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OUR VIEWPOINT

- [World Social Forum: A pause on the way](#)

The World Social Forum met in Nairobi, Kenya from 20 to 25 January. Beyond the opinion that each one of us may have about its achievements, what we would like to highlight is not so much what was said or what was done there but its message that "another world is possible."

This message implicitly means that the present world is no longer possible. In this world, increasingly dominated by large corporations, social and environmental problems are aggravated year after year. In spite of the incessant intervention of so-called solutions by those seeking desperately to keep it alive, the truth is that in most cases, the remedy is worse than the illness itself. Let us look at some examples of these so-called "solutions" in WRM's scope of action:

- To face the loss of biodiversity, the main "solution" is the establishment of protected areas, implying among other things eviction of the communities who live in them
- To face deforestation, "solutions" are added, such as protected areas, monoculture tree plantations and certification of plantations and forests
- To face climate change, some of the "solutions" are carbon sinks (tree plantations) and biofuels (oil palm, transgenic soybean and maize, sugarcane).

Each one of these "solutions" implies a series of serious negative social and environmental impacts that we have explained in numerous articles in the WRM Bulletin. Their true value is zero and they only serve to give the deceitful impression that everything can be solved without resorting to the sweeping changes urgently required. Among other things, they enable the following:

- To continue with deforestation so that large companies (timber, mining, oil, hydroelectric, shrimp) can carry on making profits with the excuse that there are protected areas to maintain biodiversity, that plantations lessen the pressure on forests (and that they are certified), that hydroelectric dams do not cause greenhouse effect gas emissions, etcetera.
- To continue promoting agricultural and tree monoculture plantations and their accompanying package of agrochemicals and transgenic plants so that the large seed, chemical, biotechnological and pulp companies can carry on making profits under the false pretence that they are attempting to mitigate hunger in the world or substitute oil by biofuels or produce the paper the world needs.
- To continue destroying the climate with the continuous burning of fossil fuels allowing oil companies to carry on making their profit, but also to enable other large companies (palm oil, sugar, biotechnology, etc.) to enter the business.
- To continue destroying the base for subsistence of millions of peasants and indigenous people through appropriation of land, water and forests by the large companies (in the water, biotechnology, pharmaceutical, pulp business, etc.).

In spite of its apparent strength, that world has already shown itself to be impossible and that it destroys the very foundations of the world we all live in.

To face this, the message of the Forum is "another world is possible." What kind of world? A world that is socially supportive and environmentally respectful. But how would it be? We don't have an answer but we do have the conviction that it is possible. How do we reach this? Perhaps the words of the writer Eduardo Galeano will serve to make us think:

"Utopia is on the horizon. I move two steps closer, it moves two steps further away. I walk another ten

steps and the horizon runs ten steps further away. As much as I may walk, I'll never reach it. So what's the point of utopia? The point is this: to keep walking"

Along this walk, the World Social Forum is just a pause on the way, where an enormous diversity of walkers stops to exchange ideas among themselves. What matters is not what the Forum does or what the Forum can do, but that the walkers start finding ways to reach that "other possible world."

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COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- Brazil: Dams would destroy isolated tribe Enawene Nawe's livelihood

The Enawene Nawe -- a small Amazonian tribe (over 420) who live by fishing and gathering in Mato Grosso state, Brazil -- are a relatively isolated people who were first contacted in 1974. They grow manioc and corn in gardens and gather forest products, like honey but fishing is their main livelihood and fish are a vital part of their diet, as they are one of the few tribes who eat no red meat. During the fishing season, the men build large dams across rivers and spend several months camped in the forest, catching and smoking the fish which is then transported by canoe to their village.

For decades the Enawene Nawe have faced invasion of their lands by rubber tappers, diamond prospectors, cattle ranchers and more recently soya planters - Maggi, the largest soya company in Brazil, illegally built a road on their land in 1997 (this was subsequently closed by a federal prosecutor). Although their territory was officially recognised and ratified by the government in 1996, a key area known as the Rio Preto was left out. This area is tremendously important to the Enawene Nawe both economically and spiritually - this is where they build their fishing camps and dams, and where many important spirits live.

Now, up to 11 dams are planned along the Juruena river, which flows through the Indians' territory. The dams will be funded by a consortium of businesses, many of whom are involved in the soya industry.

The Enawene Nawe are opposing the dams, and have launched an appeal for support to halt their construction. They spoke out:

"We are the Enawene Nawe of Halataikiwa village. We have just been to a meeting. We did not seek this meeting, it was the Brazilians who invited us. Together with our representatives, there were representatives from the Nambiquara, Pareci, Myky, and Rikbaktsa tribes.

At the meeting we spoke with a Brazilian about the building of dams. The Brazilian said, 'Come and look at the first dam we have already built.' He continued, 'The dams are a good thing, not a bad thing. The fish will not die, the water will not become dirty, the forest will not die.'

We communicated clearly to the people who want to build the dams, 'Do not build the dams, we do not want them.' As far as the Enawene Nawe are concerned, we are completely against the dams. We do not want a car nor do we want money. We are thinking about fish, and the water.

The Rikbaktsa people think the same. As soon as we got back home we, the Enawene Nawe, spoke

together. After this, we spoke in Cuiabá [the capital of Mato Grosso state], to the public prosecutor. This person said that the situation was very difficult. So then we thought like this: OPAN [Brazilian NGO working with indigenous peoples] and the Federal Ministry of Public Affairs should see the impact report together; and soon we must go to Brasilia so that all the Enawene Nawe can speak there.

We are seeking help from others, as we are very unhappy, very unhappy indeed."

Excerpted and edited from: "Dams threaten fishing tribe", Survival International, <http://www.survival-international.org/news.php?id=2193>, http://www.survival-international.org/tribes.php?tribe_id=194

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- Burma: The greening of the military junta by the Wildlife Conservation Society

The remote and environmentally rich Hugawng valley in Burma's northern Kachin State has been internationally recognized as one of the world's hotspots of biodiversity. It even remained largely untouched by Burma's military regime until the mid-1990s.

After a ceasefire between the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and the junta in 1994, local residents had high hopes that peace would foster the economy and improve living conditions. However, as Valley of Darkness, a new report by undercover local researchers published in 2007 by the Kachin Development Networking Groups, says: "Under the junta's increased control, the rich resources of the valley turned out to be a curse".

The military junta ruling Burma, together with the US-based Wildlife Conservation Society, is establishing the world largest tiger reserve: the Hugawng Valley Tiger Reserve. However, the conditions of the people living there have received no attention. The report exposes that Burma's military junta has confiscated farmlands and homes there to accommodate its military infrastructure, and is selling off vast tracts as gold-mining concessions -- offering up 18% of the entire Kachin State for mining concessions in 2002, with major ones increasing in number from 14 in 1994 to 31 in 2006. The valley's forests and waterways are now being ravaged by over 100 hydraulic and pit mines using mechanized pumps and dredges and dumping mercury-contaminated tailings.

Devastating impacts are felt not only by the environment but also by local communities. "Only the junta and a handful of businessmen are benefiting from the gold while the local people suffer the consequences", says the report, while the influx of thousands of desperate migrants from all over Burma, together with harsh working conditions, a lack of education opportunities and poverty have led to the expansion of the drug, sex, and gambling industries in the once pristine valley. Intravenous drug use and the sex industry have increased the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Wildlife Conservation Society is claiming that Burma's junta has almost completely closed down the gold-mining industry in the valley. This report proves otherwise, documenting local people speaking out about the fundamental lack of local benefit from or participation in the so called "border area development program", of which the military junta continually boasts.

"We want the world to know that both tigers and people in the Hugawng valley are being endangered by Burma's military regime," stresses the report.

Excerpted and edited from: "Valley of Darkness. Gold mining and militarization in Burma's Hugawng Valley", 2007, Kachin Development Networking Groups (KDNG), e-mail: kdnqgroup@gmail.com. The full report is available at: www.aksyu.com

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- Colombia: The U'wa Indigenous People resist oil exploration

On 15 December 2006, the Colombian government made public its decision to reinstate oil exploration activities in the Siriri and Catleya Blocks located in the Departments of Arauca, Santander, North of Santander and Boyacá, in the northwest of the country, in U'wa territory.

For over a decade the U'wa have been telling the world what oil means to them, culturally and spiritually, and have repeatedly denounced the consequences that oil exploitation would have on their territory and their culture. They have even offered their lives to defend themselves from so-called "development." Their struggle and conviction have inspired other peoples around the world who have seen how the oil industry, only benefiting a few people, has destroyed their lives. With the excuse of development and progress these projects are imposed on them, only bringing destruction.

Various research workers and experts on environmental and social conflicts caused by the oil industry have witnessed the damage done and that will be done by oil exploration on the land and the lives of the U'wa. Ferry Lynn Karl, a lecturer at Stanford University in the United States made a very detailed analysis of the negative impacts of the Siriri/Catleya project on the ecosystems and on the social and economic situation of the indigenous people. She has also announced that this activity could also give rise to a state of violence in the region.

The Government decision implies disregard for the U'wa's right to their ancestral territories, including the soil and subsoil. The royal warrant granted by the Crown to the Tuneba Nation (U'wa) in the year 1802 ratified and delimited their jurisdiction to the present Departments of Casanare, Arauca, Boyaca, Santander, North of Santander and a part of Venezuelan territory. In turn, these rights were reaffirmed in Colombian Law 153 of 1887 and also by Article 332 of the 1991 Constitution. The decision by the Ministry of the Interior to continue with the Siriri/Catleya oil project also violates ILO Convention 169 and the recommendations agreed on in 1998 between the National Government and the U'wa People.

