradually reduce the cap to 3.5 per cent by 2030, though agrofuel companies, and no doubt the palm oil industry, will be heavily lobbying against this [10].

In 2016, the EU was for the first time overtaken by Indonesia as the world's biggest palm oil agrofuel user. Thanks to an agrodiesel subsidy introduced in 2015, Indonesia used 6.3 million tonnes of palm oil in cars [12]. Indonesia and the EU together are thus burning around 10.2 million tonnes of palm oil in agrofuels a year, and some other countries, such as Malaysia [13], have started using far smaller quantities themselves. Altogether, around 15 per cent of the world's annual palm oil production of 71.44 million tonnes are thus burned as fuel [14].

Oil palm plantations are rarely established for one particular end use [15]. They are attractive to large investors because they offer many interchangeable markets and uses, both of palm oil itself (used for food, soap, oleochemicals and cosmetics as well as a fuel), and of its byproducts (used as fuel or animal feed).

Agrofuels represent the fastest growing demand for vegetable oil worldwide [16], but the vast majority of those, including palm oil, still goes to food markets, with one third of global palm oil going to India, China and Pakistan. India's vegetable oil imports climbed from 100,000 tonnes a year in the mid-1990s to 15 million tonnes today, up to two thirds of that being palm oil [17]. This was the direct result of India joining the WTO and "liberalising" its edible oil market in the mid-1990s, and of Free Trade Agreements, especially the ASEAN-India agreement which came into force in 2003. Under pressure, first from the World Bank and then from ASEAN countries with strong palm oil lobbies, India abolished all protections for the millions of small farmers whose livelihood depended on growing a variety of domestic vegetable oil crops, at the same time as palm and soya traders stood ready to flood the Indian market with cheap oils [18]. China's palm oil imports, too, can be traced back to the country joining the WTO and subsequently signing a free trade agreement with ASEAN. The Malaysian Palm Oil Board credited the agreement with ASEAN with a 34 per cent increase in palm oil imports between 2005 and 2010, and it credited Pakistan's free trade agreement with Malaysia for doubling Pakistan's palm oil imports from 2007 to 2010 [19]. Similar developments are happening in other countries of the global South, too, with food sovereignty, including over edible oils, being systematically destroyed through trade policies which favour agribusiness interests, including those of the palm oil industry.

As yet, there has been no comprehensive study of the role of the palm oil industry in lobbying for, and shaping, the many different policies worldwide which have, altogether, facilitated the vast and seemingly unending growth of palm oil. Such an analysis would clearly be very worthwhile.

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Biofuel Watch UK, <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/>

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- [2] The palm oil price has been undercut on a few short occasions by that of US soybean oil, but not by soybean oil in general: apps.fas.usda.gov/psdonline/circulars/oilseeds.pdf
- [3] See report A Foreseeable Disaster, tni.org/files/download/hotl-agrofuels.pdf and a 2016 GAIN report on EU, gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Biofuels%20Annual_The%20Hague_EU-28_6-29-2016.pdf – note that the 2013 and 2016 figures include HVO, too.
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- [13] See a 2016 GAIN report on Malaysia, gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Biofuels%20Annual_Kuala%20Lumpur_Malaysia_7-27-2016.pdf
- [14] USDA, Oilseeds: World Markets and Trade, apps.fas.usda.gov/psdonline/circulars/oilseeds.pdf - Note that this 2016/17 figure includes Crude Palm Oil and Palm Kernel Oil
- [15] See report A Foreseeable Disaster, tni.org/files/download/hotl-agrofuels.pdf
- [16] Markets and Markets, 2017, Global Vegetable Oil Market, <http://www.marketsandmarkets.com/PressReleases/oil.asp>
- [17] Index Mundi indexmundi.com/agriculture/?commodity=palm-oil&graph=imports, AND Business Line, 2017, Vegetable oil imports projected at 150 lakh tonnes in 2016-17, thehindubusinessline.com/economy/agri-business/oil/article9349762.ece
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Meat & markets: pushing industrial meat everywhere

Meat consumption is soaring in many places of the world. If current trends continue global meat consumption will grow a further 76 per cent by 2050 according to the latest studies. Doctors and scientists have been warning us that eating too much meat is bad for our health and is linked to several types of cancer, heart diseases and other problems. This is also bad news for the environment with commercial cattle raising responsible for a large share of deforestation across the world. And it's hurting the climate as well. The FAO calculated that, today, meat production alone – especially that of the industrial type - generates more greenhouse gas emissions than all the world's transport combined. If, on the other hand, heavy eaters of industrial meat kept their level of consumption to the World Health Organization's recommended amounts, the world could reduce 40 per cent of all current greenhouse gas emissions.

So why is meat consumption increasing so much beyond sustainable and healthy levels? The most common narrative explains to us that this is because the growing middle class in many newly industrialising countries can now afford to eat more meat and thus jump on the opportunity. Indeed, the projected growth of meat consumption is especially stark in countries like China, Brazil, India and other countries in their regions. But that is only part of the story.

On the production side, not all meat is being produced the same way. Industrial meat produced on corporate farms is the most rapidly growing segment of meat and dairy production accounting for 80 per cent of the global growth in recent years. This is especially the case for pigs and poultry production which has been falling under corporate control at tremendous speed. Industrial meat production has become a driving force behind the increased consumption as it is based on the highly concentrated production of cheap meat surpluses which are traded as global commodities and forced onto markets everywhere.

Propping up the corporate meat market

So why can industrial meat be produced so cheaply and expand so fast across the globe? Confinement at high stocking density is one part of a systematic effort to produce the highest output at the lowest cost. Yet, at least three key structural factors are at play



here: the corporations are fighting off any regulation of their sector, industrial meat is highly subsidised, and trade deals are signed to get it to expand massively into markets across the globe.

When Germany drafted guidelines to reduce meat consumption, demonstrating that a 50 per cent cut by 2030 would be “crucial to climate protection,” the industry lobbied. Hard. By the November 2016 launch date, the country’s climate change plan had been gutted, and stripped of any reference at all to greenhouse gases in the agriculture sector. Similar stories can be told of the meat lobby in the United States (US), Brazil and other countries where industrial meat is strong.

Despite their opposition to certain kinds of regulation, the industry is very happy to suck at the teat of government subsidy. In 2013, OECD countries dished out US 53 billion dollars to livestock producers, with the European Union (EU) paying US 731 million dollars to its cattle industry alone. The same year, the US Department of Agriculture paid more than US 300 million dollars to just 6 huge meat companies (starting with Tyson Foods) in order to get meat and dairy on school meal trays, compared to just a fraction of that to fruit and vegetable suppliers. Indeed, almost two thirds of all US farm subsidies go to meat and dairy, much of it through subsidised animal feed. Without subsidies, and without the possibility of dismissing the environmental and social costs and impacts caused by the corporations, industrial meat would simply be too expensive to buy.

But the big guns in the industry's arsenal are “free trade” agreements. These corporate trade deals artificially prop up production and consumption by promoting the dumping of cheap meat and dairy into low income countries. They include clauses that eliminate protection for local farmers from foreign competitors, that make it illegal to grant preference to local suppliers or products, and that make government regulations subject to investor-state dispute settlement under which a foreign company can sue governments that adopt social or environmental legislation that they think undermines their profits.

How free trade agreements drive the expansion of industrial meat and dairy

- By forcing tariffs to go down in the last “protected” markets. This is very much a threat in countries where tariffs are still in place to protect local farmers from foreign competitors, or where farmers benefit from subsidies and other price distorting mechanisms. This includes low income countries like India, which is now facing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) trade deal. RCEP will have a big impact on India's meat and dairy sector, forcing it to open it up to imports from Australia and New Zealand: 70 million dairy farmers in India alone face immediate import threats from these commercial livestock powerhouses. But tariffs are also an issue in the high income countries negotiating the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) agreement, which aims to open the EU to more beef imports from the US, as well as those involved in Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), in which US corporate access to meat and dairy consumers in Japan, Canada and Mexico, in particular, was paramount for US negotiators.
- By making local preferences illegal. Granting preference to local suppliers or



products becomes flatly illegal under pending deals like TTIP or TPP. "Going local" is at the very heart of common sense strategies to support small farmers and reverse climate change by addressing the ways in which we produce, distribute and access food. Yet this becomes impossible under today's trade deals—and subject to very harsh penalties. Even with some of these negotiations and agreements being in murky waters now due to turbulence from Brexit (the UK leaving the European Union), US right-wing president Trump and other nationalistic tendencies, it is clear that the corporate interests behind these deals will continue to advance.

