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## Concepts that Kill Forests



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# Concepts that Kill Forests

## Our Viewpoint

### How the Language of Domination Drives Deforestation



Terms such as REDD - the main international forest policy mechanism that has impacted tropical forests over the last 15 years, - Sustainability and a wide range of others, have strongly influenced debates within and among civil society groups, NGOs, policy-makers, financial institutions and corporations. Yet, there seem to be radically different assumptions about what these terms actually mean and what their role is or should be.

It is not the intention of this bulletin to embark on a debate of what Sustainability - or any other of the concepts discussed in this bulletin - *is* or *should be*. Rather, our aim is to **open a space for critical reflection on what these concepts actually set in motion for forests and the people who depend on them.**

The many struggles against companies claiming to operate Sustainably or implementing REDD projects in the forests are testimony to the clear contradictions between the alluring ideals cited by those who defend these concepts, and the real implications of the many projects and activities through which these concepts manifest on the ground. Governments commit to a Sustainable economy and companies market their products as Sustainable because they know that this terminology resonates with financial backers and consumers.

And it is important to note that when opposition to a concept becomes too forceful for the concept to achieve its purpose of “greenwashing” business-as-usual destruction of forests, it is quickly replaced by a new concept. **What is new, however, tends to only be the name and propaganda while the underlying assumptions that sustain the capitalist economy remain firmly in place.** Growing public demand for meaningful government and corporate action to deal with the climate chaos, for example, has given rise to a whole new range of dubious concepts and confusing expressions such as Zero-Net Deforestation commodities, Nature-Based Solutions, Natural Climate Solutions and Climate-Smart practices.

It seems that for just about every “product” and industrial process that causes environmental devastation, a Sustainable version is presented as “the solution”. But by and large, these

new versions turn out to be bogus solutions as they do not represent a break with the paradigm of limitless growth, the principal driver of over-production and rampant consumerism. For these so-called solutions, **what counts is not the reality of thousands of forest communities confronting continued land grabbing, territorial destruction, the loss of livelihoods, violence and pollution, but rather companies using product labels claiming to support Sustainable development.** Roundtables, certification schemes, corporate social and environmental responsibility programs, the safeguards of multilateral banks, among many other such initiatives, hold promises for an eco- and socio-friendly capitalist economy. An economy based on industrial production of Sustainable palm oil, Sustainable tree plantations, Sustainable mining, Sustainable energy. But in reality, such practices do little more than greenwash forest destruction and pave the way for further industrial expansion and corporate control over community territories.

Reports on the disastrous impacts of a specific driver of deforestation, industrial cattle ranching for beef production, for example, often conclude with a list of recommendations for companies, governments and financiers to apply best practices or develop a new set of safeguards or voluntary guidelines. But all too frequently, **these recommendations strengthen concepts that actually kill forests**, as they rarely demand a radical break with the *status quo*. Instead, they focus on improvements that lead to a form of destruction that “could have been worse”. Such recommendations provide the excuse for companies to publicise themselves as Sustainable, while communities are left to continue their struggle against land grabbing practises and forest destruction that supposedly “could have been worse”. In this context, **the so-called best practices, safeguards and voluntary guidelines become instrumental in the survival and perpetuation of capitalism and the “development model” that is the driver of most forest destruction.**

Another important but rather hidden threat of these concepts is that they **hinder mobilization and collective organization among civil society groups**. Yet, movements, forest communities and support groups still channel much energy into engaging with these concepts, arguing that this engagement will improve their implementation.

With so many ecological and social crises set to continue, thus generating a growing number of concepts that distract from breaking with the (green) capitalist economy, it is perhaps **time for reflection**. How can grassroots movements and support organizations best **avoid being trapped in endless policy debates and dialogue processes connected to concepts that, in the end, serve to perpetuate the killing of forests**, while undermining mobilization and collective organization?

Enjoy the reading!

## An (incomplete) List of Concepts that Kill Forests



Language and words are contested sites of political struggle. The choices and interpretations that we make when we use language can expose very deep and marked views about how we see, understand and relate to the world. Language is therefore never neutral and certain concepts have historically been used to dominate people and territories. The meanings and uses of words are constantly evolving in regard to political conflicts, interests and power.

In this bulletin, WRM reflects on the connection between language, deforestation and concepts that are usually presented as positive and necessary from an environmental and social perspective. In reality, however, they tend to serve the interests of corporate profit accumulation while dominating and harming communities and the forests and territories they depend upon.

This collection of concepts is a work-in-progress and far from complete. Its aim is to alert our readers to their meanings and uses, the interests behind them and to outline why each of them represents a contribution to the destruction of forests.

### Sustainable Forest Management

Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) began to be promoted in tropical forest regions in the late 1980s as a supposed solution to deforestation caused by industrial logging of rainforests. **Selective Logging** was promoted as a key strategy to obtain economic benefits without compromising the dynamic structure and survival of forests. The idea was backed by timber companies, multilateral financial institutions such as the World Bank and major conservation NGOs. However, in practice, industrial logging, whether “selective” or not, has proven to be an inherently destructive activity that ultimately kills forests. It is not surprising that SFM’s promise has not been kept. Despite an increase in areas under SFM in rainforests the world over, deforestation has also increased.

[Logging concessions: Basis of an industry or political control?](#)

WRM Bulletin 217, August 2015

**Community Forestry Management** is a subcategory of SFM which makes the concept sound even more optimistic. Conversations with community members who were pressured to

join Community Forestry Management schemes, revealed how logging activities made them change their livelihood from one based on non-timber forest products to one based on extracting commercially high-value timber. Because destruction takes place at a much slower pace, communities might only become aware of just how devastating this activity is for the forest after a significant period of time has passed. Although the concept implies that this form of logging is community-led, external forestry engineers lead this corporate model, with the benefits for timber companies and consultancy firms far outweighing those received by communities.

[Voices of local communities in Acre, Brazil, denounce violations of Community-based Sustainable Forest Management](#)

WRM Bulletin 197, December 2013

[Rethinking Community-based Forest Management in the Congo Basin](#)

Rainforest Foundation UK, November 2014

## Protected Areas

**Protected or conservation areas** do not protect or conserve forests. Rather, they kill the forests as they usually -and often violently- encroach on the ancestral territories of forest peoples. When a forest is left without the people who have been living with and defending it for thousands of years, it tends to be destroyed or deteriorate. Companies have much easier access to exploit such forests as communities are no longer there to oppose them. There are many examples where forest areas that are supposedly protected end up encroached by extractive projects. Moreover, when forests are turned into conservation areas, natural fire regimes and other forest characteristics are at risk. Why is this? Because forest communities and their traditional knowledge have historically supported and enriched the diversity of habitats found in forests. In most cases, people are also prohibited from living in Protected Areas, which means they are unable to maintain their livelihoods and ancestral practices of use and management of those forests.

[Good Fire or Bad Fire, Who Decides? A Reflection on Fires and Forests](#)

WRM Bulletin 238, June-July 2018

[Environmental offsets in Panama: A strategy that opens up protected areas to mining](#)

WRM Bulletin 232, July-August 2017

Protected Areas were founded on beliefs that originated in the United States in the late 1800s of the need to preserve “intact” areas of “wilderness” without any human presence, mainly for elite hunting and the enjoyment of scenic beauty. This colonial idea of **conservation**, which separates “nature” from “humans”, has also facilitated the division of forests into concession areas for different purposes. While some areas are to be “preserved” without people, others are destroyed by corporate profit-driven interests. Conservationist NGOs are in one way or another involved in most Protected Areas, often in an alliance with companies that are driving deforestation elsewhere.