In the framework of the "Prior Consultation" process launched by the government for oil exploration and exploitation in U'wa territory, a consultation was made with the Arauca indigenous organization, Ascatidar, which gave rise to a negative response. ASOU'WA, the organization gathering the U'wa indigenous peoples from Santander, North of Santander and Boyaca replied negatively to the prior consultation. Even so, the Government has informed that it will convene the organizations to involve them in carrying out the Environmental Management Plan.

Over 120 organizations from Colombia and other parts of the world and some 30 people sent a letter to the Colombian President, Alvaro Uribe on 22/12/2006 stating their surprise and indignation over the decision to carry out oil exploration in U'wa territory. They ask for the decision authorizing seismic exploration on U'wa territory to be revised and the project to be definitively shelved.

Gubanu, an elder who is also a werjaya (wise man), went to the Capital district barefoot to launch a new stage in U'wa diplomacy. Together with Luis Tegria Sirakubo, president of the Association of Traditional Authorities and U'wa Councils, ASOU'WA, they held meetings in Bogotá with representatives of the European Union, the Venezuelan embassy and innumerable social and non-governmental organizations supporting this people's opposition to oil activities on their territory. Gubanu achieved the objective entrusted to him by this people: the ratification of the U'wa vision regarding the oil issue, recently expressed on 12 October 2006, when they answered with a resounding "no" to the prior consultation process proposed by the Colombian government.

The U'wa delegates met with the press and expressed their view that with oil exploitation, not only is blood being extracted from Mother Earth, but she is also being left in very poor conditions. The old man stated that "It is for this reason that there is not as much fishing as before, it is hotter and the sacred ayu (coca plant leaf) used by the werjaya for spiritual work, is drying up."

For all these reasons and as affirmed by organizations supporting the U'wa struggle "the Siriri/Catleya oil project cannot continue. We want to tell you (President Uribe) that the U'wa are not alone, that we will continue to support them in their worthwhile struggle, that we will be by their side until the Colombian Government and the Ecopetrol and Repsol YPF oil companies understand that this territory is sacred and that cultures with principles cannot be bought."

Article based on information from: Letter to the President of the Republic of Colombia, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, Bogotá, 22 December 2006, published by Boletín Ambientalistas en Acción 55, http://www.censat.org/Documentos/AmbientalistasAccion/Carta_presidente_uwas.pdf; "U'was Reactivan Diplomacia a Favor de Su Territorio", Amazon Watch, http://www.amazonwatch.org/newsroom/view_news.php?id=1337

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- Costa Rica: Business conservationism impacts on rainforest peasants, women and children

Costa Rica has been built as an export-oriented economy, with no political or economic independence. Export pressure on resources by the world system resulted in great inequality. Since the Kyoto Protocol, neoliberals have redefined forests as 'oxygen generators', a concept that Costa Rica has embraced. In this framework, local communities, especially those living in the tropical rainforests and depending for survival on the bounty provided by the forests, have seen undermined their basic support system.

The global environmental crisis has highlighted the fact that forest vegetation stores carbon that, if released, would contribute to trapping heat in the atmosphere, driving up temperatures and speeding up climate change. In the sustainable development framework, forests have become 'natural capital', but in reality they are much more. The forest is an essential mechanism for flood control. In the forest, trees are connected directly to each other through the multitude of creatures that relate to them as food, shelter or nesting place; through their shared access to water, air and sunlight; and through an underground system of fungi that links all the trees as a super-organism. Rainforest people are also members of this super-organism.

So-called sustainable development aggravated the unequal access to resources by intensifying earlier enclosure of the land through the Conservation Area System created in 1989 by the then

Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy, and Mines (MIRENEM, now MINAE). Through SINAC (National System of Conservation Areas), the conservation area model was implemented to manage the country's wildlife and biodiversity. The country was divided into 11 conservation areas comprising wildlife, private lands, and human settlements under the current Ministry of Environment and Energy's (MINAE) supervision, expanding the enclosure model by enclosing 25.58% of the national territory. The expropriated land has been organized along the lines of national parks in North America from which people are excluded and denied any role in sustaining the ecosystems. These expropriated lands are linked to transnational and political networks to forge local and global "stakeholders" through categories of management such as Human Patrimony, national parks, wetland, biological reserves, protected zones, forest reserves, and wildlife refuges. At the same time internal boundaries are built, separating local people who share volcanoes, waterfalls, rivers, hot springs, congo-monkeys, and turtle-spawning havens. The enclosed lands become sites for mining, research, ecotourism and selling oxygen.

The Kyoto Protocol introduced a new conceptualization of the world's rainforests. Now they are valued economically in terms of the amount of carbon they sequester. Conservation Areas are considered eligible to receive payments for the "environmental services" they provide. In the Arenal Conservation Area (ACA), organized by the World Wildlife Fund-Canada, national parks such as Arenal Volcano and Tenorio Volcano National Park, and forestry reserves such as Cerro Chato, sell oxygen. But to put the oxygen on the market, in 1994, the previous reserve Arenal Volcano had to be declared Arenal Volcano National Park. From 5 hectares, it was extended to 12,010 ha. As a result, entire communities were forcibly evicted. An injunction, brought to Costa Rica's Supreme Court (Division IV of the judicial system), reported heavy losses by campesinas/os who lived in the Basin area of the Arenal Conservation Area (ACA). They lost land, pasture, houses, dairies, and roads. Former property owners have become hut renters (ranchos) or slum inhabitants (tugurios). The personal effects of the campesinas/os, such as cars and small electrical appliances, were taken by the commercial banks when they could not afford to repay their loans acquired for economic development. When, in desperation, some of them returned to their land to plant yucca, beans, maize and other subsistence foods, they were declared to have broken the law and some of them were thrown in jail.

The snatching of forest from local communities who use it to sustain themselves has become a death sentence for small and medium-size land holders. As a result, their needs are dismissed, and community members who used to live off the forest are declared enemies of the rainforest. In 1996, La Cuenca de Aguas Claras was also declared a forestry reserve and changes in the area arrived. In 2001, I attended a public Town Hall meeting in La Cuenca de Aguas Claras at which more than 200 farmers, men and women, arrived ready to be interviewed. Since the number was too high, they chose Abel Fuentes and Luis Guimo to speak on their behalf. They declared themselves witnesses of the following account. According to Mr. Fuentes, MINAE says that "our survival way of life is producing deforestation and pollution, and reducing the water level of La Cuenca de Aguas Claras. MINAE exaggerated the level of deforestation to oust almost all the inhabitants because it is reforesting our land in order to sell the oxygen to other countries and get `donations". Mr Martin Guimo, another small holder, who still lives within the expropriated land, added "When we ask MINAE officials for information, they decide when and where we can get it. When we propose a meeting, they decide when and where we can meet, then they change the hour, the date, or they cancel the meeting without telling us. Many of us live far from the meeting place and sometimes we have to ride a horse for 3 hours to go to a meeting and it is disappointing to arrive and learn that the meeting has been cancelled" (Guimo, interview, July 2001).

The power of the industrial world to re-design the forest as oxygen producer exacerbates inequalities.

As a new structure of accumulation emerges, the disintegration of the ecosystem that supported the means of survival of local communities has powerful effects on the sexual division of labour and women's oppression. When families are violently disintegrated or displaced and impoverished, rural women are encouraged to migrate to San Jose and tourist areas in the hope of earning an income for themselves and their dispossessed families. Introduced into the cash base economy, impoverished women earn all or part of their living as prostitutes. Prostitutes in Costa Rica are women at work supporting children and family members. They are in the market not by choice but out of necessity. Along with them, there are astonishing amount of children who are bought, sold and mistreated by society.

The creditors' power relations, which encourage the commodification of nature, are written in the bodies of the forest, the women and the children of indebted Costa Rica. As dwellers are evicted from their land, dispossessed and vulnerable women and children turn into the sexual tourism industry, forcing them into a new form of slavery in the 21th Century - massive sexual slavery. First world white males, with the complicity of local governments, go to exploit the economic hardships of the inequality crisis created by global capitalism.

This type of 'solution' allows the industrial world to continue polluting as long as it can purchase carbon credits from rainforest-dense countries. Meanwhile, emissions produced by an increase in coal and oil burned – mainly in the industrial world – proceed unimpeded. The carbon trade is a colonial relationship with marked class and gender biases that affect the nature of indebted countries, along with subsistence production, and the lives of rainforest women and men.

Excerpted and edited from: "The Tragedy of the Enclosures: An Eco-feminist Perspective on Selling Oxygen and Prostitution in Costa Rica", by Ana Isla, Assistant Professor at Brock University, Canada. She is also a member of Toronto-Women for a Just and Healthy Planet, e-mail: aisla@brocku.ca. The full report is available at http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/CostaRica/Eco-feminist_Perspective_Costa_Rica.pdf.

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- Ecuador: The government faces a challenge in the Yasuni National Park

When couple of days ago President Rafael Correa affirmed that the environmentalists want to return to the Stone Age on requesting an oil moratorium he was only repeating what has been said for years by those who have shaped and maintained the dependent country we have... The problem is that this time he made this statement while the international press was sounding the alarm over global warming...if we burn more oil we will end up in the Stone Age!

Beyond this typically developmental comment, it invites us to remember Plato's myth of the cavemen.

According to the myth, we human beings live in chains inside a cave, sitting with our backs to the entry and with a light at our backs. The shadows represent the only reality we can see. We do not notice the chains and we neither can nor want to act against our perceptions.

However, Plato said that someone, sometime, became aware that he was chained, got free, turned round and left the cave. The light was so strong that he felt blinded and it was only gradually that he

got used to it and could see real things...

The Ishinpingo-Tiputini-Tambococha (ITT) project, like a gigantic shadow in the midst of the darkness, is being announced with the same enthusiasm as other large projects that have failed. There is talk of 4,000 jobs and investment of 5 billion dollars, the opportunity to leave poverty behind...but if someone notices the environmental impacts, the response is that "they will be minimized."