- By imposing regulatory harmonisation between the trade agreement signatories in order to open markets further, and subjecting those openings to "standstill" and "ratchet" clauses. The standstill clause freezes a country's level of regulation in particular sectors when the country signs it. That means it can only "de"-regulate from that point forward, i.e. it cannot adopt new or additional regulations as it deems necessary. The ratchet clause means that once a country takes steps to liberalise and open its market, it can never go back. So, an action taken by one government in power—e.g. to open up to factory-farmed meat imports—cannot be reversed by a new administration coming to power, thus gutting democratic processes for climate action.
- By making environmental regulations subject to investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS). This means that if a country signs a typical investment agreement with ISDS in it, a foreign company can sue the government if it adopts a public interest policy measure that might impinge on that company's anticipated profits. For example, if a government raises taxes on meat consumption, this measure could be challenged under ISDS by the meat industry. The threat of this outcome alone, in which compensation awards typically run into the hundreds of millions of dollars, has been shown to scare policy makers away from environmental or social policies.

All this prop up production and consumption by promoting the dumping of cheap meat and dairy into low income countries. This is not only killing local livelihoods, it is also killing our health, especially of those who cannot afford to get any other source of meat or it is not even available, and our climate.

We urgently need to reverse the push for global meat and dairy "value chains" as enshrined in big trade agreements between major trading blocks, get rid of the subsidies to industrial meat, and get the industry to take responsibility for the environmental and social damage they create. We need to recognise this and redirect both investment and policy support to local, national and regional markets for sustainably produced livestock by small scale farmers.

GRAIN, www.grain.org

This article is based on (full references and sources for the figures quoted in this article can be found here):

- [*Grabbing the bull by the horn: it's time to cut industrial meat and dairy to save the climate*](#) – GRAIN
- [*The Global Dangers of Industrial Meat*](#) – GRAIN & Raj Patel, in [*Civil Eats*](#).



Laundering illegal timber: How tropical wood stolen through land grab makes its way to the furniture store

In 2013, with 3.1 million cubic meters of tropical wood exported, primarily to China, Papua New Guinea (PNG) became in recent years the world's largest exporter of tropical wood, surpassing Malaysia, which had held the top spot for the past decades.

PNG reached the coveted first place after expanding the exploitation of its forest resources through a legal mechanism called Special Agriculture and Business Leases (SABLs). According to a government Commission of Inquiry, most SABLs lack the free, prior, and informed consent of the local people, and involve fraud, misconduct, and incompetence (1). In September 2013, PNG's Prime Minister stated that the scheme "revealed a shocking trend of corruption and mismanagement in all stages in the process," (2) and later announced that all these deals should be considered illegal and be canceled (3). Yet, to date, the government has not taken any decisive action to cancel deceptive land deals, stop illegal logging, or return land to rightful owners.

SABLs are just the tip of the iceberg. The 5.5 million hectares leased under SABLs in recent years come in addition to 10 million hectares already allocated by the government as logging concessions (4). This means that more than one third of the country's 46 million hectares is now in the hands of foreign logging firms, mostly from Malaysia.

According to many investigations by both official bodies and non-governmental organizations, most of these concessions appear to be illegal too. A 2006 review of the logging industry commissioned by the PNG government found that "the majority of forestry operations cannot credibly be characterized as complying with national laws and regulations and are therefore unlawful." (5) It revealed that the PNG Forest Authority is flawed, with major deficiencies and widespread corruption (6), and that the "industry is allowed to ignore PNG laws and in fact gains preferential treatment in many cases, while the rural poor are left to suffer the social and environmental consequences of an industry that operates largely outside the regulatory system." (7) A



government-commissioned assessment of 14 logging operations—including the five largest operations—concluded that none could be defined as legal, and only one operation met more than 50 percent of key criteria for lawful logging operations in PNG. (8)

This plundering of PNG forests is taking place in a country that supposedly enjoys the most equal distribution of land on earth, with 97 percent of land that is customary, i.e. managed collectively by tribes and clans. The country is governed by a constitution that protects people's customary land rights, natural resources and the environment. As documented in the Oakland Institute's film and report *On Our Land*, (9) logging in PNG obscures a multilayered tragedy of the betrayal of people's constitutional protections and the loss of cultural heritage, land, and livelihoods for millions of Papua New Guineans.

As in many other countries in the global South, local communities who oppose the theft of their land and resources are under heavy pressure. They face intimidation, beatings, arrests, and legal actions. Police forces often work on behalf of the loggers and travel in company vehicles. On multiple occasions, locals attempting to prevent the logging operations through roadblocks and peaceful protests have been arrested, beaten up and taken away, sometimes to far away detention places.

The illegality of logging activities and the criminalization of people protecting their territories and forests does not prevent the timber harvested from entering the legal markets. Export inspections only verify the quantity and description of the timber so that export taxes can be paid; no connection is made between the legal documentation of wood products and the illegal nature of most logging operations in PNG. (10) Once loaded on a ship, the illegally harvested timber becomes legal with shipping documents endorsed by local customs.

PNG is one of the countries identified in a November 2012 UNEP-INTERPOL report as a major exporter of illegal timber that is then laundered through global laundering operations. After a review of logging operations taking place in the Amazon basin, Central Africa, and Asia-Pacific, the report contends that "illegal logging is not on the decline, rather it is becoming more advanced as cartels become better organized." (11) The illegal timber business is highly lucrative with economic value of global illegal logging estimated to be between US 30 and 100 billion dollars. (12)

China is a central player in this global scheme. It is the number one importer, exporter, and consumer of illegal timber in the world. (13) Between 2010 and 2014, the amount of tropical timber imported by China increased from 34 to 51 million cubic meters, for a value that rose from US 2.4 to US 5.5 billion dollars. (14) Illegal wood is used in the country but also processed and exported as furniture, parts, floors, etc... Since 2005, it has become the world's largest exporter of wooden furniture and parts, and its market share keeps growing. The value of Chinese wooden furniture and parts exports was US 16.3 billion dollars in 2010, a jump of 35 per cent from the previous year. (15) It reached US 19.4 billion dollars in 2013, an increased of nearly 20 per cent compared to 2010. (16)

China is the destination of over 90 percent of PNG's timber exports (17), but it imports also significant supplies from other countries such as Mozambique, Benin, Ghana,



Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, and Lao PDR (18). According to the International Tropical Timber Organization, “a significant proportion of China’s tropical log imports are currently deemed to be from high risk regions with limited legality documentation.” (19)

The other key players are the main importing countries: the US is China’s biggest market for wood furniture exports, with close to US 7 billion dollars of imports in 2013 - 35 per cent of China’s exports. (20) Japan and the United Kingdom are the second and third importers of made in China wood furniture, with close to US 1 billion dollars of imports each (totaling 12 per cent of China’s exports). (21)

Given that China is the largest importer of illegally harvested timber in PNG and other countries (22), the wood is likely used as a large share of Chinese wood products exports, and makes it way as laundered ‘Made in China’ products to the US, Japan and the EU (23).

The US and the EU have established policies intended to prevent illegal wood from entering their markets, with the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) that came into effect in March 2013 and the US Lacey Act 2008. China, on the other hand, has not yet taken legal action to explicitly prohibit trade in illegal timber (24).

Nonetheless, despite US and EU policies, INTERPOL confirms the two among the main importers of illegal wood. INTERPOL recognizes myriad laundering systems that are used to make illegal timber appear legal, including falsification of eco-certification, falsification of origin and ownership documents, funneling large volumes of illegal wood through legal plantations, mixing illegal timber with legal timber during timber processing, and bribing customs officials, forest officials, police, military, or local villages. (25) Once illegal timber has been laundered, it can enter legally developed countries’ markets and retail stores.

Yet, given the pervasiveness of illegal timber on the Chinese market, it is highly questionable whether any wood product from China should be accepted under the Lacey Act or the EUTR. China being the main trader of illegal timber in the world, wood products from China should be classified as high risk and be rejected in the absence of solid evidence of legality and adequate documentation. On the other hand, the continuous consumption of “tropical wood” should also be questioned, as it is the forest-dependent peoples who bear the heaviest impacts of this timber extraction.

Consumers around the world must be aware before buying a new mahogany kitchen table or a merbau floor that whatever the salesman may say, these may come from a forest grabbed from indigenous communities who relied on these very resources for their survival and risked their lives to defend them.

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Further information:

Reports and film on Papua New Guinea:

On Our Land: Modern Land Grabs Reversing Independence in Papua New Guinea



<https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/our-land-modern-land-grabs-reversing-independence-papua-new-guinea>

The Great Timber Heist: The Logging Industry in Papua New Guinea

<https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/great-timber-heist-logging-industry-papua-new-guinea>

Taking On the Logging Pirates: Land Defenders in Papua New Guinea Speak Out!

<https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/illegal-logging-papua-new-guinea-speak-out-palm-oil-corruption>

Watch the film On Our Land: <https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/on-our-land-full-film>

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“Green” oil palm plantations are a scam: The case of OLAM

How do major oil palm companies manage to get their palm oil sold as a “green”, “sustainable” and “climate-friendly” product when it is none of that? How does this green image help corporations to expand even further, as is happening now in Africa? This article looks into the case of OLAM International, which in February 2017 published its Draft Global Policy on Forests (1). OLAM's promising words are merely a smokescreen around what is still its main objective: increasing profits.