[Conservation NGOs: Whose Interests are They Really Protecting?](#)

WRM Bulletin 242, January-February 2019

## Landscape Restoration

These two words are used together to express a very specific political interest. **Restoration** usually involves planting the trees that create industrial monoculture plantations. Millions of hectares have been pledged for Restoration projects during conferences at the international and regional levels, viewed as a supposed solution to the climate crisis and to halt forest loss. These promises persist despite the well-documented negative impacts of monoculture plantations on the ground. To make matters worse, the same spaces that restoration proponents refer to as a **landscape** are the areas that forest peoples refer to as their **territory**. The latter term makes it clear that the land in question is much more than a geographical landscape. Territory is identity; it is a space for life shaped by complex interactions between human and non-human communities over time. Using the term landscape, in contrast, makes it much easier to create the illusion of empty, underused or degraded lands that can be made available for restoration. Academic studies and global and regional initiatives have used this term to claim that millions of hectares of land are available for restoration. In reality, such land is already being used and restoration is likely to take away control over the use of this land, which its occupants call their territory.

### [Main Initiatives to expand tree plantations in Latin America, Africa and Asia](#)

WRM Bulletin 228, January 2018

Logging, oil palm, mining, fossil fuel and agro-businesses are rebranding part of their engagement as Restoration. With this “greener” image, they are not only allowed to continue their operations, but also are now seen as part of “the solution” to deforestation and forest degradation. Thus, restoration also kills forests because it views industrial plantations as positive and sanitizes the corporate image of the companies that are driving deforestation.

### [“The claim that global tree restoration is our most effective climate change solution is simply incorrect scientifically and dangerously misleading”](#)

REDD-Monitor, October 2019

## Certification

The message that certification schemes promote is “Just keep buying!” Whenever an industrial or agriculture commodity falls into disrepute, a voluntary certification initiative soon emerges to ensure that their activities are “sustainable” according to their own indicators. Certification schemes kill forests because they legitimize the expansion of those activities driving deforestation.

### [Greenwashing continues: FSC certifies industrial tree plantations as forests and RSPO oil palm plantations as sustainable](#)

WRM Bulletin 233, September 2017

Companies carefully choose which markets they supply with certified products. They target those where consumers want to buy in accordance with their “ethical concerns” and therefore, believe certification labels to be an “insurance” that those products have been produced or extracted using “sustainable” practices. Because labels encourage consumers to keep buying, they are a driver of consumption instead of reducing it. These labels thus aid the expansion of corporate control over even more community land. They have also failed to resolve conflicts between communities and the corporations that have taken over their

territories. It is important to note that no certification scheme excludes expansion, mainly so that they can always certify more areas. As such, they are a crucial part of the trade in industrial export commodities.

[Certification promotes land concentration, violence and destruction](#)

WRM Bulletin 240, October 2018

[Industrial oil palm plantations' impacts in Indonesia and the experience with the RSPO](#)

WRM Bulletin 201, April 2014

## **REDD: Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation**

REDD has been the dominant international forest policy mechanism since 2005, and has also been a concept constantly re-defined since its introduction: from REDD to REDD+ (including **Sustainable Forest Management**, **Reforestation** and **Conservation Areas**), to landscape and jurisdictional REDD+. Some people don't even bother to use the term REDD+ anymore and refer instead to "performance-based", "results-based" or "ecosystem restoration" payment schemes.

[REDD+: A Scheme Rotten at the Core](#)

WRM Bulletin 245, September 2019

As its name suggests, this term refers to the reduction of emissions caused by deforestation. However, 14 years after it first appeared, proponents still can't provide any convincing evidence that REDD+ has actually reduced deforestation. In reality, REDD+ represents a concept that actually destroys forests and causes harm to forest peoples. This is because, as a carbon offset mechanism, it "greenwashes" the image of corporations responsible for huge levels of pollution and forest degradation and destruction, particularly in the aviation, global commodity food and mining industries. It has also promoted the idea that forests are **Carbon Sinks**, reducing their complex and interrelated cycles and functions to that of storing carbon. REDD+ distracts from the real causes of deforestation, and prevents the implementation of more suitable policies and actions that would halt deforestation.

[What do Forests have to do with Climate Change, Carbon Markets and REDD+? A toolkit for community activists](#)

WRM, 2017

REDD+ did not originate from forest communities and its exponents tend to place the blame for deforestation on peasant and forest people's agricultural practices, while failing to address the large-scale drivers of such deforestation. Most REDD+ activities impose restrictions on community use of forests, and these are often quite severe. Shifting cultivation, gathering and other subsistence activities are usually prohibited in REDD+ areas, with the restrictions regularly enforced with the support of armed guards. Corporate destruction of forests, for its part, continues unhindered by REDD+.

[REDD: A Collection of Conflicts, Contradictions and Lies](#)

WRM, 2014

## Offsetting

Offsetting is a concept that has been creeping into UN climate and forest-related negotiations and many international programs and initiatives. In order to understand the rationale behind this concept, whether linked to biodiversity, carbon, water or others, it is important to bear the following in mind: offsetting destroys forests as it allows the dominant fossil-fuel dependent economic model to continue to thrive and expand. Rather than halting the destruction of territories and forests, offsetting can only exist if there is further destruction, which needs to be “compensated” for elsewhere. Offsetting is based on the simplistic assumption that two places can be “equivalent”. It does not consider all of the interrelations, diversity and uniqueness in time and space of each location.

[Trade in Ecosystem Services. When Payment for Environmental Services delivers a Permit to Destroy](#)

WRM, 2014

[Destroy Here and Destroy There: The Double Exploitation of Biodiversity Offsets](#)

WRM Bulletin 232, July-August 2017-

[Regulated Destruction: How Biodiversity Offsetting enables environmental destruction](#)

Friends of the Earth International

The logic behind offsetting is also being applied to programs that do not include the word “offset”, such as **Zero Net Deforestation**. However, behind the new name the same rationale persists. The corporate commitment to Zero Net Deforestation may sound uplifting, but the word **Net** is crucial. This term simply means that deforestation can happen and forests destroyed, as long as the total area covered by forest within a given geography remains unchanged. It means that an oil palm plantation company, for example, is allowed to destroy a forest as long as it “compensates” that destruction by conserving a “comparably sized” forest in terms of biodiversity elsewhere. All the company has to do is come up with a story that suggests that this other forest would be at risk of destruction without their “compensation” project.

[OLAM Palm Gabon pretends to use the Forest Definition to Implement its Zero Deforestation Pledge](#)

WRM Bulletin 245, September 2019

## Nature-Based-Solutions (also called Natural Climate Solutions)

This is the latest concept that the fossil fuels industry has begun to push along with conservationist NGOs. Their goal: to prevent their pollution records and socio-environmental disasters from forming part of climate negotiations. After 14 years of failing to reduce deforestation, the same **REDD+** proponents are now claiming to have a new answer - now called Nature-Based-Solutions. The logic remains that of previous failed concepts such as REDD+: **offsetting**. Roughly three-quarters of the activities now labelled Nature-Based-Solutions either involve planting trees (industrial plantations) or forest restoration (conservation areas).

However, this concept simply leads to further forest destruction, giving new names to previous false solutions such as offsetting and REDD+. As before, Nature-Based-Solutions

will leave the drivers of large-scale deforestation unaddressed, while drawing attention away from the urgent need to leave fossil fuels in the ground.