Why is this project causing so much fuss?

The ITT project is located in the Yasuni National Park. According to scientific studies, the Yasuni Park (set up in 1979) is a region with the greatest biodiversity in the world. It is part of the Pleistocene Napo refuge. It is also the territory of the Huaorani people and an area for transiting, fishing and hunting for the Taromenane and Tagaeri people who live in voluntary isolation and who need their territory to be free from external intervention in order to live.

This is a project confronting two visions of the world, two realities. From the shadow it projects images of growth. But seen in the light of Ecuadorian oil experience this would be yet another environmental and social disaster for the local communities.

With proven reserves of almost 1 billion barrels of heavy crude oil, the Government intends to maintain the pace of its oil exploitation and exportation. It is interested in a consortium involving Petrobras (Brazil), Enap (Chile), Petroecuador and even Pdvsa (Venezuela), which seeks to consolidate a partnership in the field based on integration proposals, whatever the costs, even environmental costs. SINOPEC, a Chinese corporation is also interested as they are trying to assert their presence in the region and are submitting high bids at the cost of their total ignorance of environmental issues.

However it cannot be ignored that the project is within the National Park, environmentally a highly sensitive zone. It is expected that the project will cause levels of contamination even higher than those existing in the areas already under intervention as the exploitation is of heavy crude oil associated to large amounts of toxic water at a ratio of 80-20 (80 of toxic water to 20 of crude oil).

The project will undoubtedly cause widespread degradation in the area, serious negative impacts on the life of local peoples and the extinction of cultures.

With this scenario in mind, a proposal has been made to sell the crude oil in the subsoil to ensure that it is not extracted. It has been said that each barrel of oil in the subsoil would cost 5 dollars. I have heard many people saying that they would love to have 20 barrels, or 10 or 1 and to know that it will never be extracted...

It is considered that with this proposal a three-pronged objective can be achieved: to conserve biodiversity, to address global warming and to protect the rights of peoples in voluntary isolation.

President Rafael Correa, in an almost challenging tone, entrusted the Minister of Energy, Alberto Acosta and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Maria Fernanda Espinosa with "substituting the resources that the country will stop receiving and that could be invested in health, education and infrastructure programmes. If this substitution is achieved there will be no call for bids" he insisted.

Ecuador has signed international conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the

Climate Change Convention, ILO Convention 169, the International Pact on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, the Convention for the Prevention and Sanction of the Crime of Genocide, that protect the peoples and their territories and that aim at safeguarding the Planet.

There are sufficient arguments for the mechanism of selling oil to prevent it from being extracted to operate but, is there enough political will not only at national but at international level, to address the issue?

Will this be a project dealt with in the shadows of an Ecuador in chains or, on the contrary, will it be addressed in the light of a new vision of the country, where the environment is not a requisite to be overcome but the basis for the nation's subsistence?

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- India: The Forest Rights Act, a weapon of struggle

The passage of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill, 2006 is a watershed event in the hard-fought and prolonged struggle of adivasis and other forest dwellers of the country. For the first time in the history of Indian forests the state formally admits that rights have been denied to forest dwelling people for long, and the new forest law attempts not only to right that 'historic injustice' but also give forest communities' role primacy in forest management.

The Bill, which angered Indian 'conservationists', forest bureaucracy and paper and pulp companies alike took two long years to pass —and a nationwide political campaign by forest movements in the country, backed by a joint parliamentary committee recommending sweeping changes to the original draft. Objections to the Bill, and especially its Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) Version ranged from apprehensions (like the law would distribute forest land to tribal families) to assertive statements (that wildlife and people can no longer co-exist, and all tigers would perish). The JPC version of the Bill shifted the earlier 1980 cut-off year to December 2005; included all non-tribal traditional forest dwellers; recognized rights of tribal and traditional forest dwellers in areas declared as protected areas; revised the process for identification of such protected areas to ensure a more transparent process and increased the ceiling of 2.5 hectares on land to 4 hectares. Most importantly, it prescribed that no diversion of forest land would happen without the consent of the gram sabha (the village assembly).

As could be expected, the Government refused to place the JPC report in the parliament, citing serious differences on four major issues: cut-off date, inclusion of non-tribals, rights of gram sabhas and the ceiling issue. The Tribal Affairs Ministry did not want inclusion of non-tribals in the Bill and sections in the Government backed by wild life lobby did not want any change in the cut-off year because it would destroy forests. After months of dilly-dallying, the Government apparently agreed to the JPC report and the bill was finally placed in the Lok Sabha on 15th December 2006. That the Government was up to no good was proved when sixteen major amendments were moved by the tribal minister on the bill he himself introduced in the house. The Amended Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha, and even though there were extensive debates in the Rajya Sabha challenging the last-

minute amendments, the Upper House passed the same truncated bill on 18th December after the Tribal Minister gave some assurances about the Rules.

Despite the Government's treachery and its attempts to undermine the positive contents of the bill, the act as legislated by the Indian Parliament marked a radical departure from earlier forest acts in the country, and the forest dwellers of the country can gain from it.

The new law recognises the right to homestead, cultivable and grazing land (occupied, and in use since December 2005), and to non-timber forest produce (partially, since the rights for the time being are limited to produces of 'plant origin' and fish). It accepts that there are legitimate non-tribal forest dwellers (though in a restricted manner), recognises the right to rehabilitation in case of past forcible displacement and prescribes that all future notification of 'inviolable' conservation zones and curtailment of rights in Protected Areas shall require people's consent. Most importantly, the Act says that recognized rights of forest dwellers include conservation of forests and biodiversity, and people's involvement would strengthen conservation efforts (the bill says people's responsibility and authority.)

In another very significant section, the Act says that all forestlands —irrespective of location and category— traditionally used by communities would be henceforth treated as community forest resource, and forest dwellers can act decisively in conserving those resources.

While the Forest Rights Act contains these positive elements, enough ambiguities and 'loopholes' clutter it. Also, it has been framed in a way to keep large section of forest dwellers out of its purview. For instance, only those residing in forest areas for 75 years will be qualified as 'other traditional forest-dwellers' (other than scheduled tribes), and only those 'primarily residing in' forest areas can claim rights under the Act.

These are concerns which forest movements of the country now plan to address by prolonging and intensifying the campaign for the Forest Rights Bill. Realizing that the Government's sincerity with the Act is suspect, the movements have also resolved to 'implement' the act on their own.

How did the Act happen? Why should a state that steadfastly adhered to the principle of 'eminent domain' (which means that the State owns all natural resources over which people have no proprietary rights), and ignored the just demands of forest dwellers now become sensitive to people's rights? Why should it admit that people have any rights over forests when all its policies and laws have so far —since the colonial take over of forests in 1850 onwards-- been directed towards keeping them out, first for making the forests commercially productive, and then for conservation of wild life?

These are questions that we need to discuss over coming months. Not all of these can be answered, firstly because the law-making process isn't complete yet (the rules are not ready), and secondly, contours of the political process that would determine the question of control over forest are just emerging in India. Time and the course of struggles will make many things clearer.

One thing is however clear. The Act —however well-meaning it may be— by itself solves nothing and just because it is there, the State is not going to hand over forest rights to people on a silver platter. The Forest Department and its coercive bureaucratic apparatus and its cronies like the timber mafia won't just vanish, and neither will Big Conservation NGOs cease to raise a stink each time people really get some rights. The development menace would remain, and both forests and people will be destroyed as usual, for dams, factories, roads and mines. The Act changes nothing until forest struggles lend it teeth and turn it into a weapon.

This is time when forest struggles are seen and defined in the broader political context. The sabotage the government did to the Act showed that there was a conscious attempt to undermine community control over forest resources, which fitted into the larger plan that becomes manifest in other things being done by the government —changing existing environmental regulations of the country so that mines, companies, dams and big industries can be easily built. The drive to forcibly acquire both fertile agricultural land and village commons for Special Economic Zones and for big private companies was on. Grants of mining leases to private companies in forest areas increased enormously in recent months.

Forest movements in India now need to oppose this whole agenda of selling people's lives and resources to capital. The Forest Rights Act gives communities a political space in forest governance. For movements, this is an important weapon to assert themselves and challenge both the present forest authority and forces of capital, who move into forests in a big way. Other anti-people forces active in the forests —'hard-line' wild life groups, feudal forces, traders etc— needed to be challenged.

Movement groups have been engaged in recapturing land in the forest areas in some regions. This process has to be strengthened and such action programmes need to be extended in other areas. So-called participatory structures created by the Forest Department like Joint Forest Management need to be smashed, so that neither state nor private capital aided by International Finance Institutions find further footholds in forests.

The passage of this limited bill gives us a promise to build up an alliance of movements. From now onwards forest peoples' movements will also be for a truly democratic and pluralistic nation, based on environmental and social justice. The State-capital nexus has to be challenged at operational and ideological levels, both nationally and internationally, and involving all progressive forces active in other social, cultural and political spheres.

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- Mali: Forests within food sovereignty

Mali is host in February to over 500 women and men from some hundred countries from all over the world that are meeting at the "Nyeleni 2007: Forum for Food Sovereignty." The objective of the meeting is to launch an "international movement to achieve true recognition of the right to food sovereignty," to reaffirm this right and "set out its economic, social, environmental and political implications."

What is understood by "food sovereignty"? The concept of food sovereignty arose in 1996, when Vía Campesina expressed it for the first time at the World Food Summit held in Rome. In 2002, the NGO/SCO Forum for Food Sovereignty defined food sovereignty as "the right of peoples, communities and countries to define their own agricultural, pastoral, labour, fishing, food and farming policies, which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances."

Since then the concept has been strengthened during subsequent meetings to become an alternative to the productive models imposed by globalizing policies directed from entities of power (WB, IMF, WTO, etc.) that have consolidated the control of food by large transnational corporations, starting from seeds, sowing and inputs and going on to cover distribution, processing, sale and consumer habits all over the world.