Have oil palm companies changed?

That is what they want us to believe. If we look at OLAM’s Draft Global Policy on Forests, it says: “OLAM’s core purpose is to grow responsibly, in order to provide the world with its essential needs”. It expresses concern about providing “food security” to “the expected 9 billion people who will inhabit our planet by 2050”, and the need for “long-term employment” and “livelihood opportunities in rural areas”. At first glance, the policy looks more like a document written by a charity or state institution than a transnational corporation, raising the question: has OLAM changed?

Such a transformation would require OLAM to no longer have as its priority the maximizing of profits for its main owners – the investment company Temasek holdings



(52.3%) from Singapore and the Mitsubishi corporation (20.3%) from Japan. But looking at the “director’s statement” of its 2015 annual report, it becomes clear that no such change has transpired. There is no reference to the sake of the aforementioned 9 billion people expected to inhabit our planet by 2050, but rather only a concern about the company's “well-being and prosperity”, which involve “market competitiveness, quality of returns, business growth and productivity growth”. (2)

The only real change is with OLAM's public discourse. This change is a direct **result of the many struggles of local communities and their supporters in giving visibility to the increasing evidence of the negative impacts of large-scale, industrial monoculture oil palm plantations**. Deforestation, environmental contamination and invasion of people’s territories have affected the image of companies like OLAM towards consumers of palm oil and the banks that finance their business. A bad image could eventually interfere with OLAM's sales and its capacity to attract loans, and thus threaten its core purpose of business growth and profits.

Companies were forced to do something. Nowadays, almost all oil palm companies have “sustainability” divisions and engage in processes and commitments that claim to tackle the problems they create, especially deforestation. OLAM’s Draft Global Policy on Forests lists several initiatives and principles they intend to adhere to, such as the certification system Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) (3), the concepts of High Conservation Value (HCV) forests and High Carbon Stock (HCS) forests, as well as the Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) Principle.

Next question then: do these processes and commitments make any substantial difference for communities on the ground? We argue they do not and are thus convenient for the companies. First, these commitments, discussed in air-conditioned conference rooms, far away from the reality of communities surrounded by monoculture plantation areas, are not binding but voluntary. Second, companies exercise significant control over certification schemes – heavily promoted by some NGOs like WWF - and are able to ensure that these schemes do not have any significant impact on their operations, such as with the RSPO, where companies from the oil palm sector constitute the vast majority of the members. And third, none of these commitments require changes to the model of large-scale monoculture production. Many studies from around the world (4) show that inherent to this model is the large-scale occupation of well-located, obviously fertile and thus, most often, community lands. Pursuing this model necessarily leads to deforestation. A recent report produced by the US-based NGO Mighty Earth, in collaboration with the Gabonese NGO Brainforest, shows that OLAM, an RSPO-certified company, has cleared about 20,000 hectares of forests in Gabon across its four concession areas since 2012. (5)

Additional loopholes that benefit OLAM

Looking at OLAM’s Draft Global Policy on Forests, one can identify additional ways of how the company, with some clever wording, can claim it adheres to commitments on paper without changing much in practice.

One has to consider the profound, unequal power relations between communities and companies in order to understand why communities in Gabon do not have the same



voice and influence as OLAM in the so-called “multi-stakeholder processes” that OLAM claims to follow in its policies. For example::

- OLAM commits itself to protect community “rights”. Is the company really intending to respect and recognize the customary land rights of communities, and thus prevent most of the problems associated with industrial oil palm expansion? Obviously not. OLAM only refers to the right to “Free, Prior and Informed Consent of local people”. This is a strong principle on paper, but it becomes a lot weaker if one considers the local context. In Gabon, OLAM not only has the support of the government - something common for oil palm companies in most countries – but the Gabonese state itself is a shareholder in OLAM Gabon, and President Ali Bongo himself is a strong supporter of OLAM's oil palm business in the country. His authoritarian regime has the power to appoint and control local political representatives at the village level. As a result, OLAM, in collaboration with local authorities, can use power structures to silence opposition from the affected communities. In this context, FPIC is a useless tool for communities to defend their territories.
- OLAM is committed to “multi-stakeholder processes” like RSPO certification. This is also convenient for OLAM because there are a number of loopholes that ensure that OLAM can control the process in its favour. For instance, the companies themselves hire the consultants that carry out the so-called “independent” certification audits. Also, even if one argues that RSPO has a complaint mechanism in place, these are highly complex for communities to access and use. If they do succeed, often with outside support, it is hard for them to achieve a positive outcome. According to Jefri Saragih from Sawitwatch, an Indonesian NGO supporting communities affected by industrial oil palm plantations and with experience in assisting them to file RSPO complaints: “With over 50 cases unresolved, it is fair to say that the RSPO has been unable to address the many negative impacts caused by large scale oil palm plantations. From a social perspective, we can see that today there are over 40 cases that have been submitted to the RSPO Secretariat and that have not been resolved.” (6) RSPO is thus more of a marketing tool to protect OLAM’s palm oil exports and profits.
OLAM is committed to no deforestation of High Conservation Value and High Carbon Stock forest. But who defines what HCV and HCS forests are? Certainly not communities. These are defined by specialized consultants, companies and especially conservation NGOs. Communities mostly argue that all their customary land is important for them, independent of how much or less “carbon” or “conservation value” is given to a particular area. Even those lands classified by consultants as “degraded forests” are important to communities.
- OLAM is committed to food security. “Food Security” is an attractive concept for companies like OLAM because it is not about who controls food production or how and what will be produced. These essential questions are part of another much broader and more political concept defended globally by major peasant movements like *La Via Campesina*: food sovereignty. The concept of food sovereignty is absent in corporate “sustainability” policy documents because the practice of corporations is to increasingly take over and control peasant lands, food markets and chains to increase their growth and profits. OLAM, for



example, has a program called GRAINE, which promises to increase food production in Gabon. Although this sounds good and obviously promotes OLAM's image, most of what the program has been doing on the ground in Gabon so far is to develop industrial oil palm plantations on people's lands. (7)

If not the companies, who or what has changed?

In the past, many social and environmental NGOs, especially Northern, were busy denouncing and doing actions against tropical deforestation, like calling for boycotts of tropical timber. Nowadays, however, an important number of them are sitting around the table with agribusiness companies to discuss certification mechanisms, principles, criteria, policies, safeguards for communities and forests, high conservation and carbon stock forests, etc., sometimes with funding from these corporations.

This change in the way NGOs are working has benefited the companies and most often weakened community struggles. It has, on the one hand, created division among NGOs and, on the other, it has given legitimacy to corporate "sustainability" commitments. Companies can now say "we have support from the NGOs". For example, the aforementioned NGO Mighty Earth that first denounced OLAM in December 2016 for deforestation of 20,000 hectares, negotiated an agreement with the company soon after, in February 2017, where both parties declared they would "collaborate on forest conservation and sustainable agriculture" in "Gabon and other highly forested countries". The agreement was facilitated by another NGO, the World Resources Institute (WRI), and negotiated in Washington D.C., US, far away from the people of Gabon. (8)

Another consequence at the local level from this type of engagement by NGOs, especially international NGOs, is that these NGOs usually push and influence communities and community-supporting groups and activists, in a top-down way, towards engaging with the companies as the best way forward. Many communities and supporting groups and activists –instead of spending their precious time in strengthening the capacities of local organizations to mount increasingly difficult resistance struggles- are pushed to monitor companies' commitments or engage in "multi-stakeholder events". Those local organisations that do nevertheless prioritise grassroots organising usually face intimidation.

An example happened recently at OLAM's Gabon plantations. The Gabonese NGOs *Muyissi* environment and *Brainforest*, together with a platform of NGOs called *Gabon Ma Terra Mon Droit* and African and international activist groups, organized a workshop where OLAM affected communities could come together to increase their understanding about OLAM and its impacts, and exchange experiences with other activists from African countries affected by plantations. After this workshop, the director of a local NGO and community leaders were intimidated by local authorities, receiving the message that they needed to stop organizing such events and organizing the communities. (9)

Greenwashing to expand business

There are an increasing number of products with certificates, such as RSPO, that promise consumers that they do not harm the environment or communities. They give



the false impression that everything is good with our globalized production and consumption model. This is profoundly wrong. Today's excessive production and consumption has to be reduced and limited but **certification schemes by and for the corporate sector do nothing to address this.**

On the contrary, the RSPO seal, for example, supposedly *guarantees* that the palm oil used in several products is “sustainable” but in reality it is about opening market shares to the corporations that created the seal. “Sustainable” production and consumption, according to the RSPO, is about increasing production and consumption, about getting a bigger market share, in partnership with multinational corporations. In fact, in its 2015 review, RSPO mostly writes about an “increase” in palm oil: increasing the RSPO membership by 20%; increasing its palm oil growers by 6%; increasing 100% sustainable palm oil in 10 European countries so that “all of Europe’s palm oil is sustainable by 2020”; and increasing the consumption of RSPO certified palm oil by 10% in the mega-market of China by 2020. RSPO ends its overview stating that RSPO is about “transforming markets to make sustainable palm oil the norm in any country”. (10) So, RSPO is not about transforming a heavily concentrated and unequal production model that provides cheap vegetable oil for the junk food industry into a localized model of small-scale produced vegetable oil according to agroecological and social justice principles. **RSPO is simply about increasing the share of RSPO palm oil and the safeguarding of corporate profits.** This also explains why RSPO organized an “African Road Show” that stopped in Gabon in 2012 (11).