### [Natural Climate Solutions](#)

REDD-Monitor

### [Launched at COP25, IETA's Markets for Natural Climate Solutions is Greenwash for the Oil Industry](#)

REDD-Monitor, December 2019

## **Safeguards or Voluntary Guidelines**

Companies, banks, development agencies and conservationist NGOs promote safeguards or voluntary guidelines (for so-called best practices) as a tool to avoid government regulations. Such entities promise to regulate their activities, based on the **standards, guidelines** or **indicators** that they themselves create. Lacking any legal basis, these voluntary standards give the impression that industry is regulated, that things are “safe” and that something is being done to make industrial activities “better”. However, safeguards or voluntary guidelines kill forests as they allow destructive activities to continue and expand, divide communities, weaken resistance and allow the perpetrators of deforestation and land grabbing to operate with impunity.

### [Honduras and the Consultation Law: A Trap that Seeks to Advance Capitalism onto Indigenous Territories](#)

WRM Bulletin 234, November 2017

Safeguards and voluntary guidelines have come to form an integral part of the “checklists” of companies and banks. They have opened the door for companies to continue to engage in business as usual, even if it causes environmental and social destruction that banks claim not to be funding and companies claim not to be causing any longer. The World Bank, for example, has its own safeguards and social and environmental standards for the projects it funds. However, all of these are voluntary, and the entity has revised and diluted them over time in order to provide even greater flexibility in the “requirements” needed for investing in forest areas.

Developing, updating and monitoring these safeguards and standards has also become a highly lucrative business for consulting firms.

### [Safeguarding Investment: Safeguards for REDD+, Women and Indigenous People](#)

WRM Bulletin 211, February 2015

## **Planted forests**

“Planted forests” is a contradiction in terms, as it is only possible to plant a tree, not a forest. This concept is based on the **FAO definition of forests**, and industrial monoculture tree plantation companies are its biggest beneficiaries. FAO’s definition reduces a forest to any area covered by trees, thus leaving aside other life forms as well as the biological, cyclical and cultural diversity that define a forest in terms of its continuous interconnection with forest-dependent communities. National forest statistics count these industrial monocultures

as forests, despite the well-documented social and environmental impacts such plantations have had around the world.

### Forest Definition

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The definition of forests is a highly political issue. It also has serious social and environmental consequences for forest-dependent communities. FAO's definition is the most widely used forest definition today and serves as a guide for national forest definitions worldwide. It is also an important reference in international fora such as the UN climate negotiations. For example, the UN Paris Agreement uses FAO's forest definition and thus promotes industrial tree monocultures under the guise of a positive image of forests.

### Local Struggles Against Plantations

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(For more information please visit our website at: [www.wrm.org.uy](http://www.wrm.org.uy) )

## **“The National Interest”: Neofascism in the Amazon Rainforest**



Brazil. Ph: Mongabay.

Fascism emerged as an ideology last century in Europe. Among other things, it was characterized by a presumed national interest, authoritarianism and the violent repression of its opponents. These elements also apply to the actions of the Brazilian government led by former military officer, Jair Bolsonaro, in his first year of office. Brazil gained worldwide visibility in August 2019 due to the forest fires. While it was easy to see the smoke in the mass media coverage, it was much harder to see what was behind **the smokescreen created by the Brazilian government: a series of actions that will lead the Amazon rainforest to a swift death, destroying territories, livelihoods and the diverse cultures of peoples and populations who depend on the rainforest.**

### **“Our Amazon”**

On August 23, 2019, during the height of the fires in the Amazon, Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro made a statement on radio and television networks. He began by talking about

“our Amazon,” and said that “the Amazon forests are an essential part of our history, our territory, and everything that makes us feel Brazilian.” He also said that “forest protection is our duty” and that we are “aware of our sovereignty” (1).

In that period, some prominent world leaders expressed concern about the situation in the Amazon, and especially in Brazil—which contains the largest area of the Amazon region. The Brazilian government complained about these countries’ alleged attempts to intervene in “our Amazon.” Bolsonaro said: “Who has their eye on the Amazon? What do they want there?” When the president of France announced the help of G7 countries to fight the fires, the Brazilian government did not accept it (2).

This posture is not new. The last military regime in Brazil (1964-1985), which inspired Bolsonaro, invented the false narrative that international companies and NGOs from industrialized nations were conspiring to appropriate the Amazon region. With the motto, “integrate so as not to relinquish,” **the military carried out an authoritarian process of destructive occupation of the Amazon region.** It was supposedly a Brazilian occupation; however, foreign investors also profited from the destruction and extraction in the Amazon (3). **Roads were opened up, transporting logging companies, landowners, national and international entrepreneurs and settlers from other regions of Brazil—to a region that was at that time considered to be “unpopulated,” despite the presence of indigenous peoples and quilombola and river-dwelling communities.**

This process continued in the post-military dictatorship governments, including in the governments of the Workers’ Party (2003-2016), which carried out construction of **the Belo Monte mega-dam.** The third largest hydroelectric plant in the world, Belo Monte was designed—though never built—during the military dictatorship. Indigenous peoples and social organizations in the region widely fought against the construction of Belo Monte, but their voices were ignored. It was also during the governments of the Workers’ Party (PT, by its Portuguese acronym), that a **new forest code** was approved, which—among other things—condoned the deforestation that had taken place until 2008. This code permits deforestation beyond the allowed limits, as long as it is “offset” by preserving forests in other regions of the same biome. This encouraged **the legitimization of illegal occupations and a new wave of “grillaje” (land grabbing) of forest lands,** through the implementation of the so-called Rural Environmental Registry (Cadastro Ambiental Rural, CAR) (4). Meanwhile, one must consider that in the PT governments, there was more investment in state agencies to oversee, investigate and penalize deforestation, which led to a significant decrease in deforestation from 2004-2010.

It is also important to remember that long before the 2018 elections, Bolsonaro had found **support for his candidacy among large landowners and companies that exploit the “riches” of the Amazon.** In exchange for this support, Bolsonaro promised them impunity; he also promised that he would fight against everything that had to do with “the left,” “environmentalists,” “NGOs,” “human rights” and “the landless,” and that he would not demarcate any more indigenous land. This explains “The Day of Fire” during the peak of the forest fire crisis, when landowners in Pará—the state with the highest deforestation rate—set fire to a forest together to “celebrate” that they could do so with impunity. Another certain sign of impunity is that between August 2018 and July 2019 there was a **large increase—by 84%—in the deforestation of areas that the federal government should be protecting: conservation areas and indigenous lands (5).**

Yet so far, “the protection of forests,” and respecting the autonomy and agency of communities who depend on them, has not been a priority for any of the Brazilian governments. In presidential cabinets, the voices of big capital interests and large landowners have always been louder. The indigenous and quilombola territories that exist today, as well as the legalized extractive reserves—which forest-dependent peoples and communities can collectively use—are the **result of much struggle, organization, mobilization and pressure on the part of these peoples and communities.**

### The Alleged Threats

During the height of the fires, and without presenting evidence, Bolsonaro began to suggest that—in addition to indigenous peoples—**NGOs were behind all of it:** “(...) we took money away from the NGOs, transfers from abroad; 40% was going to NGOs; they don’t have any more. So these people are feeling the lack of money. I’m not confirming it, but it’s possible that these ‘NGO people’ are carrying out a criminal activity to bring attention against me, and against the Brazilian government” (6). The “transfers from abroad” referred to the resources of the Amazon Fund, supported by the governments of Germany and Norway to support actions to reduce deforestation in the Amazon.

In November 2019, some **NGOs were targeted by a police action in the Amazonian state of Pará.** Four firefighter volunteers from Alter do Chão, trained to fight forest fires, were sent to pretrial detention. The accusation, based on the federal government’s insinuation, was that the volunteers were setting fire to justify a call for international support to fight the fires, and that they would have diverted these resources (7).