Food sovereignty is centred on local autonomy, local markets and community action and incorporates aspects such as agrarian reform, territorial control, local markets, biodiversity, autonomy, cooperation, the debt, health and many other issues related with food production.

Thus, perhaps, the first point to be underscored is that food sovereignty is a process of grassroots resistance and its conceptualization not only is deeply rooted in the social movements fuelling these struggles but is also an opportunity to bind them together in a common agreement over objectives and actions.

So, starting from peasant movements, the concept is widened to include the landless, traditional fisherfolk, shepherds, indigenous peoples...and the defence of forests that is also a matter of food sovereignty.

Non-timber forest products have been and still are a basic input for many communities either living in the forest or close to the forest and resorting to it for their livelihood. They find honey, fruit, seeds, acorns, tubers, insects and wild animals in the forest; all important additional sources of food. Forests also supply resins, rattan, bamboo, tannins, dyes, leaves, straw, skins and leather, useful for either self consumption or to be sold, thus ensuring income to obtain other foodstuffs. The forest is also a supplier of plants for forage, particularly important for the production of cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys and camels.

Forests are also threatened and destroyed by those same processes threatening peasant farming: the advance of agro-business and large-scale monoculture plantations for export – ranging from soybeans to eucalyptus trees –; the destruction of biodiversity with the imposition of transgenic crops; the oil matrix involving exploitation processes poisoning and destroying everything around them; the fencing in of sites showing high biodiversity to use them for the tourist business or for bioprospecting. In every case these are scenarios exploiting or displacing entire communities, stripping them of their way of life and their culture and leaving them to sink into poverty. The predominant model involves a circle of exploitation, extermination, exclusion. When the forest is destroyed, food sovereignty is destroyed.

However, this is not happening without a reaction. From their grassroots, peasants, traditional fisherfolk, shepherds and indigenous peoples who have developed and made possible production systems ensuring their own livelihood and that of other people not directly involved in production, are seeking to open a breach against these demolishing processes. From a local level, building autonomy, taking up again the principles of cooperation, integration and dialogue with nature that enabled them to build biodiverse agro-ecological systems and the dynamic conservation of ecosystems, grassroots movements are becoming the masters of their fate and teaching the world that "It is time for food sovereignty"!

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COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- Australia: Tasmania shows the way to ban tree plantations

Last year, about 170 farmers met in the farming community of South Riana to air their concerns and see how to stop valuable farmland being converted to timber plantations. They were concerned for the future of the area -- built on successful dairy and cropping enterprises -- and called for the Tasmanian Government to abolish tree plantation development on prime agricultural land.

The meeting came within days of the King Island Council becoming the first in Tasmania to ban plantations on rural land, fearing they would risk the viability of dairy and beef industries. Gorgeous cream, cheese, yoghurt and beef are more important to King Islanders in Bass Strait than woodchips. And in a Tasmanian first, the King Island Council has removed forestry from its planning scheme as an acceptable agricultural use, an amendment now approved by the Resource Planning and Development Commission.

The local mayor Charles Arnold said tree farms would have a severe impact on the island's famous dairy and beef industries, and that "Once they plant it, the number of persons involved in it, is minimal. And I think that our prime agricultural land shouldn't be sacrificed for other people's gain out of minimising their tax".

There's also a moratorium on any further clearing of vegetation on the island for pasture. "People want to protect what they've got on the island," said King Island Council general manager Andrew Wardlaw.

Federal Forestry Minister Eric Abetz is enraged over the decision to ban tree farms. He said that contrary to farmers' claims, plantations create new jobs and revitalise rural communities, and that they were intended to the domestic market: "We either import timber ... or we grow our own."

However, when the Minister planted the 100 millionth tree for Great Southern Plantations Ltd on a commercial hardwood plantation near Albany in West Australia, he was then extolling exports: "Once harvested, 100 million trees will result in the production of 10 million bone dry tonnes of woodchip — all of which is destined to be exported to south-east Asia."

Great Southern Plantations is part of the Great Southern Group, an agribusiness investment manager. It's gobbled up land for tree farms in recent times, stretching from Western Australia to the Tiwi Islands to King Island. Plantations are big business, not least because investments are 100% tax deductible in the year in which they are made. Such scheme gives them an advantage no other person has and, as somebody said, has "turned Tasmania into a monocultural tree plantation state. Eucalypt Nitens are now THE defining feature of Tassie's [Tasmania] now very boring landscape."

Banning of industrial tree farms is a step many rural communities worldwide expect their governments to take. Few have, and the King Island Council should be very proud of showing the way.

Article based on information from: "Tasmanian Cattle Farmers Fear Plantations' Impact", http://www.mycattle.com/news/dsp_international_article.cfm?storyid=19022, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, News Online, 2006; "Tasmanian farmers protest against tree plantations", The World Today, 2006, <http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2006/s1724364.htm>; "Abetz spitting chips over King Island tree farm ban", Tasmanian Times,

- Brazil: Veracel's deceitful practices

The Veracel pulp mill is located in the south of the Brazilian state of Bahia, some 45 kilometres from the coast, on the border between the municipalities of Eunapolis and Belmonte. Veracel is a corporation in which the Swedish-Finnish group Stora Enso and the Brazilian Aracruz group have equal shares, today managing one of the world's largest eucalyptus plantation and industrialization projects.

As from the end of the eighties, gigantic monoculture tree plantations and pulp mills started to be set up in the Southern Cone of South America, occupying vast stretches of land in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Brazil. This is the implementation of a strategic decision taken by the main timber and paper market groups from Sweden, Finland, Spain, the United States, Brazil and Chile.

While dozens of factories that had been producing 100, 200 and 300 thousand tons of pulp per year were being closed down in the North, mills producing a million tons per year were being set up in the South, with their corresponding plantations, invading vast areas of native ecosystems and other land formerly used for traditional farming in the region and causing the consequent social impacts.

An example of this model and its negative social and environmental impacts are the Veracel plantations and pulp mill. The plantations were started in 1991 and the pulp mill in September 2005. One hundred and sixty four thousand hectares belonging to Veracel and another similar area contracted with local farmers are given over to massive eucalyptus plantations in order to feed a pulp production amounting to 900,000 tons per year.

On launching its activities through costly advertising campaigns, Veracel committed itself to preserve the Mata Atlântica forest, affirming that its plantations were ecologically sustainable, that it would provide tens of thousands of jobs and implement major social works. However, as the project advanced the promises became fewer and fewer and presently they do not correspond to the actual situation.

The scope and speed of the expansion of this monoculture plantation generated considerable changes in the living conditions in the area. Between 1991 and 2002 rural migration reached 59.4 per cent and small farmers disappeared. Some of those evicted decided to struggle for their right to a plot of land while others moved to the nearest large city, Eunápolis, which has some 100,000 inhabitants.

In 2005 after serious conflicts with the police and armed bands, 515 families organized by the Movement of the Landless (MST) achieved their objective but some 1570 other families lodging in camps set up along the highways in the area continue to demand land. In the meanwhile those who went to the city were unable to find employment and are now part of the rising urban social emergency.

"Here we have the refuse produced by the presence of Veracel. What has most increased is criminality, child prostitution, poverty, hunger, the number of people imprisoned, robberies, murders," affirms Jodenilton Bastos, a journalist who constantly receives requests for food and clothing for the

unemployed through two daily programmes on the Eunapolis Rádio Ativa.

The promises of employment and welfare made by Veracel underwent a progressive reduction as time went by. They started by announcing the creation of 40,000 jobs, this figure later dropped to 20,000, then to 10,000 in the mill and 3,000 in rural tasks. Now the mill employs some 300 workers, mostly from outside the region as they cannot find specialized workers in the area.

The state of social emergency in the region is that of extreme hunger. The SOS Vida home in Eunapolis, directed by Sister Terezinha Biase cares for up to 50 children. "They arrive here weighing 50 to 60 percent less than normal. They stay here from three to eight months, until their lives are no longer at risk", she explained. The home relies on voluntary donations as it receives no economic assistance either from the public sector or from private companies.

The situation in Eunópolis is becoming more serious because Veracel is abandoning programmes for direct assistance to the population. A project for a soup kitchen and educational care for 100 children from a poor neighbourhood was closed by the company after it had used it to obtain financial endorsement. The parents of the children denounced that Veracel dressed them especially to receive visitors from abroad and take their photos.

Something similar happened with the preservation of the Mata Atlântica forest, the sustainability of monoculture eucalyptus plantations and non-contamination of water courses and air from the pulp mill. The Promoters (Public Prosecutors) of the Public Ministry of Eunapolis have launched various court cases against Veracel but Justice is slow and the public powers act in complicity with the company.

João Alves Da Silva Neto, Public Prosecutor for Eunópolis told us that "Our legal system is one of the slowest. They take advantage of this slowness and implement their action," referring to Veracel. "They use corrupt practices. The executive and legislative are in the hands of economic powers that exert more and more pressure to increase the plantations."

In 1993, the Public Prosecutor for the Republic accepted civil action against Veracruz, a predecessor of Veracel, for felling hundreds of hectares of Mata Atlântica forest. The company did not halt its activities and started occupying traditional farming areas, planting beyond the limits established by local legislation. The law is simply ignored or changed in agreement with the municipal or state government.

For some years now, various civil bodies in the area have been complaining about the irregular activities of plantation and pulp mill companies. In 2005, following a public hearing, the Public Prosecutor demanded that Veracel remove its plantations over a radius of 10 kilometres in the buffer zones of the National Park Conservation Units, in accordance with Brazilian legal requirements.