Without changing the large-scale monoculture model, schemes like RSPO will continue selling a false message. They argue that large-scale oil palm monocultures could be, as OLAM says in its policy, “sustainable”, something you can “grow responsibly” and that can “coexist” with the “wellbeing of communities”. When consumers and banks buy this message, companies can expand their palm oil business while, at the same time, oppress those communities struggling against the now so-called “sustainable” companies.

Challenges ahead

So, what can be done to work towards structural change and to reduce unequal power relations?

Communities need support. International, national and local groups and activists must continue giving priority to supporting and strengthening the organizational capacity of communities and their struggles; create networking and exchanges between communities in and between countries and continents, in order to strengthen a global movement of struggles against a profit-driven model that is destructive for the well-being and future of communities, forests and the climate.

Corporations’ commitments towards sustainability should be legally binding. NGO’s should reject and not engage in voluntary commitments. Experience shows that these have not only failed but have improved the image of corporations while heavily jeopardizing the struggles of local peoples.

Consumers have an important role to play: to refuse, publicly question and boycott RSPO and other corporate certificates, because they create a false image that only



benefits companies. Procure products from local peasant agriculture, contributing to food sovereignty-- that is, peoples control over lands and local food production and supply, rather than imported products based on large-scale monocultural production, controlled by transnationals like OLAM.

GRAIN and WRM

(1) OLAM International's Global Policy on Forests – Draft for Consultation – version 1, 28 February 2017

(2) OLAM Annual Report 2015: <http://olamgroup.com/investor-relations/annual-report-2015/annual-financial-statements/>

(3) The RSPO is an initiative founded in 2001. It is a partnership between the palm oil industry and a few NGOs, with WWF as one of the main actors. It is a response of the palm oil industry to the conflicts and the environmental problems, especially deforestation, caused by the very fast expansion of the industry, mainly in Indonesia and Malaysia, over the past 20 years. The RSPO now has over 750 members and only 13 of them are NGOs, so the remaining 740 members are companies somehow related to the oil palm sector. The RSPO delivers certificates to palm oil producers, based on a set of principles and criteria approved by RSPO members. The RSPO states on its website (www.rspo.org) that it has, by October 2015, already certified about 2.56 million hectares of oil palm plantations as 'sustainable'.

(4) <http://wrm.org.uy/browse-by-subject/tree-plantations/>

(5) <http://www.mightyearth.org/blackbox/>

(6) <http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/indonesia-interview-with-sawitwatch-about-the-impacts-of-industrial-oil-palm-plantations-in-indonesia-and-the-experience-with-the-rspo/>

(7) see article on the GRAINE program of OLAM in the forthcoming WRM bulletin

(8) <http://www.mightyearth.org/olam-and-mighty-earth-agree-to-collaborate/>

(9) Personal interview held in March 2017

(10) <http://www.rspo.org/news-and-events/news/looking-back-at-2015>

(11) Another example is how groups like WWF, Conservation International and Proforest, together with OLAM and other companies like multinational Sime Darby (Malaysia) and the food giant Unilever (UK/Netherlands), organized what they called an "RSPO Africa Roadshow". This involved events in 2012 in Gabon and other African countries to inform about "the potential to deliver many socio-economic benefits" and "raise awareness on sustainable palm oil". The "show" was funded by private companies and donors from Northern governments.

(<http://www.proforest.net/en/featured-work/developing-capacity/the-rspo-africa-roadshow-building-capacity-and-raising-awareness-on-sustainable-palm-oil>).



The Daily Struggle of Kichwa Women in Sarayaku, Ecuador

Foto: Esteffany Bravo S.

It is almost lunchtime and Rita does not have firewood left for cooking. Equipped with an axe and a large basket, this Kichwa woman walks in the thicket of the Amazon rainforest in search of a tree to cut. After several dozen powerful blows, the tree's trunk yields to the woman's force. Once she has finished the chore, she carries the heavy wood along a path that winds between rivers and ravines. When she returns home, she starts the fire for cooking; but not before collecting enough water from the river to prepare the fish soup. Rita has also cleaned her house and gone to the *chakra* [farm] to collect manioc to make *chicha*, the favourite drink in her community. Aside from all her daily duties, Rita also holds a political position: she is one of the women leaders of Sarayaku, a town in the southern Ecuadorian Amazon that has been resisting oil exploitation for over 30 years.

The women of the Indigenous Kichwa Peoples of Sarayaku have played a crucial role in their community's resistance to attempts to extract the energy wealth hidden in the bowels of their ancestral territory. Always on the front lines of marches, carrying their babies on their backs or in their wombs, the *warmis* ("women" in Kichwa) have raised their voice to say "No!" to extraction and patriarchy. It is a double struggle for indigenous women of Sarayaku, who are determined to resist both the Ecuadorian State's attempts to extract oil and the ancestral patriarchy they face in their community.

"Women have the same heart and the same body as men; the only thing we don't have is a beard," says Corina Montalvo, an 83-year-old resident of Sarayaku. "They used to call us *warmi sami*, that is: women who cannot do anything. But that was long ago, in a time of ignorance," she reflects. "They would say that women are meant to cook, clean, make *chicha* and collect firewood, that that was women's work. But we later realized that was not so, and we said that the men also had to work. Our children come from both of us, so men also have to raise them," she concludes.

This fierce veteran fighter from Sarayaku was one of the driving forces behind the community's first major mobilization. It was 1992, and several Amazonian peoples of Ecuador marched to demand the government of then president Rodrigo Borja legally validate the titles of their territories they inhabited. **It was the women who convinced**



the men to walk the almost 250 kilometres of distance and 2,000 meters of ascent. "It took us a long time to get to Quito [the capital], and it was hard to walk. There were 5,000 of us: many women, some old women, others carrying their children and still others pregnant," recounts Montalvo, one of the 1,600 inhabitants of Sarayaku.

One of the women who walked while holding her child was Narcisa Gualinga, now 72 years old. "The men wanted to go by bus, but we had no money; they didn't want to walk. We, women, convinced them to walk," recalls this woman, one of the founders of the pioneering Association of Indigenous Women of Sarayaku (AMIS, by its Spanish acronym). It was Narcisa's older sister, the historic leader Beatriz Gualinga, who raised her voice against president Borja. "Though many people had studied and spoke Spanish very well, she didn't know, but she spoke with the government," declares Narcisa. "Beatriz spoke very powerfully. She said to the president, in Kichwa, 'You all only do things in order to win votes.' She shouted at him loudly," says Montalvo.

Resistance to Extraction

Women's leadership in Sarayaku has continued over time. The land titles obtained in 1992 were of little use when, a decade later, Argentine oil company CGC entered communal territory to initiate seismic exploration in search of crude oil—without inhabitants' permission. When they detected CGC's presence, the women and men of Sarayaku got moving.

"When the oil company arrived in 2002, we went to fight. The women met to decide who would go and who would stay. We had to leave our children at home. We had to neglect our *chakras*, and we lost the whole harvest in the struggle," tells Ena Santi, current Women's Leader in the Council of the Autonomous Government of Sarayaku. "I was nine months pregnant with my daughter Misha at that time, but I walked anyway," she says. **"Between 20 women, we got a canoe and went to the place where a helicopter had landed with company workers. We grabbed the workers and brought them to the center of the community. We also caught some soldiers and took their weapons away. We only had spears,"** explains Santi, who was previously the secretary of AMIS, the organization that was later renamed *Kuri Ñampi* (Golden Path).

The community ultimately managed to expel the oil company from its territory, but it did not stop there. Sarayaku went before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights to denounce the State for having allowed CGC to enter without consulting the community. In 2012, **the Court forced the State to publicly apologize, and to conduct free, prior, informed consultations with community inhabitants before initiating any oil project in their territory.**

Even though Sarayaku won the battle, its women have continued their struggle, both inside and outside the community. On March 8, 2016, coinciding with International Women's Day, hundreds of *warmis* from seven indigenous nationalities took to the streets to protest the concession of two oil blocks which partially affect Sarayaku's territory to the Chinese consortium Andes Petroleum.



Kichwa, Waorani, Zápara, Shiwar, Andoa, Achuar and Shuar women made clear their intentions to combat the extractive aspirations of Executive Rafael Correa and the Chinese oil companies Sinopec and CNPC.