The neofascist government of Bolsonaro even accused film actor Leonardo DiCaprio of funding the NGOs that were investigated. DiCaprio has a foundation to support the protection of nature, but he denied the accusation. Regarding the NGOs investigated, he said that “Even though they deserve support, we do not fund the organizations cited” (8).

While Bolsonaro accuses NGOs, the **historical process of “grillaje” (land grabbing) in Brazil is intensifying.** Now, the land usurpers (grileiros) are much more armed, because one of the Bolsonaro government’s first actions was to sign a **decree facilitating the possession of up to four weapons per person.** In a manifesto in support of one of the NGOs accused of burning forests, over 200 organizations state: “We want the police to investigate and catch the grileiros, the land speculators, the gangs that invade and steal public lands and forests, using fire as a strategy to clean the area. And those working to defend the forests should not be accused without evidence” (9). In this context, it goes without saying that **violence against peoples in the Amazon is increasing.** As of September 2019, the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI, by its Portuguese acronym) recorded 160 cases of land invasions that affected 153 indigenous territories, mostly in the Amazon; and more indigenous leaders were murdered (10).

A law that passed this year in Pará State (129/2019) is further aggravating the situation: **the law encourages illegal deforestation, facilitates the regularization of public lands for private uses, and makes it possible to validate titles to lands that have been grabbed** (11). The federal government is taking similar measures, even allowing logging companies’ invasions in protected areas to go unpunished (12). The federal government is also looking into ways to facilitate the export of native wood, which is currently prohibited (13).

## The Alleged Solutions

In his speech at the inaugural ceremony of the UN General Assembly in September 2019, Bolsonaro also accused NGOs of being behind a conspiracy to “make sure our indians remain true cavemen.” Despite saying that he recognizes that “each peoples or tribe, with its chief” has “its culture, traditions, customs and mainly its worldview,” Bolsonaro apparently knows what indians want, when he says: “Indians don’t want to be poor landowners on rich lands.” As a solution, he suggests that “We are ready—in partnership and adding value—to sustainably use our full potential.” In other words, he suggests maintaining **the same extractive economic model, but led by national actors** rather than “foreign economic and political interests” (14).

It should be noted that the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI, by its Portuguese acronym), the **state agency to protect indigenous peoples and demarcate indigenous lands, is turning into an agency in defense of agribusiness and mining interests within indigenous lands** (15). In order to open up indigenous lands that have already been demarcated, the federal government intends to modify the Constitution. If that happens, there are **4,332 exploration requests for potential mineral extraction on indigenous lands in the Brazilian Amazon that could be approved**. One must not forget that the global mining sector is dominated by transnational, not Brazilian, companies (16).

Regarding forest conservation as a way to stop forest destruction, the government constantly repeats that Brazil is a model of conservation—even though in 2019 it **broke the record for deforestation for the last decade**. So, the day before the 2019 UN Climate Conference, the Minister of Environment, Ricardo Salles, said: “We should be entitled to at least around US \$10 billion per year.” This is the amount that the government would charge so-called rich countries for supposedly taking measures to maintain forests as carbon sinks (17). Regarding criticism about the increase in deforestation, Salles promised a “new strategy” (18). But so far nobody knows what that new strategy would be.

In conclusion, while Bolsonaro states that “forest protection is our duty,” **in practice it is completely different**. It is enough to remember that when Bolsonaro formed his government, he wanted to do away with the Ministry of the Environment. And when, after strong pressure forced him to back down, he made deep cuts in the Ministry’s budget—thereby reducing its ability to control deforestation. A March 2019 decree, for example, cut \$187 million Reals from its budget (more than US\$45 million) (19).

The objective is clear: **open up the Brazilian Amazon as quickly as possible to extraction and destruction, and “integrate” indigenous and non-indigenous peoples into the consumer society**, so that they abandon their subsistence economies that depend on forests and can serve as cheap manual labor for the projects that are planned to be implemented.

## Resistance

**Neofascism in forests is not only happening in Brazil. It also threatens peoples in other countries with tropical forests.** We refer, for example, to what is happening in Papua, India and the Philippines. But there is also **a lot of resistance**, and that is how we want to finish this story. The following are some fragments from the Articulation of Brazil's

Indigenous Peoples' (APIB, by its Portuguese acronym) response to Bolsonaro's speech at the UN in September 2019:

"Bolsonaro condemns himself and is an embarrassment to Brazil, by demonstrating a serious lack in understanding geopolitics, history and the socio-cultural reality of his country; by wanting to fight even imaginary enemies, and by making accusatory, unfounded, inaccurate, demagogic, deceitful and beyond fallacious statements, (...) mainly against us, native peoples. We owe nothing to him, his descendants or the elites who—through colonialist, devastating and genocidal practices—have been taking our territories and the natural goods that we have been protecting for millennia. On the contrary, Brazil's historical and social debt with us remains unpayable. That is why we do not deny our Brazilian identity, and that is precisely why we demand respect for our right to be a part of this country, ensuring the basis of our existence—our territories, what little we have left—our ethnic and cultural diversity, our ways of life, our worldview. (...)

Bolsonaro knows that his hate speech and his willingness to legalize criminal practices like garimpo [illegal mining], in addition to fully opening up protected areas (indigenous lands, quilombola and traditional communities' territories, and conservation units) to all kinds of invaders, as well as the expansion of agribusiness and large enterprises, were the fuel that started the fire. This is a fire of proportions never before seen in Brazil's recent history, mainly against the Amazonian and Cerrado [Brazilian savannah] biomes. Even so, he outrageously states in his speech that the Amazon remains virtually untouched, and that he has a "solemn commitment" to it. (...)

We call on our allied bases, organizations and social movements not to be intimidated and never to retreat in their defense of their basic rights—mainly our rights to life, and to the lands and territories that we traditionally occupy" (20).

Finally, it is yet to be known what positions governments of countries with strong interests in the Amazon's "riches" will take—mainly the United States, Canada, European nations, Japan and China. This also includes their interests in carbon credits in Amazonian forests, which they deceptively claim will offset their pollution. Because it is not only the government of Brazil creating a smokescreen; many governments also do so by appearing to be worried about the forest fires or Bolsonaro's policies. We know that, above all, they are seeking to **benefit their own economic and multinational interests through their foreign relations**.

Therefore, is it not time to look more closely at what is behind the smokescreens created by neofascist governments, in order to **build stronger and more solid alliances to combat the hatred, violence and destruction of forests that are obliterating the Amazon and many other forests and peoples in the world?**

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## Portucel en Mozambique: la realidad tras el discurso de las “plantaciones sustentables”



Communities in the province of Zambezia, Mozambique—in particular in the Ile, Namarroi and Mulevala districts—have been living and using the land in a sustainable way for centuries. This system enabled practices and processes which in turn maintained peaceful and functional relationships between communities and the environment.

Mozambique is currently experiencing the dilemmas of a development model based on the extraction of resources. **Land is becoming an asset in service to capitalism, and it is expropriated from the local population.** In regards to tree plantations, since 2000, **more than 600 thousand hectares of land have been placed in concession to produce pine and eucalyptus in Niassa, Nampula, Zambezia and Manica provinces. These plantations are mostly controlled by two large companies: Portucel (controlled by The Navigator Company of Portugal) and Lúrio Green Resources (controlled by the company, Green Resources).**

In 2013, the government of Mozambique committed to granting around three million hectares of land in concession to companies that promote tree monocultures in Niassa—with the goal of making the country the **second largest pulp producer in Africa**, after neighboring South Africa. It is clear that investing in tree plantations is a priority for the Mozambique government, regardless of their impacts. Due to the reduction in cultivation areas in the regions where these projects take place, the concessions have led to social unrest, forced resettlement and localized food insecurity.