According to agronomist Mónica Leite, a specialist in fruit-growing, this region "was very prosperous, it had a good rainfall and a certain balance, there was a lot of forest. My father was a farmer, he planted a lot (...) and there were no diseases. Fifteen years ago fruit growing here was marvellous; there were enormous plantations of papaya, graviola and guava. But all this is ending with the arrival of Veracel".

The small cattle-farmer, José Marinho Damasceno suffers from the consequences of the discharge of Veracel effluents opposite his house, on the other side of the Jequitinhonha River. The strong smell of rotten cabbage gives him headaches and irritated eyes and each time it happens he has to abandon

his farm. Damaceno knows that sooner or later he will have to leave his land definitively and sell it as best he can.

The typical fish of the Jequitinhonha River, the snook, has practically disappeared. As a remedy, Veracel introduced another fish, the pintado that further pushed the snook to extinction and is itself also disappearing. Civil bodies have stated their concern over the pulp mill's emissions, which is apparently using ECF bleaching technology, but no data is available – it is the company itself that carries out its own monitoring.

Source: Research carried out in situ by the Uruguayan journalist Victor L. Bacchetta (vbacchet@internet.com.uy) with the support of the Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas para o Desenvolvimento do Extremo Sul da Bahia (CEPEDES) which has been carrying out activities in the city of Eunápolis since 1991. A full version of this report -in Spanish- is available at: <http://www.guayubira.org.uy/celulosa/Veracel.html>

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- Cameroon: FAO's rubber "forests"

According to the FAO definition, rubber plantations are "forests." Recently we visited one of these "forests" in Kribi, Cameroon and talked with the workers and local population. Unlike the FAO "experts," nobody, absolutely nobody there perceives these plantations as forests.

In fact, if there is anything in the world that looks less like a forest it is precisely a rubber plantation. To the normal monotony of plantations comprised of parallel lines of thousands of identical trees – eucalyptus, pine, acacia – is added the array of small pots hanging on the tree trunks into which the latex is gathered. Along the paths there are other, larger pots where the latex is poured to take it to the processing plant. Added to this is the penetrating and disagreeable smell of rubber.

The plantations we visited belong to the Société des Hévéas du Cameroun (HEVECAM), a company set up in 1975, with plantations covering a total of 42,000 hectares in a region that was previously covered by dense tropical forests, hosting some of the most varied biodiversity in the world. Today one can still see the enormous stumps of native trees between the rubber trees and even large tree trunks rotting in the middle of the plantation. That is to say, this plantation –this "forest" according to FAO– was the direct cause of the total destruction of the forests previously growing there.

This is well-known by the Indigenous Bagyeli People ("pygmies") who have been the worst affected. The Bagyeli are nomad hunters and gatherers who used to find in their ancient forest all they needed for their welfare. According to the group of Bagyeli we interviewed, they used to live decently on their territory that covered what is now the HEVECAM plantation, in addition to other adjacent areas. The forest no longer exists and the Bagyeli are considered to be intruders on their own territory, now controlled by the company. Although they are "allowed to enter" the plantation, the same cannot be said for the children as they might "damage the rubber trees".

The possibility of obtaining food and income by hunting is very remote. To the disappearance of fauna due to the effects of the plantation is added the presence of hunters with fire-arms – usually HEVECAM workers – who advantageously compete with the traditional arms of the Bagyeli. The possibility of getting a job on the plantation is also unlikely. The company hires them sometimes for

weeding, but pays them very badly. The result is that now here is a demoralized, poor, underfed, exploited and oppressed human group, cornered by the plantation and with nowhere to go.

However, the Bagyeli are not the only ones to have been adversely affected. We also interviewed the inhabitants of the village of Afan Oveng near the HEVECAM plantation, where two years ago a company truck had an accident and the contents of latex and ammonia it was transporting ended up in the river running through the village. As a result animals died, people were sick and the fish died. They sent letter after letter to the responsible authorities and to the company and so far the only "compensation" they have received have been some tankers with water, not even fit for human consumption.

However for these people the problem is not limited to an accident, but goes much further and implies that their traditional rights over the forest have never been recognized. For example, the place where the company hospital is located used to be land belonging to these people. They insist that "the forest belongs to us" and denounce that the "forest that still is left is being destroyed by HEVECAM".

In fact, the company continues its "savage" felling of the forest, apparently in connivance with the mayor of Kribi, who owns the saw-mill where the timber is processed. The local community receives no benefit, but is left with the damage implied by the disappearance of the forest and of the products obtained from it.

Company workers – brought from other regions of the country – would then seem to be the only ones to benefit from these plantations. However, this is not the case either. "HEVECAM is slavery", affirmed a person who had worked 7 years for the company. He spoke of very low wages, very hard work, respiratory diseases, blindness, tuberculosis, death, arbitrary redundancy and the impossibility of trade union organization.

We visited one of the villages built by the company and talked with various workers. There they told us that they had continuous problems with drinking water; that the latrines were overflowing, that this led to abundance of mosquitoes and subsequently to diarrhoea, cholera and malaria. They are crowded in these dwellings and it is not easy to find a two-roomed house. Consequently, most of the families must live in a single room. As the houses belong to the company, if the workers are fired, or even if they retire, they automatically find themselves homeless.

They also told us about the transportation system for the company workers, done in hired vehicles that are obliged to comply with a set timetable to cover the 40 km from the village to the plantation, resulting in frequent accidents. They told us about the application of weed-killers and fertilizers with no gloves or protective equipment. They explained that there are people who have gone blind because in that climate the eye protection equipment provided by the company cannot be used and it has done nothing to find a solution to the problem.

If the above would seem to confirm that effectively "HEVECAM is slavery", this conviction was further strengthened when the workers told us that when the company was privatized in 1996 (the International GMC Group of Singapore is the present owner), they learnt about it when different cars from those used by the previous managers appeared. "They bought us in the same way as they bought the rubber trees." Just like in times of slavery.

Ricardo Carrere, based on information gathered during a visit carried out to the region in December 2006 with researchers Sandra Veuthey and Julien-Francois Gerber. The author thanks the Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement (CED) for its support which made this visit possible.

- India: World Bank forestry project goes from bad to worse

Indian NGO Samata and the UK's Forest Peoples Programme have found that the resettlement action plan (RAP) of the World Bank-funded Andhra Pradesh Community Forest Management Project (APCFMP) undermines customary rights and livelihoods and is in multiple breach of Bank safeguard policies on Indigenous Peoples and Involuntary Resettlement. The participatory evaluation, which was undertaken in seven villages in NE Andhra Pradesh in November 2006, has discovered that many problems identified in an earlier Samata-FPP study (see end notes) of this Bank forestry project, which started in 2002 and is due to close at the end of 2007, have not been resolved and in some cases have even worsened.

The study finds that affected Adivasi communities have not been able to participate meaningfully in the design of the Resettlement Action Plan (RAP), which under the APCFMP is supposed to offset hardships suffered by Adivasi families after losing shifting cultivation fields in forest land under the previous Bank-assisted Joint Forest Management Project (1994-2000).

Villagers have simply been told that the Forest Department has money for Forest Protection Committee members to do "land improvement" and "income generation" activities under something called the "RAP". Many affected communities do not understand what the RAP is about and why it is part of the so-called "Community Forest Management" (CFM) project. In two cases, NGOs contracted to implement the RAP have incorrectly told villagers that the RAP support is a loan that must be wholly or partly repaid by the villagers. In Chapariguda Village, Shrikakulam District, for example, one RAP implementation NGO has allegedly unjustly collected money from 18 Savara families promising them that through such payment they would get benefits under the RAP scheme. The villagers have not seen the NGO staff person for 11 months and have no information since then about whether or not their village has been included in the compensation scheme by the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department (APFD).

Indigenous Adivasi villagers have not been properly informed about their rights and entitlements. In several villages visited by Samata and the FPP, people advise that NGOs have pressed them to sign consent letters in order to receive the "sanctioned" 25,000 R per family:

The NGO man took signatures and thumb prints from all the people. He said: 'Sign here to receive the 25,000 R benefit. There are no wages from the Village Forest Protection Committee (VSS) now, so you should sign the document to get the RAP benefit'. He told us that women will get saris and men will receive cloth. He took 200 R from each family which he said was necessary to receive RAP support. 18 families paid this man this money! [Savara families in a meeting in Chapariguda village, November 2006]

We asked the NGO man why are you taking our signatures? He replied: 'The Forest Department has sanctioned 25,000 R per family. You will get that in materials. You just need to sign for it. He did not explain anything about any legal commitments to give up our forest land... If we had understood that we were making legal commitments not to return to podu (shifting) cultivation, we would have never signed.' [Adivasi villagers, Narseepatnam Division, Vishakhapatnam District, Andhra Pradesh]

Contrary to the project loan agreement, in all the villages visited there have been no detailed impact assessments conducted for each family to assess what monetary and non-monetary costs or hardship they have endured over the last 10 years after losing their shifting cultivation lands. Local NGOs have complained that flat-rate of compensation under the RAP is unfair and inaccurate, but these complaints have been dismissed by the Forest Department.

There are worrying signs that in some villages families who became landless under the previous Bank forestry project are being excluded from compensation under the RAP altogether – in direct contravention of the loan agreement. In Sagara village in Vishakhapatnam District 5th Scheduled Area, for example, families who became landless after being obliged to leave their shifting cultivation (podu) lands in the forest under the World Bank-financed JFM project in the 1990s claim that they have been excluded from RAP assistance. According to village leaders, these families were not invited to the RAP meetings and local APFD officials have dictated that compensation for damages caused by the previous Bank project is only available for those families who already have patta lands (permanent fields).

Community leaders and support NGOs point out that the whole CFM project is out-of-date because it undermines current governmental moves to go some way towards recognising customary forest rights under the newly enacted Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act (2006)). Given the inadequacy of the RAP and the serious flaws in its design (not least arbitrary level of (flat rate) compensation), a growing number of villages have refused to take part in the RAP. Many local NGOs are also refusing to implement the resettlement plan.