Although in his first months in the Government he aligned himself with the indigenous movement and environmental organizations, Correa did not take long to distance himself from them, and to continue with the extractive legacy of his predecessors. **Additionally, since 2015, repression of indigenous protest has intensified.** In August, a national strike promoted by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) resulted in over one hundred arrests. In the Condor mountain range, the army evicted the Shuar communities of Tundayme and Nankints, in order to make way for two mining megaprojects.

A Daily Struggle

In their daily revolt against ancestral patriarchy, the women of Sarayaku managed to restrict the distribution of alcohol, with the exception of *chicha*, the traditional cassava drink that they ferment with their own saliva. **"The women had to fight a lot in the assemblies for the men to accept this,"** recounts Abigail Gualinga, a twenty-year-old woman who belongs to Sarayaku's new generation of women fighters. **While this restriction does not tackle the inequalities stemming from the patriarchal system, it does substantially improve the *warmis'* living conditions.** In her book, *Mujeres de maíz (women of the maize)*, written in Chiapas, Mexico, Guiomar Rovira states that **"alcohol, along with religion and weapons, has been a form of control and subjection of poor peasants and indigenous people. Its consumption has been zealously cultivated by employers, chiefs and other exploiters."**

Much of the organized indigenous women's efforts are aimed at resisting the ancestral patriarchy which fixes gender roles in their communities. According to Lorena Cabnal, an indigenous Xinca from Guatemala and a community feminist theorist, ancestral patriarchy is "an age-old structural system of oppression against native or indigenous women."

The case of Sarayaku is not the only one in Ecuador where women have played a leading role in the defense of their bodies and ancestral territories. From her position as women's head of CONAIE, Katy Machoa reveals the main reason why Amazonian women are so determined to fight. "We have a very daily relationship of belonging to the earth. In the rainforest, everything comes from the earth. It is our source of life. We have no other source of income. The fact that all development and family maintenance depends on our territory means that when this has been threatened, we have organized to demand respect for our way of life," she shares.

In Sarayaku, there is still inequality in access to political positions. Despite the fact that Sarayaku's struggle has lasted for over three decades, it is only in recent years that women have had access to the community governing council. Likewise, despite their leadership in the resistance to oil exploitation, only one *warmi* has been president of the autonomous government. Thus, in both the political struggle and the daily one, these women still have much to fight for.



In the meantime, women like Rita continue to get up at four in the morning to prepare breakfast, walk to their *chakras* to weed, and return carrying baskets full of cassava, bananas or papaya. Rita, like so many other *warmis*, continues preparing *chicha* and going to the city to demonstrate against State and oil companies' interference in their territory. **Rita—whose placenta is buried in Sarayaku, the land which gave birth to her—does not relent in her determination to defend the territory that her grandmothers left for her, and that she strives to leave intact for her granddaughters.** And Rita also looks forward to not being afraid when she returns from a march, because, as Machoa reminds us, "men do not fear that someone could be waiting for them at home after their political activity and beat them, but women do."

This is a summary of the original article, which was published in January 2017 in Pikara Magazine:

<http://www.pikaramagazine.com/2017/01/la-cotidiana-lucha-de-las-mujeres-kichwas-de-sarayaku/>

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The Ngäbe and Buglé Resistance: Keeping extractive industries out of their territories

With a history plagued by outrage and territorial imposition since colonization, the indigenous Ngäbe-Buglé peoples of western Panama struggle relentlessly for autonomy, and freedom from mining, hydroelectric and other destructive industries in their territories (1).

Nowadays, even the most destructive industries can obtain "green seals" to sell environmentally friendly images, or to finance "offset" projects—which theoretically restore lost biodiversity or counteract emissions. However, these strategies do nothing more than deepen the current extractive model, by making consumers believe that destruction is being "offset," or that a destructive project is somehow "sustainable."



In the face of this trend, which converts polluters into "green" companies and uses slogans on sustainability, communities affected by the operations of these companies are carrying out a strong resistance. This is how the Ngäbe-Buglé territory became a source of inspiration. In 2010, their struggle pushed the government into passing a law banning mining and hydroelectric projects in the region. In March 2017, El Salvador also passed legislation banning all metal mining in the country, after strong protests (2). Costa Rica also has a national ban on open-pit metal mining, resulting from over 15 years of popular resistance (3). And in March 2017, a municipality in southern Colombia secured a ban on what would have been the world's largest open-pit gold mine. The ban followed community resistance after the vast majority of the population that would have been affected opposed the opening of the mine (4).

In this occasion we speak with Rogelio Montezuma, head of the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of the Ngäbe-Buglé, a key player in the resistance against the copper mine at Cerro Colorado and hydroelectric dams.

Interview with Rogelio Montezuma

What were the mining and hydroelectric plans in the region?

The government plans were to activate a mining concession in the Ngäbe Buglé territory in 2010, reforming the national mining code to promote foreign investment. This also would have allowed the issuance of a water concession for construction of a hydroelectric dam, which the population strongly rejected in 2011 and 2012. Consequently, the then government of Ricardo Martinelli repealed the law that would have changed the mining code; and he legislated another law banning mining exploration and exploitation, as well as hydroelectric projects, in the Ngäbe Buglé region.

Why was and is it so important to protect Cerro Colorado against extractive industries?

It is important to protect Cerro Colorado for its biodiversity and rivers, on which Ngäbe communities depend for their indigenous culture, traditions and customs. The area is particularly important for the rivers, because it contains their headwaters and springs, and because these rivers supply water to both indigenous and non-indigenous populations. In addition, geographically speaking, Cerro Colorado is considered to be part of a Mesoamerican biological corridor and the lung of the region.

How did you organize the resistance? What was the strategy?

The consciousness of this region's inhabitants is what has maintained the resistance. To this aim, information was shared with communities about the negative social, environmental and cultural impacts of mining; by projecting videos about the bad experiences other indigenous groups have had with the mining industry.

How did you confront government-deployed criminalization and repression?



The Ngäbe peoples made a conscious decision to fight for their lives. They never gave up their resistance—despite the massacre and brutal repression perpetrated by national police—until they were able to establish the agreement with the Panamanian government guaranteeing Ngäbe territory would remain free from mining and hydroelectric projects.

Why did the agreement against mining and hydroelectric projects in the region not affect the Barro Blanco dam?

The agreement established after the repression became the law prohibiting both mining exploration and exploitation and dams in the region. It was not possible to cancel the Barro Blanco dam, as it lies outside the area's boundaries; this is in spite of the fact that it impacts and affects Ngäbe communities that live on the banks of the river where the dam was built.

Can you already see impacts on communities and forests as a result of the dam's implementation? If so, what are they?

The real impact is the flooding that is affecting communities living on the banks of the Tabasara river, when the reservoir filled up. But resistance continues and the families affected people have reached such a point of desperation that we do not know what will happen in the near future.

How can people on the outside support the struggle of Ngäbe-Buglé peoples today?

People's conscious participation and awareness is key in the face of any potential scenario, in which there could be attempts to impose similar projects on people. Defending legislation is also necessary, now and always.

- (1) <http://wrm.org.uy/oldsite/countries/Panama/article1.html> ;
<http://wrm.org.uy/oldsite/boletin/46/Panama.html>
- (2) <https://ramumine.wordpress.com/2017/03/31/el-salvador-prizing-water-over-gold-bans-all-metal-mining/>
- (3) <http://www.bdlaw.com/assets/htmldocuments/Costa%20Rica%20Proyecto-159481.pdf>
- (4) <https://ramumine.wordpress.com/2017/03/28/central-colombia-town-bans-worlds-largest-open-pit-goldmine/>
- (5) Ver: <http://www.radiotemplor.org/prohiben-la-mineria-a-cielo-abierto-en-areas-protegidas-de-panama/>



Food Production and Consumption: Resistance against domination

To begin to discuss in depth the production and consumption of food, especially in a country like Brazil, it is necessary to recall and mention a series of points.

First, we must always remember that eating is a fact of human existence, nothing less. Forty days without eating can be fatal for anyone. We do not have the ability to absorb minerals directly and sustain ourselves with them, as plants do. We need food produced by plants and animals (1), which nature alone is not able to produce for the billions of human beings. That is why it is necessary to grow crops and raise animals to produce food.

Second, we live with a capitalist mode of production, wherein Capital is obsessed with its own reproduction and accumulation. It transforms everything and everyone into commodities produced to sell and generate profit. Thus, the more the capitalist mode of production "develops, the more mercantile logic invades, penetrates and saturates social relationships"; that is, commercialism becomes universal (2). Using this logic of production, food is also transformed into commodities. In other words, they are "units that synthesize value of use and value of exchange" (3), that is, they are produced to sell. In the country, this entire logic is called agribusiness, which in Brazil — more than just a system of production — is a direct association between financial capital, multinational biotech and chemical corporations, metallurgical industries and state trading enterprises.

In this context, the production and supply of food has been transformed to cater to the interests of Capital. Reducing food to mere commodities has generated and continues to generate a set of contradictions and, consequently, problems in the countryside and in the city — most notably hunger and malnutrition.