And yet, at the 2019 annual meeting of the New Generation Plantations platform (PNG by its Spanish acronym)—an initiative by conservation organization, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), to promote the industrial expansion of monocultures—**Portucel referred to these plantations as a group of “sustainable plantations that support rural prosperity, with an inclusive and shared approach.”** Meanwhile, this so-called “sustainable forest development in Africa” translates into a harsh reality on the ground.

## The Fight Against Invasions of the “Machambas”

On July 14, 2018, the organization, MISSÃO TABITA, was informed of a conflict between Portucel and the communities of Mugulama in the Nanretete area of Ile District. A Nanretete community member and resident said that “Portucel technicians came to Nanretete to inform the community about **cemetery mapping**. Company representatives asked the community the following questions: “Where are the remains of people buried, and what is the cemetery registration procedure?” All of this took place **without any consent from the communities in the locality**. An indignant community member asked, “What is this, if the cemetery is a sacred place where the dead are buried, and the ending place of our lives?” While that question was being asked, the leader of the community and the company technician ordered entry into the cemetery to take photos. The community reacted so strongly that they even wanted to hit the technician in response to this action and the company’s attitude.

MISSÃO TABITA verified that this kind of activity was merely beginning in the community of Nanretete, to later continue in the communities of Namacubo, Intiticoni, Naume, Mualua and Napua—where other issues arose: **armed threats from suspicious people, and communications from Portucel announcing agreements with communities that had been reached in bad faith**.

The communities we passed through also **requested support in their struggle against the company’s invasion of the machambas, the word used to refer to lands for food production in Mozambique**. This invasion sparked more attention in the communities, since agriculture is the basis of their survival. We also spoke with the Neves community chief, from whom we obtained minimal information about the company’s objective—which is to expand eucalyptus plantations. He also stated that the company’s team visited his office many times; they would go to **pressure him in order to secure the company’s entry into other areas**. Because he resisted, they looked for a way to corrupt him, offering him an amount of money that he did not disclose to us; and they explained that they would first map sacred spaces to avoid destroying them.

## Portucel’s Construction of Small Dams on Rivers that Pass Through Communities

In July 2019, MISSÃO TABITA received an alert in the communities about the construction of **small dams on rivers that go through the communities**. One of the people affected by the incident said: “Suddenly a group came to measure machambas, with the guarantee of securing the peasants’ land; and we accepted because they argued that in the event that a company came to take over our lands, we could produce the DUAT documents (Land Use and Exploitation Rights). They gave us safeguards and appealed to good conservation. A few days later, white people came with the head of the Ile administrative post (headquarters) and agricultural technicians to a meeting called by the local leader. **They did not ask for the community’s opinion at the meeting**. They just said that they want to build a dam on the Nakope River in the community of Hamela, on my land, to irrigate vegetable crops to benefit the community—thereby affecting 34 families. At the meeting, they said that the people who will be affected will leave their lands, and they didn’t tell us what our fate will be. Now, I am an orphan. I have children to take care of. I am not happy, because I don’t know where I’m going to go. I wouldn’t want to leave my ancestors and go live a dubious and uncertain life. They can’t leave me on land that doesn’t produce anything, because I live thanks to the machambas, which is the land that sustains me.”

**Well-versed in trickery, Portucel started a collaboration with the Rural Association for Mutual Aid (ORAM, by its Portuguese acronym), whose job is to demarcate lands.** This was the entity that demarcated the proposed dam construction area, claiming that it was to irrigate agricultural products. The people we interviewed only spoke of ORAM, without knowing that this was Portucel's scheme.

## **The Process of Accessing Land, and the Rights of Local Communities**

Information about how DUATs are assigned to Portucel is not in the public domain, because the legal compliance for that process is unknown. And it is necessary to bear in mind that a significant portion of the lands in question belonged to the local communities (the respective owners of the DUATs). In the areas where Portucel located, agriculture is the main subsistence and income-generating activity for the local population—involving practically all family members. They practice agriculture manually on small family farms using a companion planting system based on local varieties.

**Portucel Mozambique has about 2.3 billion dollars of financing from the International Finance Corporation (IFC)—the private arm of the World Bank—to establish eucalyptus plantations for the industrial production of pulp and energy in Mozambique.** According to the IFC, Mozambique was chosen to implement this project due to the strong cultural affinity and its strategic and favorable geographic position relative to Asian markets. According to project information that is available in the Environmental Impact Assessment Reports, the installation of eucalyptus plantations in Zambezia and Manica provinces will be done gradually. In Zambezia province, an estimated 2,000 hectares will be planted the first year, gradually increasing to cover an area of around 120,000 hectares of eucalyptus after 12 years. Meanwhile, in Manica province, an estimated 1,500 hectares will be planted the first year, with the same gradual increase reaching about 126,000 hectares after 12 years.

Several community members expressed **feeling pressured by local leaders into accepting Portucel's entry, and the consequent transfer of land.** However, they do not know whether Portucel was aware of this local pressure. According to the interviewees, Portucel Mozambique convinced the communities to relinquish their machambas to the company, through **promises of employment and technical training.** Meanwhile, communities complained that **the promised jobs ended up being short and precarious,** and that the wages ranged from 80 to 100 meticales per day (between US \$1.25 and \$1.50). The compensation criteria used for the communities—whose rights to the land were transferred over to Portucel—are also not in the public domain.

"We greatly lament this, because we didn't receive what they promised us. The people who work [for the company] don't stay on; they work for a few days. And that's the reason we are not happy with Portucel," vents a community member from Socone Administrative Post (headquarters).

All of these verified cases contradict what Portucel publicly stated in its document about land access procedures, in which it said that "in the event that communities and families are not interested in the Portucel Mozambique project, the company will seek an alternative area, rigorously rejecting any act of pressure or coercion on the part of its collaborators."

According to members of interviewed communities, negotiations to transfer community land are done on an individual basis. The company directly negotiates with the owner of the

machamba. This negotiation also covers the cleaning of the machamba—which is done by the owner and hired family members, who receive about 1,500 meticales (about US \$24) for this work.

“At first, they said that whoever wanted to work should hand over their machamba, and we did not waste much time. I gave up two and a half hectares, and we only worked for one month because it took a month to cut down the trees. They gave us 1,500 meticales per person for the job. I did not receive any money for the machamba, but rather for the work we did on my own machamba. Now I don’t have anything to do but stand around. The leader himself handed over his machamba, and now he is sitting at home. I produced corn, jogo beans, bóer beans and cassava in my machamba to support my family. I have six children, and I also live with my wife and mother-in-law,” said one community member.

So far, the company has attributed the communities’ concerns, to a large extent, to a lack of information and communication between the company and the communities. MISSÃO TABITA believes that this analysis is **a gross simplification of the communities’ concerns, considering that many people simply have no interest in changing their way of life, do not want to live surrounded by eucalyptus trees, and have no idea about the negative impacts that this kind of plantation will have on their machambas—in terms of water availability and use of pesticides, etc.**

Even though the company is only in the initial process of implementation, there are already **land conflicts**. The Mozambique government must urgently address this situation with special attention, as it constitutes a threat to the survival of rural communities, and especially those of Ile, Namarroi and Mulevala districts. Most members of the communities contacted **do not have the slightest knowledge about the project**, the amount of area it will use, the potential social and environmental impacts, or the details of the type and number of jobs promised; nor do they know what kinds of changes to expect in their ways of life. There is visible discontent, due to the **high expectations generated by countless promises** made during the community consultation. The company is tempting and “fishing” government officials with money; they are therefore in favor of the company.