As the project nears closure (at the end of 2007) villagers like those of Gorapadu village in Srikakulam District protest that the World Bank-financed APCFM Project still lacks transparency and has less community participation than the previous Bank project! Village authorities have had to use the Freedom of Information Law to obtain information on the Forest Department's use of project funds, and uncovered information that has confirmed their fears of corruption. Local NGOs who have long since withdrawn from the CFM project, say they will not be duped next time by Bank promises of a new participatory approach to forest management:

When we first heard of the CFM project, we thought that the "community" would be central, and that communities would gain control of forest land. We believed that the CFM project would be nourishing, like the ghee-bottle gourd: full of rich clarified butter oil. But when we drank from this gourd we found its contents tasteless. There is no richness there. There is no "community" in CFM. The goodness has been taken out [Sanjeeva Rao, Velugu Association, November 2006]

Village authorities and support NGOs are now taking their grievances about the RAP and the APCFM project in general to implementing agencies and "independent" monitoring bodies. However, at this stage, the communities hold out little hope that they will secure genuine redress for the hardships caused by existing and previous Bank forestry interventions. The early signs are that the APFD will once again deny any problems with the project and dismiss legitimate community grievances as unfounded or "misinformed".

By Tom Griffiths, FPP, e-mail: tom@forestpeoples.org.

Further Information:

Contact Ravi Rebbapragada and Bhanu Kalluri at samatha@satyam.net.in and Tom Griffiths at tom@forestpeoples.org For a more detailed article, see Griffiths, T (2006) Going from bad to Worse: World Bank forestry project in Andhra Pradesh fails Adivasi communities, http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/ifi_igo/wb_andhra_pradesh_dec06_eng.shtml

For earlier studies of this same World Bank project, see: Griffiths, T, Rebbapragada, R and Kalluri, B (2005) "The Great Community Forest Management Swindle: a critical evaluation of an ongoing World Bank project in Andhra Pradesh (India)" WRM Bulletin No. 93 (April 2005). See also, FPP and Samata (2005) Andhra Pradesh Community Forest Management Project – A preliminary independent evaluation of a World Bank forestry project

http://www.forestpeoples.org/documents/ifi_igo/wb_andhra_pradesh_cfm_proj_may_05_eng.pdf

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- Kenya: Let's plant seeds of peace and hope, not seeds of conflict!

Kenyan winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize, and also Deputy Minister for the Environment and Natural Resources and Member of Parliament, Wangari Maathai, launched in 1977 the Green Belt Movement, which spread from Kenya across Africa.

The movement has an environmental conservation programme focused on promoting the planting of indigenous trees in forest catchment areas and riparian reserves, private farms with high community access, and public spaces to preserve local biological diversity. For the purpose of conservation, medicine and herbs, shade, biodiversity increase and protection of cultural sites, indigenous trees are provided as the best suited species. Exotic fast growing species are provided to supply for household needs and fodder. However, Maathai warns that the introduction of some exotic plant species can have a severe effect on the balance of the ecosystem.

Though promoting tree planting, Wangari Maathai stands far apart from the large-scale tree monoculture model. She has cautioned against giving priority to exotic plants, which she says are becoming a threat to Africa's flora and fauna. "Thinking money all the time is also contributing to the governments' sacrificing our rich biodiversity", said Maathai in an interview (The East African Magazine, November 13-19, 2006). She warned against the present trend that gives "a lot of emphasis now to trees such as the eucalyptus". "Several years down the line, the water table will begin to go down with the huge tapping of water from the ground by these trees, because they consume too much water. The argument is that they mature quickly. But the sad thing is that they are being introduced in the continent's highlands, which are the custodian of the continent's natural drainage system, without which animals and people downstream cannot survive", said the former Nobel laureate.

Along similar lines – and even with the Green Belt Movement as a partner –, UNEP launched a major tree planting campaign --the Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign, <http://www.unep.org/billiontreecampaign/>-- which encourages the planting of indigenous trees and trees that are appropriate to the local environment in areas such as degraded natural forests and wilderness areas. The objective is to plant at least one billion trees worldwide during 2007.

However, the project also encourages "sustainably managed plantations". This raises a number of doubts, given that two plantation certification schemes (PEFC and FSC), that have consistently certified unsustainable large-scale tree plantations are partners of the campaign, and so is the FAO, which has been -and still is- the world's main monoculture plantation promoter. It is interesting to note that the campaign states that "mixtures of species are preferred over monocultures" – a wording very similar to that of FSC's criterion 10.3 which states that "Diversity in the composition of plantations is

preferred". Why not simply say that large-scale tree monocultures will not be accepted within this campaign?

The importance that the campaign puts on tree planting pledges -- anything from a single tree to 10 million trees -- may easily result in the involvement of business and industrial interests which could use it to publicise their vast monocultures. In this respect, it is revealing to see that the campaign's "Inaugural Corporate Partner" is none other than Toyota, a Japanese corporation involved in genetic manipulation of plantation trees. Will we soon see Weyerhaeuser, APRIL, Advance Agro, Sappi, Mondi, Stora Enso, Metsa Botnia, Smurfit and others as "new corporate partners" of the campaign?

In this respect, it is essential to maintain the spirit of Wangari Maathai's words: "when we plant trees, we plant the seeds of peace and seeds of hope". It is clear from the above quotes that she is thinking in terms of indigenous species or small community plantations. If large scale tree monocultures are included, the result will be that the campaign will easily achieve the quantity target, but will in fact be planting seeds of conflict and seeds of despair.

Article based on: "Unbowed. One Woman's Story", Wangari Muta Maathai, published by William Heinemann, 2006; "Beware those foreign plants", The East African Magazine, November 13-19, 2006.

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- **Malaysia: Acacia plantation plan threatens the Belum-Temenggor forest**

For decades, the presence of communist insurgents kept Malaysia's northern frontier free from exploitation. Too dangerous to open up for tourism or development, the Belum-Temenggor forest stood in pristine splendour as the nation built superhighways and superstructures, and extracted timber from other forests.

Sprawling over 3,000 sqkm, the mostly intact primary rainforest is now a treasure trove of biodiversity. The main intrusion into this wilderness was the construction of the East-West Highway in 1975, a 124 km strip of tarmac stretching from Gerik to Jeli to reach Kelantan and the east coast.

Not until 1989 did insurgents cease activities, thus enabling logging to commence a few years later when the curfew was lifted. But the habitats remained healthy enough to sustain megafauna such as the Malayan tiger and Asian elephant, the entire menagerie of 10 Malaysian hornbills, special plants such as the large Rafflesia flower and ancient cycads, a range of monkeys and gibbons, as well as a number of orang asli communities.

The East-West Highway divides this enormous, but single, ecosystem into its two main parts: Belum Forest Reserve to the north and Temenggor Forest Reserve to the south.

A threat looms over the Belum and Temenggor forests – the Perak Government intends to cultivate a 4 km-wide swathe of acacia trees along the East-West Highway. If planted, this ecological commotion has by far the greatest potential to turn Belum-Temenggor into a fragmented landscape with dire consequences. Big animals require large spaces, so forest size is critical for wild mammals to retain breeding populations with sufficient pools of genetic diversity.

Statements from officials say that “new establishment of forest plantations [sic] must be outside permanent reserved forest” and that they “must also take into consideration the current concern for environment and biodiversity conservation.” Belum Forest Reserve is already slated for protection as part of the Royal Belum Park; whereas, some areas in the Temenggor Forest Reserve are under a cease logging directive from Perak Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohamad Tajol Rosli Ghazali that begins this year.

So far, Perak has revealed little about its acacia plantation plan. But there is little merit in considering plantations along the East-West Highway.

Acacia plantations are sterile monocultures: one tree type, unpalatable leaves, limited wildlife cover, and unsuitable habitat for most species. It is devoid of the type of biological life that exudes from rainforests. Let's review two examples from Sumatra and Sarawak, where large-scale acacia plantations are mixed within protected area landscapes.

Paper mills in Sumatra demand wood supplies from both natural forests and plantations. Problems arise when acacia trees from plantations cannot provide enough logs to sustain mill requirements, putting pressure on natural forests. Acacia plantations and oil palm estates surround the Tesso Nilo National Park, part of the largest remaining area of lowland forest critical for tigers and elephants. Shrinking habitats cause elephants, which are not fond of acacia, to seek fruits and fresh leaves in other areas, such as village gardens and oil palm plantations.

In Sarawak, the government started developing 150,000 ha of acacia plantations in a Planted Forest Zone (PFZ) in 2003, in order to meet the raw material demands of pulp mills. The PFZ is a mosaic of planted trees, natural forests, riverine buffers and wildlife corridors, the latter two as conservation set-asides. Ecologically, researchers have found that the only animals foraging in acacia plantations are bearded pigs, a hardy species known to adapt to secondary growth in fragmented forests. Converting a complex tropical forest into a monoculture crop does not make sense.

Currently, the East-West Highway is just a scar dissecting a fairly intact ecosystem. But a 4 km-wide acacia plantation is essentially a clear-cut creating two distinct habitat halves unable to ecologically function as before due to its fragmented state.

Here are some of the possible consequences for Belum-Temenggor if the East-West Highway becomes a corridor for pulpwood:

- Loss of ecotourism potential: Today the chance still exists to see elephants and other wildlife while travelling the East-West Highway. Tomorrow, pulpwood lorries may cruise down the road like army ants on the march.
- Fragmentation folly: The acacia plantation will act as a barrier that prevents easy access across the highway, reduces cover that exposes animals to danger for too long and disturbs migratory patterns and territorial needs essential for finding scattered food resources and potential breeding partners.
- A plethora of pigs: Being the only animal found to forage in acacia plantations, pigs may dominate the highway zone landscape and become a nuisance for travellers who have to avoid their mass migrations and midnight crossings.
- Widening the conflict zone: Elephants and other animals are known to forage on agricultural crops and destroy cultivated fields. So far, it seems elephants stay out of acacia plantations but opening the East-West Highway to human presence will only increase the frequency of conflicts, especially in areas near to established animal trails.