Third, most food is produced by peasant farming (in Brazil, 70 per cent) (4). Therefore, selling the farm production is necessary, and all farming families do it. There are various ways to sell products, such as at farmer's markets, or through intermediaries, industries, exporters, grain traders, etc. These forms of marketing depend on a set of factors, such as the products produced, the distance, and the size of the city supplied.



Finally, people currently suffer from a number of diseases directly related to an inadequate and toxic diet (diabetes, hypertension, gastritis, cardiovascular problems, obesity, cancer). This is the result of pesticide use in agroindustrial production, but also industrial production that adds chemical preservatives to products. Another serious threat is the specter of hunger, which once again threatens millions of low-income households in Brazil, either due to a loss in these families' income, or to the increase in the price of food.

We therefore start from these four findings: we need food to live; it is produced and circulated in a context of capitalist production (5); most food is actually produced in non-capitalist systems of production (6); and the current agroindustrial food model is a public health problem and a profoundly unjust social problem.

Domination in Food

Under capitalist logic, the first space that capital occupied was as an intermediary between food producers and consumers. By occupying this space, it seeks to alter the food standard and production system, in order to generate greater profit. For example, soybeans comprise almost 60 per cent of the Brazilian agriculture crop harvest. In 2016, the bean harvest was very meager. Beans are a staple food for most Brazilians. Soybeans and other beans are similar plants; they come from the same family, and where one is produced, it is possible to produce the other. The question is, therefore: Why were there not enough beans? The answer is simple: beans are not a good commodity; their storage life is short, and they have only one purpose: to feed humans. Even though there are many recipes, most beans are cooked unprocessed. Meanwhile, soy is used to produce oil, fats, milk, juices, chocolate, cookies and meats — that is, an infinite number of products.

Corporations functioning as intermediaries in production earn a lot by buying low and selling high; and they end up determining what and how farmers produce, and what and how consumers consume. In this way, the market is not an intermediary, but rather a determining factor in the agroindustrial food model.

The problem with this model is that it is centered on profit generation and capital accumulation, and not on (feeding) human beings. At one end is the farmer, always in precarious economic conditions, and at the other end is the consumer, who pays dearly to consume poisoned food. Indeed, the agroindustrial food model imposed by agribusiness requires the intensive use of chemicals in food production, and mainly in its circulation, when preservatives, radiation, and fungicide baths are added, and other practices are used to increase the shelf life of food.

The consequences of this model include serious public health problems on a global scale and the continued decline of populations in rural areas. This rural exodus has slowed but the process continues. To a large extent, it is not families that migrate, but young people. This is due to the interaction of several factors: i) production costs increase without a corresponding increase in the sales price of products, thus diminishing peasant families' income and forcing some members to seek outside sources of income; ii) there is insufficient infrastructure in the countryside to provide adequate living conditions — including medical care, schools, cultural spaces and sports spaces,



etc. — which discourages people to remain; iii) prejudice against peasant and manual labour makes young people, in particular, feel ashamed about living and working in peasant farming; iv) the propaganda about cities as the land of opportunities; v) gender relations that oppress young people, especially women.

In this context of domination in food production, there is a process of violence and persecution against rural peasant production, which includes health legislation, restrictions on banking credit for food production, opposition to farmer's markets, and intense pro-agribusiness propaganda that claims it is the only possible way to produce food.

The Resistance

It is in this scenario that Brazilian peasant movements, in particular the Small Farmers Movement (MPA, by its Portuguese acronym), is calling on all farming families to intensify their food production — both for their own consumption and to supply cities with healthy food at a fair price. How can this be done?

As farmers, we have already done a lot on the production side. We thus have a lot of practical and theoretical experience to promote the conversion to agroecological production. Our greatest challenge is marketing. With the State Food Acquisition Program (7) we were making good strides, but the government-by-coup that took power in 2016 has since dismantled that policy (8), we have to find other ways. There is no recipe for this, but we will briefly share some principles, in addition to some of our experiences.

First of all, it is important to understand that it is possible to have a scenario in which all farming families are practicing agroecology, in conjunction with a popular and massive distribution policy. This should be based on a clear and substantial State policy that has humans at the center, rather than capital; thus, an anti-capitalist policy.

Secondly, we must be clear about the magnitude of what we are doing, in terms of agroecological production, experiences and various ways to sell and distribute directly to the consumer. We are proving, in practice, that we are able to provide healthy food to humanity. We are demonstrating that we peasants are part of the future and not a holdover from the past. We are also proving that it is possible to produce food without pesticides, and we are breaking down barriers between producers and consumers.

Thus, marketing at this historic time, according to the MPA farmers' political strategy, GOES FAR BEYOND SIMPLY SELLING. Our marketing process must complete several functions: it must legitimize the farming profession; it must be a tool of social agitation and propaganda for peasant farmers; but mainly, it must be a tool of social agitation and propaganda for urban populations, who need to understand the issues of the countryside and join the fight to defend peasant farming. In a way, their stomachs are the way to reach urban populations and invite them to join the anti-capitalist struggle.

Therefore, everybody must understand that producing, selling and consuming healthy foods is a political act of profound resistance to the global order, and directly challenges the agroindustrial food logic promoted by capitalism. In this sense, marketing is the



bridge that connects the countryside to the city.

What we are doing and what we can do:

- **In small, inland cities** where we have a presence: encourage families to organize **farmer's markets**; have discussions in churches, schools, urban unions, organizations and associations about the importance of healthy food and farmer's markets; make farmer's markets spaces for political education about food and the struggle and resistance of farmers; **popular markets** and **farmers' stands** are also important mechanisms to sell products and share information about the MPA and its views.

- **In regional cities:** strengthen existing farmer's markets and encourage families to meet the requirements to participate. We can organize collective transportation of products, organize storage and distribution structures in these cities, and open new points of sale for healthy food. Other possibilities include selling food boxes, creating healthy food consumers networks, creating popular markets in collaboration with urban organizations, and supplying to restaurants and community kitchens. These cities have more possibilities in terms of political relationships, and we can reach a larger number of people. Thus, our political arguments can reach more people; but we must do our part in creating links and relationships between the MPA and other organizations, as well as direct relationships with consumers.

- **In capitals and large centers:** this is where the most acute contradictions of the agroindustrial food model exist. On the one hand, we have a wealthy, obese and sick city center, and on the other hand, an urban periphery living with food scarcity and having to make choices to put on the table. In these large cities there are many organizations; so small marketing-related actions could generate a great political impact. All of the possible points of sale mentioned previously are also feasible in these city centers, but they demand a greater level of organization, in order for high-quality food to reach the city at a good price. This would produce concrete results for families and for the MPA, and simultaneously propagandize and agitate people around food.

We have said little here about public policies on marketing and sales. We must fight for such policies, and for them to respect the logic shared above. That is, they must serve to combat the agroindustrial food model. In practice, we must invite people from popular neighborhoods to join us in the fight to restore the public policy on direct purchase of food through the Food Acquisition Program, jeopardized by the current government. After that debate and the struggle for food, we must have the debate on health, the situation of rural farmers, and the fight against the capitalist system.

It is therefore essential to see marketing as a way to engage in politics; not in an electoral sense, but in the sense of debating major issues and the direction of our country, in the sense of raising awareness about the reality in which we live and the need to transform it. This is the political activity in which we must engage in these times of coup in Brazil. We must resist the stripping of rural and urban workers' rights. We must always keep this in mind in our planning processes; or else we will have good economic experiences with no political impact, and therefore our successes will be in the short term, without sufficient support to be sustained over time.

The path walked thus far has shown us that our work can be sustained when it has



organizational support; since agribusiness, with the full support of the State, quickly acts to dismantle our work. We have two emblematic cases in Brazil. The first occurred in São Gabriel da Palha, Espírito Santo, in the Popular Food Market: after a few months of operation, the Ministry of Agriculture carried out an operation in which it seized products, denounced the association and issued threats. Following this incident, consumers organized public hearings, demonstrations, petitions, and other actions, forcing the Ministry to retreat; since then, no new actions have been placed on the part of the Ministry. The second case occurred in Alta Floresta do Oeste, Rondônia: a farmer developed a way to make an alternative mineral salt for his cattle; his cattle were captured, he received threats, and the perpetrators said they would slaughter his whole herd. Through the MPA's local and national mobilization, these actions were impeded, and an analysis of the farmer's mineral salt was demanded. That analysis revealed no problems with the salt, except for the fact that it was produced by the farmer and not purchased from agribusiness companies. These two cases show that building alternative paths is not easy, and that agribusiness reacts, criminalizes and fights all of our work.

Therefore, in order to resist, we must organize as peasant farmers and consumers, and in direct relationship with each other; because in order for healthy food to reach families' tables, it is necessary to face the power of agribusiness.

March 2017

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(1) There is extensive debate on the matter of animals and human consumption. We will not discuss that here, but we believe that sustainable agricultural systems require the integration of animals and plants—it is enough to see how plants depend on pollinators. Thus, albeit indirectly, food production depends on animals. Additionally, there is a huge difference between the industrial system of raising and feeding corn and soy to animals in confinement; and peasant systems of animal husbandry.