Our struggle to defend the environment and to preserve water sources—the main source of food for humankind—must be constant, because the privatization of water sources is a growing problem throughout the world. Water is a basic human right, and even though water management is necessary and in the public interest, this vital resource should not be property.

**When a dam is built, the river dies!  
Water is life!**

Zambezia, October 2019

*Rodrigues Bicicleta, Eugénio Oloda Muhelele and Victorino Bernardo  
MISSÃO TABITA, Mozambique*

*An organization that seeks social justice, human rights and the promotion of communities’ rights to use the land. The organization works in collaboration with Justiça Ambiental! on the issue of communities who lost their rights and who are affected by large eucalyptus plantations in Mozambique.*

## India: Women, Commons and Patriarchy



India. Foto: SAMVAD

**Commons are a basis for livelihoods and determine the life rhythms of a big section of the population in India**, especially for those living on the margins of the dominant capitalist economy. Commoners form a significant section of the Indian population, and the majority are dependent on forests and small-scale agriculture. Development planners seek to draw commoners into the modern economy to enable them to get economic benefits, but they pay little attention to the fact that **Commons is a way of life and that the processes of development has placed those dependent on nature and their intertwined ways of life with, for example, forests, under threat** by assuming that the Commons and their inhabitants need a paradigm shift to a more “civilized” way of life. Embedded in the Commons - the inherently diverse forests, grasslands, water bodies, etc.– are the multiple traditions that remain alive and sustain themselves and the lives around them, based on a symbiotic reciprocity of nurturing and replenishing, on knowledge and practices which have evolved over centuries of being and doing.

**Women have been at the centre of these communities practicing and nurturing the Commons.** These practices emerge from a tradition of giving and receiving and, in turn, the creation of “abundance”.

Some feminists defend that since women are the birth givers, the status of caregiver is “naturally” given to them. Other feminists, on the contrary, view these assigned roles as socially constructed. The degree of acknowledgement and focus given to women and their contributions to the nurturance of societies has varied across regions and cultures. However, these have increasingly being diminished and subjugated by the **capitalistic, patriarchal and hierarchical socio-economic structure of society, characterized by oppressive control over labour and the domination of nature and women’s work.**

Women’s work in the household or on the fields, in the forest, raising animals or foraging for fuel, food, water or grasses is neither considered as “work” in the current dominant paradigm nor is it remunerated or respected. Women’s rights to land and livelihoods are always the most insecure. **The rampant violence against women across societies is an expression of the domination and control of women’s work and their capacities, as much as of the**

**domination of nature** that comes in tandem with technologies for this purpose: mining, logging, trawling, etc. (1)

In India, grazers and herders, often nomadic, constitute a significant part of the population. They have foraged, hunted and gathered from the forestlands and have had centuries of learning to evolve “a way of life” that harmonizes their needs with those of nature, of which they feel part. Several such tribal societies have had a matrilineal history (where the descendants are identified via the mother’s blood line), which is believed to be embedded in the centrality of women to maintain synergistic relationships with the Commons (e.g. Khasis in North East State of Meghalaya, the tribals in Sirmor District of Himachal Pradesh in Northern India, etc.) Other tribal societies, however, established patterns of survival and sustenance in less egalitarian structures, and are increasingly turning towards rigid patriarchal modes of governance.

### **(Her)stories: Cycles and Abundance**

The knowledge and stories, the lives and seasonal cycles of pastoral communities and indigenous peoples have increasingly been documented. Much of this documentation, however, has been **based on the stories told by men and informed by a patriarchal and capitalist mind set**. This has meant a foregrounding of certain activities and processes over others; of capturing experiences that portray and emphasise particular aspects of the economy and the relationships embedded therein; of highlighting specific values that create images of a certain lifestyle and emphasize certain choices over others – an attempt to validate the legitimacy of a world embedded in greed over need; of dominance and competitiveness as a natural attribute. Meanwhile, **those stories which are the foundation of multitudes of communities but do not serve the purpose of accumulation of capitalist modes of production, have been ignored**.

More recent attempts to document the stories of these communities from a women’s perspective illustrate the nuances of their existence. They highlight experiences of communities sustaining their lives and livelihoods in simple yet intertwined modes of being with nature. They are mostly narratives and analysis from sites of displacement or climatic crisis, from the struggles against the onslaught of destructive development and aggressive industrialization, etc. In all of them, there are invariably women’s experiences that bring forth the nuance, the expressions that inform the protests and the women bodies that end up mostly at the forefront of resistance. And thus, it is also they who are easy targets to the masculine aggressive power of the capitalist developers of industry, working in alliance with the state.

**The Commons as a space and across time, as “culture” and “lifestyle”, have been integral to women commoners’ ways of doing, knowing and being**. The space of the Commons defines and is defined by an infinite intertwining of their existence as entities embedded within these realms, ascribed by the rhythm of nature. Their rhythm and nuance is best unravelled from the oral histories and traditions. For example, the appearance of new leaves on a particular species of plant forecasts the possibility of a good monsoon, or a bird or a flourish of fruit flowers on a mango tree. **Commons’ economies from a gender perspective represent a daily cycle of balancing needs for survival and care, with processes of abundance and scarcity**. Taking from the Commons is done in accordance to the need to replenish towards maintaining a balance based on cycles and seasons. Jhuming (shifting cultivation) and Nomadism have followed such a rhythm across space and time.

While several economies seek to rediscover or re-imagine the Commons as a way of life, many societies in several regions of the global South have managed until now to sustain a life based on the Commons – as a set of principles and rhythms defined contextually, but also universal in its ideological roots of sharing and abundance.

## Work, Labour and Production

Despite the significant current shifts in tribal societies under the influence of the oppressive, dominant mainstream economy, one still finds acknowledgment of women's rights to community resources. Yet, **their rights are curtailed in the realm of individual household rights to land**, a system that has emerged from the practices of non-commoners embedded in notions of private property.

Although women remain to a greater extent the holders of knowledge in relation to food, herbs and healing practices, aware and capable of foraging, gathering, harvesting and other work based on a legacy of gained skills and knowledge, this work is mostly invisibilized and lacks recognition. Such work became the burden of women when **the classification of work emerged: subsistence value work** (assigned to women who pursue it based on their conviction of its value) **became separated from economic value work** (assigned first and mainly to men who aspire to gain economic value through wage labour or other forms of market linkages). From this classification, **hierarchies were created, with economic value work being remunerated and** accordingly, having a higher value attached to it.

The system of labour (economic value work) is invariably performed for the “outsider” - a contractor or a local person with allegiance to the world outside the Commons - for motives other than subsistence or sustenance. The likelihood for men to be drawn into the economic value work system is higher due to the lesser extent to which they are embedded in the work related to their Commons, and to the nurturance of the Commons' philosophy. **Men also began to dominate decision-making and rule making spaces that determine the terms of engagement with each other and with the outside/other world of the (labour) market.** As a result, many of such societies have been prone to adopt and reinforce mainstream practices and cultures, including patriarchal ideals.

Debates over the need to acknowledge women's work as labour by compensating it through financial measures has found resonance in India among some policy makers and with western liberal feminists. While this might seem like an altruistic goal, it in fact detracts from the dignity of such work: It would reduce women's nurturing work to an occupation for which a wage payment is due, and be done with it. **The act of sharing, sustaining and nurturing the Commons for the creation of abundance is negated when seeing it merely as a commodity to be remunerated.** But, as this function is not shared, it becomes confined to the domain of women and ignores the social and cultural structure embedded therein.