If bearded pigs prefer acacia plantings, then will tigers move in to feast on one of their prey species? Then, will poachers move in to take advantage of the chance to bag an endangered species for big money on the black market?

- Expanding the paper trail: Despite huge acacia plantations, large paper mills in Indonesia continue to source wood from natural forests to keep up with production and debt payment demands. What if 40,000ha along the highway is not enough? Pressure to expand and illegal encroachment may constantly plague and over-ride conservation concerns to satisfy the pulp and paper industry.

The East-West highway is integral to the economic growth of Malaysia's north zone. The Belum-Temenggor forest is integral to the biological diversity and environmental integrity of Malaysia's natural resource base.

Malaysians must decide on whether the East-West Highway maintains its surroundings as a haven for nature or becomes a road that pushes the boundaries of capitalistic indulgence.

Excerpted from: "Choking our forest reserves", Rick Gregory,
<http://thestar.com.my/lifestyle/story.asp?file=/2007/1/23/lifefocus/16591171&sec=lifefocus>

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- Vietnam: What's happening in the pulp and paper sector?

Vietnam's paper industry is booming. In 1995, paper production stood at 220,000 tonnes. In 2007, the Vietnam Paper Association aims to produce more than one million tonnes of paper. Demand far exceeds supply and in 2006, Vietnam imported 709,000 tonnes of paper products. A large proportion of paper produced is for packaging - a result of Vietnam's expanding export economy.

At present, Vietnam's pulp industry supplies only 37 per cent of domestic demand and Vietnam also has to import pulp to keep its paper mills running. In 2007, the industry anticipates importing 232,000 tonnes of pulp.

This could be about to change. According to a 2006 Ministry of Industry paper industry plan, Vietnam's pulp and paper sector needs US\$6 billion of investment by 2020. Some of this investment has already started and about 750,000 tonnes of new capacity is currently planned or under construction.

In May 2006, construction began on the 130,000 tonnes a year An Hao Pulp Factory in Tuyen Quang province, in the north of Vietnam. Japan's Marubeni Corp won a US\$130 million contract to build the mill. A paper mill is planned in a second phase of the project. The government has approved an area of 380,000 hectares forest land to supply the mill.

In the south of Vietnam, construction is under way on the Phuong Nam Pulp Mill in Long An province. Phuong Nam will produce 100,000 tonnes of kenaf pulp a year. Financing to the tune of US\$70 million comes from the French bank Société Générale for imports of equipment and services. Petrovietnam Finance Company and the Transport, Communication, Development and Investment Company are also funding the project. Austria's Andritz is supplying machinery with backing from the Austrian, German and Swedish export credit agencies.

In August 2006, the Saigon Export-Import Company announced plans to invest US\$150 million in a 115,000 tonnes a year pulp mill in Nui Thanh district, in the central province of Quang Nam. To supply

the raw material for the mill, Quang Nam authorities have allocated 30,000 hectares of land for acacia and eucalyptus plantations.

In November 2006, the Vietnam Paper Corporation announced plans to invest almost US\$300 million in an expansion of the Bai Bang Paper Company in Phu Tho province. Vinapaco plans to build a 250,000 tonnes a year pulp production line at the Bai Bang site. A further US\$100 million will be spent on "material forest zones", otherwise known as industrial tree plantations, covering a total of 160,000 hectares in five provinces.

In January 2007, Hong Kong-based Lee & Man Paper Manufacturing announced plans to build a 320,000 tonnes a year containerboard paper mill and a 150,000 tonnes a year pulp mill in Vietnam. Lee & Man is reported to be also interested in investing in plantation projects in Vietnam.

These pulp mill projects (with the exception of Phuong Nam, which is to be supplied by farmer-planted kenaf) will mean more industrial tree plantations, more biodiversity loss, more dried up streams, lowered water tables and less land for agriculture and rural communities.

Recently, William Sunderlin and Huynh Thu Ba, researchers at the Centre for International Forestry Research, asked themselves two research questions about Vietnam: how forests help alleviate poverty; and whether the plans for large scale tree planting are consistent with the government's goal of eliminating poverty. They concluded that their questions could not be answered, because "there has not yet been any primary empirical research directed specifically at answering these questions".

Yet, even without this research, the development of industrial tree plantations to feed the pulp industry is heavily subsidised by the Vietnamese government as well as by bilateral and multilateral aid agencies. While the benefits of these subsidies go to the pulp and paper industry and to exporting industries, the impacts are felt by rural people.

In August 2006, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) announced that it would be conducting "concentrated afforestation" on 258,000 hectares of land in the Central Highlands. In February 2007, the MARD announced plans to establish 2.4 million hectares of plantations over the next five years in the northern mountainous region. According to the Vice Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development, Hua Duc Nhi, the plantations are intended to provide raw material for the pulp industry, which will produce 700,000 tonnes of pulp a year in the northern region of Vietnam, once the plantations are established.

The German government is supporting a project to establish plantations in five northern provinces in Vietnam. The Asian Development Bank has approved a US\$45 million loan for an "afforestation" project in the central highlands. The World Bank is funding a Forest Sector Development Project in four central coastal provinces. The project aims to establish 66,000 hectares of plantations.

Meanwhile, the government's flagship tree planting project, the Five Million Hectare Reforestation Programme (5MHRP) seems to be imploding. The 5MHRP started in 1998, and aimed to plant one million hectares of industrial tree plantations to feed the pulp and paper industry. "In Vietnam, they make plans which are inappropriate and then they cancel them," a World Bank forestry specialist explained to Keith Barney, a Canadian academic, in 2003. The Bank's expert described the 5MHRP as "not realistic". Two years later, Hua Duc Nhi, MARD Vice Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development acknowledged that tree planting was "way behind schedule". Government surveys found that the quality of plantations was poor and the supply of wood was small. The target has now been reduced to three million hectares.

In January 2007, Education Nature Vietnam reported that, "Government audits have revealed that between 1998 and 2005, a total of 35 billion VND (US\$2.25 million) was misappropriated from a forestation fund nationwide and put to private use by provincial authorities."

By Chris Lang, email: chrislang@t-online.de, www.chrislang.blogspot.com

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CARBON SINKS

- Uganda: Notes from a visit to Mount Elgon

The land near the southern boundary of the Mount Elgon national park is green and the volcanic soils are fertile. But since it was declared a national park in 1993, a sometimes violent conflict between villagers and the national park management has flared up at Mount Elgon.

In July 2006, I visited Mount Elgon national park together with Jutta Kill of Sinkswatch and Timothy Byakola of Climate Development Initiatives. The visit was part of the research for a WRM report about a carbon offset tree planting project carried out by the Dutch FACE Foundation and the Ugandan Wildlife Authority (UWA). The UWA-FACE project has so far planted about 8,500 hectares of a total of 25,000 hectares with indigenous trees around the border of the national park. The project has been certified as well managed by SGS Qualifor according to the Forest Stewardship Council system.

A village council chairperson told us that some people died as a result of the evictions from the national park in 1993. "We got the land in 1980," he said. "After Mount Elgon was declared a national park, our property was destroyed and our homes were burned. Since then, we have lived here in this Trading Centre." UWA promised compensation, he told us, but none has ever arrived.

"We planted crops last year," the village council chairperson said. "But when we went to the forest we were beaten. About six people have died. We have reported what happened to the court but we are still waiting for what the court decides." He told us that at the beginning of 2006, the President saw that people were desperate and said that villagers could go back to the land. "But we have gone back in fear. UWA is not treating us like human beings."

Several villagers told stories of violence and threats from UWA rangers. One villager told us of a villager who was forced to eat the intestines of a dead mouse. Another told a story of UWA rangers forcing a villager to have sex with a goat. Others told stories of UWA rangers forcing male villagers to have sex with each other.

I told them that the FACE Foundation acknowledges that there were some problems in 1993 but claims that things generally are better now around the national park. "No. The problems have worsened," a villager replied. "The things we are describing have happened recently," another added.

I told them that the FACE Foundation claims that its project is providing jobs. They laughed. "No", a villager replied, "the FACE Foundation is not providing any jobs in their village." I asked whether anyone from the FACE Foundation had ever visited their village. UWA-FACE last planted trees in this area in 1994 was the reply.

None of the villagers had heard of the Forest Stewardship Council.

We visited a trading centre in Buwabwala Parish, which villagers moved to in 1993 after they were evicted from the national park. Many of the villagers here had bought land from forest officers during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Forest guards had not been paid for months, and were keen to earn money from fees for land allocation. At the same time, under the regimes of Idi Amin and then Milton Oboto, the government encouraged forest-clearing so that anti-government groups could not hide out in the forest. Villagers sold their land lower down the slopes of Mount Elgon in order to pay the forest guards for the land higher up. When the government declared these transactions illegal, they became landless.

A villager introduced himself to us as a representative of the people evicted, not just here in the village, but also in the High Court. "In the old days," he said, "people and the Park lived amicably. We want the forest to be there. We know the benefits of forest."

He told us that after the evictions in 1993, the government left villagers with too little land. "UWA and UPDF evicted us by the force of the gun. All our property was demolished and our land was added to the national park."

"In 1998, we made claims in the court of law," he said. "The court has helped us. It has given us land to use until it makes its decision. But UWA's rangers are not allowing people to use the land. We have planted the land, but we are threatened day and night. UWA sometimes destroys our crops. We have documents of title deeds and court documents, including 'Certificate of Title' documents. We have requested that the government helps us to get UWA to stay where it is until the court decision."