(2) NETTO, José Paulo, and BRAZ, Marcelo, 2010. *Economia Política: uma introdução crítica*. São Paulo: Cortez, p. 85.

(3) *Idem*, p. 80

(4) O Estado Da Segurança Alimentar E Nutricional No Brasil: Um retrato multidimensional. RELATÓRIO 2014. Pages 8 and 55.

(5) We understand circulation to be the entire post-production process, from minimal processing to industrialization, as well as storage and distribution.

(6) They are produced in a family or community context, where there is no third-party exploitation of labor and no surplus production; however, when these foods are circulated, capital appropriates them and turns them into commodities used to generate profit.

(7) A program that purchased food from farmers and distributed it to people in situations of food insecurity; this program was created in under the FOME ZERO program (ZERO HUNGER), by the Lula government.

(8) In reference to the impeachment process of President-elect, Dilma Roussef, in 2016; which resulted in her vice president assuming the presidency in Brazil.



Women and Traditional Oil Palm: A Struggle for Life

Marie Crescence Ngobo coordinates the Sustainable Development Actors Network in Cameroon (RADD, by its French acronym). RADD works with women on economic and social issues, organizing activities that help women regain their identity and autonomy, in order to improve their families' living conditions.

Marie Crescence, you organized four workshops on traditional oil palm in 2016. How did that work, and what did you observe in those meetings with women?

The workshops involved assisting women to delve deeply into their cultures and traditions, in order to draw out their values associated with traditional oil palm. The objective was to recover recipes involving nutritional, medicinal and artisanal uses of traditional oil palm, and together make a booklet that will be distributed to the women. The aim is to value these uses and preserve traditional oil palm.

The workshops were organized in the framework of a caravan composed of the women that participated in the activity in Mundemba. (1) Everywhere we went, the caravan shared with women our messages about the sustainable use of traditional oil palm and preserving the best ways to use it. Those four workshops enabled us to make four major observations.

The first observation is that traditional oil palm is in real danger of disappearing. This palm is threatened by the expansion of industrial oil palm, because the latter has greater economic value in terms of productivity; it is ever-expanding, and thus wipes out traditional palm. Traditional palm is also threatened by local populations themselves, who have begun to use a destructive method of extraction. They sometimes pull out traditional oil palms from the root or they cut the trunks, in order to extract a wine which is both drunk directly and used to prepare a brandy that local people consume in great quantities. That is why traditional varieties of oil palm are increasingly scarce. Consequently, women are no longer able to easily collect the fruits or the seeds like they could before, in order to process them and feed or treat their families.

The second observation is that traditional oil palm is extremely important; women used to be able to go behind their houses, collect the fruits, and a few hours later prepare the



meal for their family. This is no longer possible. Given the scarcity of traditional oil palm and its derivatives (fruits, seeds, roots, etc.), they are forced to go to the market to buy them. Unfortunately, they do not always have the money for this, and therefore hunger settles in at home. Traditional oil is also important because the "selected" or industrial oil does not produce the same results in terms of flavor. The communities we met with only want traditional palm oil for certain traditional recipes. In the case of many Cameroonian families, when women go to market they have to buy fruits 'from the village' to make the best dishes. With the industrial fruits, also called 'socapalm,' these dishes inevitably lose their good flavor, and consequently we lose our culinary sovereignty.

Regarding medicinal aspects, all the medicinal recipes made with oil palm should be done so with the traditional oil, in order to achieve good results. We recognize that this traditional pharmacopoeia is the first aid for local populations, as hospitals are frequently very far away or do not have doctors. But women know that if they have their traditional oil palms, they can take the roots, fruits and seeds to administer first aid, or to heal people completely.

The third observation is that it is extremely important to value traditional oil palm, because despite its known nutritional, medicinal and artisanal value, industrial oil palm surpasses it from an economic standpoint. That's why we are increasingly thinking about opening a national center specialized in selling only products derived from traditional oil palm, in order to meet a potential demand. Women in urban centers need the traditional palm oil they call village oil, village fruits, and black palm kernel oil. We must find a way to facilitate access to these derivatives of traditional oil palm.

And the fourth observation we have made is that the women we met with have a great desire to perpetuate this species, and to do what it takes not to lose it completely. They have even begun setting up small nurseries, in order to replant their lands. Also, when they are working their land and encounter traditional oil palm shoots, instead of destroying them as they used to, women preserve and protect them so that they can grow.

These are the observations that came out of our activities. We thank all the women for their willingness and openness, and for making this initiative their own. We are convinced that the recipe book will help preserve all the cultural wealth that comes from traditional oil palm, for current and future generations. This compilation will enable us to encourage people, even men, to sustainably manage this traditional species of oil palm. Through this tool we hope to reach young people too, who must continue working for the sustainable management of traditional oil palm.

In Africa, we are now seeing large industrial plantations of thousands of hectares multiplying, and communities are losing their lands—forests where their traditional palms are located. How does this affect women?

The expanding consumption of industrial palm oil has already created a food dependency on those oils whose origin and production process are unknown. It is always more reassuring to consume a product of known origin. This was the case with traditional oil, which is clearly a more natural product, even at first glance. With



industrial oil local dishes lose their authentic flavor, and local culinary values deteriorate and are threatened—and with them our food sovereignty.

For women living in communities near large industrial palm plantations, the situation is catastrophic. They enter into poverty with no way out; they become totally dependent because the food they used to produce on their farms no longer exists. They are forced to buy everything. Lacking substantial resources, they must nonetheless deal with their children's education, illness, hunger, and their family's housing needs. They live in insecurity, generation after generation.

Biodiversity is also destroyed when the forest is cleared to plant industrial oil palm. Non-timber forest products—which women used to collect, eat and sell for income—are obliterated. This causes women to sink further into precarious situations. With the destruction of the forest, the very roots of women's lives are destroyed, and with them the roots of families and society.

These destabilizing factors also cause conflict within families and between families. Families are forced to split up. They become fragmented because the bases of their lives have been destroyed. Children live in uncertainty. Girls are exposed to debauchery. Boys embark on adventures and run the risk of disappearing in the sea in search of some *El Dorado*. It becomes impossible to recover the warmth of the home and the family, which is the essential building block for any society's development.

When this expansion sets in, women's lives become vulnerable. It is virtually impossible for them to live and keep their families alive. Some women end up working on farms; they must leave home very early in the morning and return at night, in exchange for a meager salary. When can they take care of their family?

To avoid these consequences, we must help women see that they should firmly defend their living spaces—all places where they carry out their activities (fallows, springs, rivers, markets, etc.)—so that these spaces are protected when large industrial plantations move in.

Could you comment further on the importance of conserving the use and consumption of traditional palm commodities for women and villages in western and central African countries? What are the advantages and the importance of traditional oil palm, and what must be done to conserve it?

Regarding the conservation of traditional oil palm: we must place more value on products derived from this species. They are high-quality products. It is necessary to improve processing and conservation methods, to place the products in attractive containers, and to market them through brands that increase their value. Consumers themselves want this. Plus, it will be a viable and sustainable means of livelihood, which will encourage women to fully take responsibility of preserving and sustainably managing traditional oil palm, from the outset.

We must also foment conservation-related initiatives, and continue raising awareness among both women and men. In our field visits, women said to us: "We need you, madame, to come to our villages to tell the men what you are telling us. Because when we tell them they don't listen to us, they continue cutting [the palms]; if you come they



will understand what you are saying, just as we understood a while ago." Thus, raising awareness in the place itself is very important, and it is what the women are hoping for.

In addition to improving processing, preservation and packaging techniques for traditional oil palm derivatives, we must introduce modern technology to extract the oil. I think these two aspects are necessary to promote the sustainable management of traditional oil palm.

I would like to use this platform to **send out a strong call to all women in the communities, to tell them that they are not alone.** Together, we can eliminate or mitigate the impacts they are suffering today. Whether in Cameroon, Gabon, Congo-Kinshasha or Congo-Brazzaville, Ivory Coast, Nigeria or Sierra Leone—**together we can put pressure on the companies that are destroying the lives of women in the communities.** Human rights dictate that these women have the right to live, and to live well. It is unacceptable for them to become slaves in their own villages. If they cannot live fully in their villages, it will be difficult for them to have a better life elsewhere. A farmer whose land has been taken away from her has nothing left, except perhaps death. But we are here to create life, and we are committed to working to restore their lives.

Strong solidarity is required to continue supporting and accompanying these women who are fighting to defend their spaces of life.

I call on the women of Africa and of the world to mobilize—as we know how to do—in political meetings and in churches, to defend the interests of women and families destroyed by land-grabbing. When you fight for a good cause, you must never tire. Nothing should stop us. Let us mobilize in large numbers to express our solidarity, and to support all initiatives aimed at restoring the dignity of women living near industrial plantations.

Yes we must!

Yes we can!