## “Work” by the Feminist Commons

In managing food for the household, for instance, women would make discrete decisions about what to collect and how much. They would likely opt for that which is greater in abundance as these would be likely to replenish more quickly and more easily, as opposed to those particular herbs, tubers, roots or inner barks which would be useful as crisis foods, in times of ailments or if there is risk to abundance. **These discrete choices are rarely**

**recognized or understood for their role in maintaining a balance in the use and replenishment within the cycles of nature** and would therefore not enter the forecasting of food needs or crisis management.

Yet, one often finds planners, bureaucrats and officials of state and aid programmes, immersed in the delivery of a particular recipe of development payments and packages, lamenting that communities do not seem to exercise a planning approach to deal with their problems nor save for times of crisis.

A feminist perspective on Commons would reveal that being embedded in the cycles and rhythms of nature makes the compulsion to hoard contradictory to the principles of sharing and caring. **That receiving from the abundance is a function also of ensuring that needs (and not wants or greed) define the extent of extraction**, in order to allow others and themselves to depend on the availability on future occasions. **Such communities have refrained from a culture of accumulation since abundance and not scarcity informs their needs**. The simplicity of needs is woven into a fine texture of relationships of receiving and reciprocity so that the need for hoarding and conflict may not arise. And if that were to arise, there are also norms for its redress that many communities have been known to adopt.

**The problem then lies not in their unwillingness to hoard or accumulate, but in the processes that threaten the sustenance of abundance on which they depend.** “Work” from a feminist Commons lens needs to incorporate the actions and processes undertaken in a context of nature’s abundance and shared processes of production to **benefit the entire realm of wellbeing**. Labour, on the other hand, is coercion deriving from the sense of scarcity, which compels individuals to seek economic returns for themselves, irrespectively of how these tasks may affect nature and other beings.

**Work viewed as labour, then, ignores the processes rooted in complex social and cultural contexts.** It invisibilizes the worker and the social relevance and ecological imprint of this work. Women’s movements strive for recognition of such work, but **not as “women’s work”, but as work that is fundamental to the wellbeing of societies**. Feminists also strive for sharing such work as well as the rewards – be these in economic terms or in the relations that this work entails. If such work is to be shared, then **men and women could contribute together more holistically towards building nourishing Commons and societies**.

*This is a summary of the article:*

*“Women’s Work is Work: A Feminist Perspective on the Commons as Process”, Soma KP and Richa Audichaya, India.*

[http://boellblog.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/KP\\_Soma.pdf](http://boellblog.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/KP_Soma.pdf)

*(1) “Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property rights. Patriarchal ideals act to explain and justify this dominance and attribute it to inherent “natural” differences between men and women.*

## Blockchain and Smart Contracts: Capital's Latest Attempts to Seize Life on Earth



Ph: Earth Bank of Codes

### The two meanings of “biopiracy”

The “fair and equitable sharing of Benefits from the use of genetic resources” (1) is, besides preservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, one of the main goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The Convention, created at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, was celebrated as a victory by southern megadiverse countries for being the first international treaty that recognized the sovereign right of these nations to exploit those resources. Foreign parties, interested in accessing genetic resources would have to get permission from the respective state governments. The benefits from commercial use were to be shared with both the state and the local communities and indigenous peoples that hold traditional knowledge about these resources.

By that time, **the monopolization of genetic resources through intellectual property (called patents) – mainly by pharmaceutical companies – was increasingly perceived as a threat by Amazonian forest communities.** Maybe the most emblematic case in this context was that of US patent number 5.751P, that granted a US citizen in 1986 exclusive rights over the plant *Banisteriopsis caapi* – an Amazonian endemic plant, known as Ayahuasca, sacred to many of indigenous peoples in the region.

To expose this kind of **theft of traditional knowledge from forest peoples** through patents and, above all, the conversion of collectively used biological resources and collective knowledge associated with such resources into private property, the NGO Rafi (today ETC Group) coined in the mid-1990s the term “**biopiracy**”. (2) Initially the use of the term was avoided inside the CBD debates, being considered the expression of an “extreme view”.

In the following years however, the term became increasingly integrated in those debates, although its meaning changed fundamentally: Biopiracy was now understood as obtaining Indigenous Peoples rights over genetic resources and traditional knowledge without permission or benefit sharing. The underlying idea of “legal appropriation” stands of course in stark contrast to the original intent of critical groups like ETC. Indian activist Vandana Shiva

brought this contradiction to the attention by stating that the problem of biopiracy is a result of the western Intellectual Property Rights systems, not the absence of such systems in the global South. (3)

In 2010, the Nagoya Protocol, a legally binding agreement about Access and Benefit Sharing of genetic resources, was adopted by the CBD with the declared intention to “prevent biopiracy”. As a matter of fact though, there are countless obstacles to the implementation of the Protocol. Disclosure of origin of genetic resources and identification of the original holders of traditional knowledge, who would be entitled to benefit sharing, seem to be impossible tasks. Besides, **pharmaceutical companies, like Bayer or Novartis, can gain access to these resources in indirect ways by operating in the grey zone of academic collaboration**. They are also increasingly able to produce synthetic substances in the laboratory, in theory without ever physically accessing the genetic resource in the country of origin. They can then claim in their patent applications that the synthetic copies are their “inventions”. (4) “Successful” benefit sharing contracts continue largely to be wishful thinking. Negotiations generally fail due to cultural differences, different value systems, communication problems and lack of trust between the parties.

### The Amazon Bank of Codes

In January 2018, the World Economic Forum (WEF) launched at its 48<sup>th</sup> annual meeting in Davos, the Amazon Bank of Codes Initiative. It is supposed to be **the first phase of a larger program, which consists on the partnership of the Earth BioGenome Project and the Earth Bank of Codes**. (5) The Earth BioGenome Project intends to sequence and catalogue all plants, animals, fungi and a large portion of all single-celled organisms on earth by developing and implementing air-, land- and ocean-faring drones and new cheap sequencing technologies (see note 1) within the next ten years. The Earth Bank of Codes is planned as an online system that will use a technology called blockchain, which would facilitate to register global biological and biomimetic (copied from nature) intellectual property assets, as well as the origin, rights and obligations associated with them.

Why blockchain? This technology allows property values like money (6) to be transferred “peer to peer” – directly from one party to another without a third party, like a bank or trustee. How does this work? Transaction data are stored in blocks that are timestamped and tied to one another in forms of codes and cipher systems, forming a chain. Copies of this chain are stored across many devices and updated with each new transaction, which makes it virtually impossible to alter transactions retroactively. Blockchain systems frequently make use of so-called “smart contracts” in order to facilitate negotiations of contracts as well as the fully automated commercialization of the assets through a web portal.

Many people believe that these new technologies will restructure the global economic system in the next decades. The combination of blockchain and self-executing smart contracts carries the potential to make in the future not only banks (including central banks) obsolete, but also notary offices, land registry offices, lawyers, security companies or any other mediator or trusted third party.

**So how is the Amazon Bank of Codes expected to put these technologies into practice?** Through the web portal, a buyer (for instance a pharmaceutical company) would be able to obtain Intellectual Property rights over a biological resource (for instance an Amazonian medicinal plant) quickly and with almost zero transaction cost. All rights and

obligations would already have been coded into a smart contract and the sellers (for instance the government of Brazil or a group of indigenous people that hold traditional knowledge about the plant) would automatically receive their respective share, as soon as the buyer gets revenues from his Intellectual Property asset. (7)

The World Economic Forum propagates that its project, counting with a budget of US\$ 4,7 billion will in the next decade enable **a multi-trillion dollar “inclusive global Bio-Economy”**, and – enforcing the Nagoya Protocol – ensure the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from “bio-inspired innovations”.