Villagers here also told us of being attacked by UWA rangers. One of the villagers was beaten and taken to the police. Another man showed us wounds he'd received on his chin, where UWA rangers had hit him with a rifle. Another has a broken hand, a result of being beaten by UWA rangers. Another man was laid down flat on the ground and had a heavy stone placed on his back so that he could not move. He is now in bad health. Another villager was beaten and is now bed-ridden. "These are only a few of the many cases," said the village representative. "UWA has never been prosecuted for any of them. We have reported UWA's actions to the authorities many times, but because we are poor nothing has ever happened."

"Yesterday UWA uprooted onions in our gardens," said a villager. "This morning there was a gunshot," added another.

I asked whether the UWA-FACE project had provided jobs in this village. "None of us is ever employed in the national park. None," was the reply. No one from the FACE Foundation had visited this village, either. I asked about FSC. Again, they'd never heard of it. In any case, when people do come to the village, they have their own agenda, a villager explained. "When you ask, you hear a bullet," he said.

A villager opened up an envelope containing bullet shells. "The bullets were shot by people trying to kill us," he said. "Some people have died. Others have been injured."

Land rights are the key to villagers' well-being. "Taking a child to school is almost impossible without land," a villager told us. "We don't want the whole National Park, we just want our land back," another said.

The first step towards addressing the land rights of the people living in and around the park is to acknowledge that the boundary of the national park (as well as much of the park itself) is a highly contested zone. Any top-down solution to the park boundary will result in further conflicts between park management and local people. The FACE Foundation is contributing to the tension because the carbon stored in its trees must be protected from damage from local communities. Through the UWA-FACE project, the boundary of the park is being fixed, not in stone but in carbon. Rather than focussing on UWA's "rights" to manage the national park and the "rights" of people in the North to continue to pollute, there is an urgent need to start from the perspective of the rights of the people living in and around Mount Elgon National Park.

By Chris Lang, e-mail: chrislang@t-online.de, www.chrislang.blogspot.com. "A funny place to store carbon: UWA-FACE Foundation's tree planting project in Mount Elgon National Park, Uganda", by Chris Lang and Timothy Byakola is available here: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Uganda/book.html>

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BIOFUELS

- The EU's dead-end approach to climate-proofing Europe's transport sector: The More Gas You Guzzle the Greener You Are

Biofuels are flavour of the month for car-makers and politicians keen to be seen as green without directly addressing the problem of ever-rising transport emissions. The buzz has also caught on strongly in the EU. On 10 January, the European Commission presented its new energy and biofuels blueprint. It can be summed up in just seven words: bad news for people and the climate.

The Commission's paper proposes that ten per cent of transport fuels (excluding aviation fuel) across the EU should come from biofuels by 2020. These will come from a variety of crops, including rapeseed, maize, sugar beet and grains, palm oil, sugar cane and soya. Some of these biofuel crops will be grown within the EU, but there is limited capacity here – so the larger the European demand for this 'green' fuel, the larger the share grown in the Global South. As the Commission has set a target in proportion to overall transport fuel use, increases in fuel use would increase this volume still further. With transport fuel currently the fastest growing source of emissions increases in the EU, the demand for biofuel imports from the South will be substantial.

This is particularly worrying because there is growing evidence that existing EU demand for biofuels is spurring forest destruction and the conversion of biodiversity-rich ecosystems across the world, from South America to Southeast Asia.

In Cameroon, for example, the largest oil palm plantation SOCAPALM is expanding at the expense of forests traditionally used by local populations. This expansion lies at the root of land conflicts involving Bagyeli, Bulu and Fang populations whose land has been confiscated without compensation. Jobs created at the plantations – which rarely employ local people - are often temporary, without labour contracts, health or accident insurances, and the wages are extremely low: an unskilled worker earns a little more than one euro (about 65p) for a 12 hour work day. Agrochemicals and run-off from the refinery pollute the neighbouring streams, further curtailing local people's livelihood.

In addition to putting local people's livelihoods in jeopardy and causing further deforestation and conversion to intensive agriculture, many a biofuel will also have increased, not reduced greenhouse gas emissions in the process of production and processing. A recent environmental impact study of palm oil grown in South East Asia by the conservation group Wetlands International showed that their use in Europe would generate up to 10 times more CO₂ than the equivalent emissions from burning fossil diesel.

The Commission report mentions such threats only in passing and instead praises biofuels as an opportunity for Southern economies. It fails to acknowledge that the gains from such an export-oriented biofuels market will benefit few in the South, while many will be faced with loss of their traditional lands to monoculture plantations and increasing prices for staple foods. Since biofuel targets in the EU would promote the production of biomass in the global South, the EU could be responsible for reducing the area of land devoted to food production, so eroding local and international food security. Like EU targets, the US biofuel targets have been criticised for requiring an excessive proportion of the corn crop (20 per cent in 2006). US demand for biofuel from corn has already increased the world grain deficit, raising prices for staple foods such as tortilla in Mexico.

The Commission proposal is also silent on another key issue: the biotech industry's interest in promoting biofuels. The genetically modified varieties of several crops now used as biofuel crops (including maize, soya and oilseed rape) have met strong resistance to their use as food, especially in Europe. The industry hopes that by promoting them as biofuels, these crops will gain acceptance.

Growing transport volumes are the real issue that the EU energy strategy should be tackling. Investment in well-designed and affordable public transport schemes is essential, but the EU blueprint makes no mention of these. The paper leaves no doubt that 'energy security', not climate change or reducing the EU's environmental footprint, is the primary objective of increasing biofuel use in Europe's transport sector. That may explain the lack of attention to measures within the transport sector that could bring about much greater climate change gains. Speed limits and a better power-to-weight ratio for new cars and trucks could result in the same savings; and even greater savings could be achieved by adopting fuel-efficient tyres and reducing fuel consumption through smaller engines in passenger cars. And this all before we get into fuel savings from substituting individualised transport systems through smart public transport schemes. The Commission discards all these options as marginal and not worth pursuing. It prefers risky biofuel imports that are likely to undermine climate and environmental policies over climate-proofing the EU's transport sector. No wonder, then, that over sixty environmental and social justice organisations are already calling for a halt on EU biofuel targets.

By Jutta Kill, FERN, e-mail: jutta@fern.org, www.fern.org, www.sinkswatch.org This article will appear in the Issue 150 of Red Pepper, March 2007, "Temperature Gauge", <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/>

* Sign an Open Letter against EU biofuels targets at www.biofuelwatch.org.uk

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- Facing the biofuel rush: Land must be used to feed people, not cars

The present eagerness of the European Union to favour the use and import of biofuel as an

alternative to fossil fuels has risen serious concerns among those who are aware that global warming should be tackled globally and demand drastic changes in the current Western consumer, commercial and production patterns.

On last January 10th the EU commissioners made decisions on the EU Biofuels directive that are critical to the future of many in the Southern nations. A few days before, Latin American networks, which have been long denouncing the serious and irreversible impacts of the industrial large-scale tree monoculture scheme encroaching southern ecosystems and cultures, had appealed to the governments and people of the European Union countries to seek solutions that do not worsen the already dramatic social and environmental situation of the peoples of Latin America, Asia and Africa. They claimed that "it is time for food sovereignty", and "land must be used to feed people, not cars".

"The increasing use of individual automobiles and their associated oil consumption as one of the main causes of global warming, makes fossil fuels use grow day by day. In this context, the use of biofuels would appear to be a positive alternative. However, everything seems to indicate that this will generate serious negative impacts, especially on the people of the South", says the letter, since "energy crops will be grown in Latin America, as well as in Asian and African countries, at the expense of our natural ecosystems." While Europeans maintain their lifestyle based on automobile culture, the population of Southern countries will have less and less land for food crops and will lose its food sovereignty, having to base their diet on imported food, possibly from Europe. (See their open letter "We want food sovereignty, not biofuels" at http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/biofuels/EU_declaration.html)

On January 26, the Indonesian organization Sawit Watch (Oil Palm Watch) also sent an open letter to the European Parliament, the European Commission, the governments and citizens of the European Union, claiming that "oil palm plantations are a major cause of deforestation, forests fires, land and water pollution, and are being imposed on local communities and indigenous peoples without concern for their rights, livelihoods or welfare, and managed with insufficient concern for the rights and welfare of plantations workers and smallholders." They also denounce the "extreme concentration of land and natural resources in the hands of only a few business people from the oil palm plantations and palm oil industries." "It is therefore unavoidable that, as a consequence of Europe's biofuels policy, the land rights of indigenous peoples and local communities will be relinquished further, and that food security will be undermined and lands for agricultural purposes and subsistence livelihoods will diminish," says the letter. They eventually call on the EU "to take corrective and effective measures by adopting policies and declaring a commitment to global justice which will lead to real changes which will benefit local communities and indigenous peoples in Indonesia. It is time to make markets, governments, and companies accountable", since "Development without justice is not development, it is exploitation!" (The full letter is available at: <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/biofuelwatch/message/245>)

Echoing the claims, over 160 European organizations and key individuals also sent their own message on 31 January, expressing their extreme concern by the plans as presented by the European Commission to adopt a mandatory target for biofuel use in transport, which would entail further deforestation, biodiversity losses, and evictions and impoverishment of local communities. They warn, among other things, the "risk of increased climate impacts of biofuels", and that "biofuels will increase pressure on world food supplies and further erode food sovereignty". They call on the UE Member States "to reject the biofuel target for transport and halt all other incentives for biofuel production which could encourage in any way the use of biofuels linked to the problems described. Instead, the focus should be on drastic reduction of energy use and support for genuinely sustainable renewables."

They are collecting more signatures from organisations, local groups and individuals. Anyone who want to sign, please send an email to info@biofuelwatch.org.uk . (The full open letter is available at: <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2007Jan31-openletterbiofuels.pdf>)

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