Yes we will win!

(1) The idea to hold four workshops on traditional oil palm with women from communities was a recommendation coming out of a previous workshop with women from several countries in Africa and other areas. This first workshop addressed the expansion of industrial oil in Africa, and the impacts of this expansion on women's lives. It was organized by RADD in 2016, with the collaboration and support of GRAIN, SEFE, CED and WRM, in Mundemba, Cameroon (see the Mundemba declaration [here](#)).



ACTION ALERTS

Save Ampasindava Peninsula in Madagascar!



A mining project threatens to forever destroy the Ampasindava Peninsula—an area that is home to some 33,000 people, primarily in farming and fishing communities. The company Tantalum Rare Earth Malagasy (TREM) has obtained a 300 km² concession from the Malagasy government to extract rare earth minerals—the most contaminating kind in the world. Support the petition to stop this mine! (in French)

<https://www.change.org/p/projet-tantalus-sauvez-l-archipel-de-nosy-be-et-la-p%C3%A9ninsule-d-ampasindava>

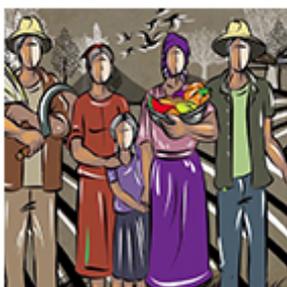
Stop Extractive Mining in Panama!



Mining-affected communities in Panama, environmental organizations, human rights defenders, and social and citizens' movements in the country, staunchly reject this exploitative and death-driven industry. Affected families' testimonies and the environmental damages caused by mining in Panama are sufficient reason to stop mining multinationals from operating in the country. Support the call to stop multinational mining companies in Panama by signing the following petition (in Spanish):

<https://www.change.org/p/presidente-de-panamá-juan-carlos-varela-petición-de-cancelación-al-modelo-extractivo-minero-en-panamá>

The Right to Resist Land Grabs!



Millions of traditional, peasant and indigenous peoples' communities around the world have limited access to their land and forests because the land is being monopolised and controlled by landlords and big corporations. “The Right to Resist Land Grabs” is a short film that tells the story of land grabbing and repression faced by communities, and people’s resistance. See the film in English:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNG9ZcmUw0o&feature=youtu.be>

See further about the campaign “No Land No Life” in English here:

<https://panap.net/campaigns/no-land-no-life/>



Philippines bans new open-pit metal mines



The powerful evidence of massive injury to communities and water supplies in the Philippines, and findings of rampant violations of environmental law, have led the country's government to ban new open-pit gold, copper, nickel and silver mines. The current Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources cancelled or suspended 26 mining licences and cancelled 75 agreements between the government and mining companies that were proposed to be built on watersheds. While announcing the ban, she said “Water is

life”. Read more information in English here: <https://ramumine.wordpress.com/2017/05/01/philippines-bans-new-open-pit-metal-mines/>

Rio Tinto's biodiversity offset project in Madagascar imposes severe restrictions on local communities



QMM, the Malagasy branch of Rio Tinto, a British-Australian mining company, is extracting ilmenite in Fort Dauphin, Madagascar, to export it to Canada. To compensate for the destruction caused by this mining activity, QMM set up a biodiversity offsetting project in another forest, 50 km to the north of the mining site. The forest use restrictions imposed on local communities at the biodiversity offsetting site are raising serious human rights, health and food insecurity issues. See the video “Your Mine” produced by the NGO Re:Common at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-ZB2xyCfQ&feature=youtu.be>

Athanase Monja, A Malagasy farmer affected by Rio Tinto's activities, planned to speak at the firm's Annual General Meeting on 12 April, but was refused a visa by the Home Office. See more information in English here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/apr/07/madagascar-farmer-mining-firm-rio-tinto-ousted-from-land-athanase-monja>

Norway: divest from eucalyptus plantations!



The Norwegian Solidarity Committee for Latin America raises debates about the ethical principles behind Norwegian investments. They invited, together with a network of Norwegian organizations, people from Guatemala, Honduras, Brazil and Swedish Sami to present their stories, research and reflections to a popular court in March 2017. One of the cases discussed was the situation in the extreme south of Bahia, Brazil, where three of the world's biggest pulp and paper-producing companies operate (Suzano, Veracel and Fibria).

The national Oil Fund of Norway invests over 3.5 billion Norwegian kroner in these



eucalyptus plantation companies, despite the well-documented impacts of monoculture plantations on forests, biodiversity, water sources and the destruction of local territories and livelihoods.

The popular court is part of a campaign to demand that the Norwegian Oil Fund pulls out from such investments. More importantly, they call for stricter and more transparent control of Norwegian investments.

<http://www.latin-amerikagruppene.no/english/>

The report from the popular court will be published soon in Portuguese and a video from the campaign can be watched here (with English and Spanish subtitles):

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

RECOMMENDED

Socio-environmental Implications of Building Tourism Spaces

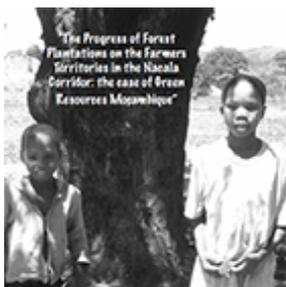


This article, written for the research and communication network, Alba Sud, presents a critical view of territories dominated by capital investments in tourism, with a special focus on Central America and the Caribbean. The incursion of tourism and real estate capital, along with certain laws and public policies, is causing a radical shift in land use. Nature, transformed into a commodity, becomes a way to increase profits; and people are expelled from their lands and alienated from their ancestral knowledge and cultures. Read the article

in Spanish at:

[http://www.albasud.org/noticia/942/implicaciones-socio-ambientales-de-la-construccion-del-espacio-turistico -sthash.IST9x8Jc.dpuf](http://www.albasud.org/noticia/942/implicaciones-socio-ambientales-de-la-construccion-del-espacio-turistico-sthash.IST9x8Jc.dpuf)<http://www.albasud.org/noticia/942/implicaciones-socio-ambientales-de-la-construccion-del-espacio-turistico#sthash.IST9x8Jc.dpuf>

The advance of forest plantations on the farmers territories in the Nacala corridor: the case of Green Resources Mozambique



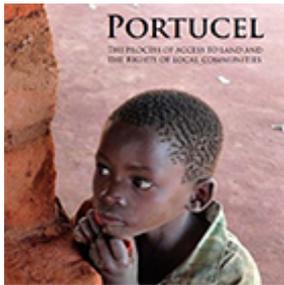
Based on evidence from a field investigation, this publication provides a detailed overview of the impacts of pine and eucalyptus plantations on communities in three provinces in Mozambique. The report focuses on one of the main companies active in Mozambique and in Southern and Eastern Africa: the Norwegian company Green Resources. Over the past years, this company has grabbed about 265,000 hectares of lands in Mozambique only, dispossessing communities from lands they depend on for their livelihoods. The report,



available in English and Portuguese, was launched in 2016 by the Mozambican organisations Livaningo, UNAC (National Peasants Union) and Justiça Ambiental/Friends of the Earth Mozambique, and written by Lexterra.

<http://wrm.org.uy/other-relevant-information/the-progress-of-forest-plantations-on-the-farmers-territories-in-the-nacala-corridor-the-case-of-green-resources-mozambique/>

Portucel: the process of acquiring access to land and the rights of local communities in Mozambique

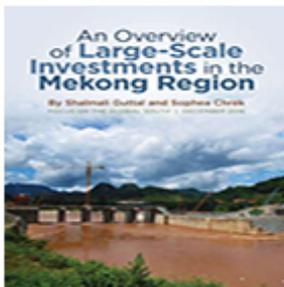


Portucel Mozambique is a Portuguese company with the biggest land concession among the plantation companies in Mozambique – 356,000 hectares. Its project includes the construction of a pulp mill for future export to Asian markets. This report, available in English and Portuguese, is based on a field investigation over about 4 years that monitored at community level the loss of lands and livelihood to this large-scale plantation project. Published by Justiça Ambiental/Friends of the Earth Mozambique in 2016, in

partnership with the World Rainforest Movement (WRM).

<http://wrm.org.uy/other-relevant-information/portucel-the-process-of-the-access-to-land-and-the-rights-of-local-communities/>

An Overview of Large-Scale Investments in the Mekong Region



Across the Mekong region, the “development” model promoted by the region’s governments prioritizes trade and investment liberalization, and privatization. Private investment is sought in virtually every sector of the economy. This publication presents an overview of these investment trends in the Mekong region, the regulatory and policy changes designed to facilitate large-scale foreign and domestic investment, and the impacts of such investment on the living and working conditions of workers in Special Economic

Zones. It offers a critical perspective on how these investments privilege large investors over local populations and public interest. The English language paper can be downloaded at:

https://focusweb.org/sites/www.focusweb.org/files/LandStrugglesIII_HIRES.pdf

The Bulletin aims to support and contribute to the struggle of Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities over their forests and territories. Subscription is free.

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