### **Why blockchain and smart contracts are not solutions but part of the problem**

In a recent article, Larry Lohman, researcher from The Cornerhouse, analyses the emergence of blockchain and smart contracts as one more chapter in a long-standing historical process of mechanization promoted by capital. (8) For Karl Marx, all artefacts, including means of production like machines, are crystalized human labour. In the capitalist industrial mode of production, machines are part of capital and inversely instrumentalize the human workers. “The instrument of labour confronts the labourer, during the labour-process, in the shape of capital, of dead labour, that dominates, and pumps dry, living labour-power.” (9) In this sense, a mechanical loom or an assembly line, as parodied by Charlie Chaplin in his movie *Modern Times*, is dead machine labour that dominates and exploits living human labour.

Basically, the same thing is happening with blockchain and smart contracts. However, they supplant different kinds of labour. “What the smart contract strives to mechanize is something more encompassing and complex: trust, rights, identity, recognition, respect and – in an even more thoroughgoing sense than any factory machine or personal computer – interpretation.” (8) **In the capitalist context, these machine algorithms (computed programming codes), that we like to regard as our “tools”, actually dominate and exploit us.** We still think that we are “using” the internet, when we apply likes or dislikes in Facebook, write a WhatsApp message with autocomplete, identify objects on CAPTCHA-images or adapt text in Google Translate. In fact, we are not only feeding big data, but also grooming the algorithms that learn from us. **We still think we are “consuming” online services, while in fact we are providing unwaged living labour for the dead labour of capital.** In contrast to traditional human labour, like assembly line work, this new labour takes place unrecognized and hence reinforces the capitalist myth of a fully automated labour-free world.

Proceeding from Marx, Lohman concludes that “machines can’t serve capital without constant, cheap infusions of the ‘blood’ and ‘vitality’ of free-range human and nonhuman activity.” The “nonhuman activity” refers to the living labour provided by nature throughout millions of years, like the conversion of solar energy into coal, oil and gas (through plant metabolism and earth’s pressure on buried organic material), or the provision of minerals and metals. In the case of blockchain, the amount of nonhuman activity is enormous. **The amount of energy consumed to run the computers, storing data devices and related technology is massive. Thus, the carbon emissions of blockchain as a whole are already today in the range of those of a medium-sized country in the global North.** (10)

The second law of thermodynamics says that the total entropy of a system will increase over time. What does this mean? Systems like living organisms or machines will always have an output of usable energy that is lesser than the input. **To keep them alive or running, new**

**constant input of usable energy is necessary. This is why a perpetual motion machine cannot exist.** The idea of a fully mechanized world relies precisely on the myth of the perpetual motion machine and accordingly can be refuted on the basis of the second law of thermodynamics: mechanization – the transformation of living labour in dead labour – will always cause the consumption of more living labour from humans and nature.

Moreover, human sign-interpretation – what smart contracts ultimately strive to mechanize – cannot be reduced to computer codes. This is due to a fundamental paradox that results, to put it simply, from the fact that each rule that is supposed to govern the correct interpretation of a sign has itself to be interpreted in order to be applied correctly. So, the rule always requires another rule, leading to an infinite regress. (11) This means that **the attempt to mechanize interpretation not only must fail, but lead to ever more interpretation work.**

### **A wave of neo-colonial grabbing in the tropical forests**

What took place a few decades ago in the form of occasional transgressions by mainly pharmaceutical companies and was exposed as biopiracy by activists and grassroots NGOs, has developed into **a fully-fledged project of global seizure of life by capital (pushed mainly by pharmaceutical companies, conservationist NGOs, mainstream scientists, Northern governments, etc.)**

The Earth Bank of Codes is however highly myth based and, what the World Economic Forum describes euphemistically as “interesting challenges” to be overcome by the project, are in fact **fundamental and insurmountable contradictions.**

Nevertheless, we have to remember that historically the waves of colonial exploitation and violence that ravaged tropical forests and its people were oftentimes prepared and accompanied by mythical constructions like the “El dorado” and the “warlike Amazons”. When those myths were shown to be false, the plunder still continued and other narratives were created for its justification.

**The Amazon Bank of Codes will probably have severe impacts on forests and forest people. It is likely to exacerbate the existing impacts of the REDD-type projects** (12) that are currently taking toll in tropical forests: land grabbing, rights violations, rural exodus, division of traditional communities, loss of traditional knowledge and cultural identity. (13)

It ultimately targets what economic geographer David Harvey describes as accumulation by dispossession: “taking land, say, enclosing it, and expelling a resident population to create a landless proletariat, and then releasing the land into the privatised mainstream of capital accumulation” (15) In former times, the so produced landless proletariat was exploited as cheap labour in factories. Today, however, **forest communities are often not directly expelled through conservation or carbon projects. Instead, their traditional subsistence activities are restricted or completely prohibited** in order to maximize “carbon stockage” or another “environmental service”, and hence their traditional relations with plants, animals and their living space as a whole are cut off.

It can be expected that once the Amazon Bank of Codes facilitates “successful” deals with what its promoters call “biological, biomimetic and traditional knowledge assets”, the **financial benefits will revert mainly to local oligarchies or other somehow already privileged individuals.** The majority of the impacted forest people, whether staying in the

forest or moving to the impoverished outskirts, would probably be transformed into indebted users of smartphones or other online devices, or – more accurately – unpaid big data and Artificial Intelligence maintenance workers for companies like Google and Facebook.

Given the increasing pressure, with which capital promotes the financialization of nature and the disruption of human relations with it, there is an **urgent need for understanding these new technologies that are an imminent threat to remaining forest dependent communities and for supporting their resistance.**

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- (1) Institutions like the UN use the term "biological resource" for any non-human living organism (animal, plant, microbe...) or part thereof that humans can make use of. "Genetic resources" are understood as those biological resources that are of interest with regard to their genetic (hereditary) components. "Genetic information" can nowadays be extracted from these components through a technology called "sequencing" and is increasingly being patented.
- (2) ETC Group. Patents & Biopiracy <https://www.etcgroup.org/issues/patents-biopiracy>
- (3) SHIVA, V., Biopiracy: need to change Western IPR systems, in The Hindu, 28/07/1999 <https://www.grain.org/article/entries/1882-biopiracy-and-prior-art>
- (4) TWN Info Service on Biodiversity and Traditional Knowledge (Nov15/01) 16 November 2015 <https://www.twn.my/title2/biotk/2015/btk151101.htm>
- (5) WEF - World Economic Forum: Harnessing the Fourth Industrial Revolution for Life on Land, 23 January 2018
- (6) Blockchain technology has enabled the creation of decentralised "digital currencies" such as Bitcoin and Ethereum, which can be transferred un-burocratically across borders online, without banks and without governmental control.
- (7) In reality, the current Brazilian law for benefit sharing disregards to a large extent the rights of indigenous people in such "negotiations". It limits benefit sharing to between 0,1 and 1 per cent of the annual net revenue obtained from the economic exploitation of the developed product. For more information about the law, see WRM. The Brazilian Biodiversity Law: Progress or Threat? Bulletin 227, December 2016 <https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/the-brazilian-biodiversity-law-progress-or-threat/>  
<https://www.weforum.org/reports/harnessing-the-fourth-industrial-revolution-for-life-on-land>
- (8) This text section reflects some basic ideas of Larry Lohman's article: Blockchain Machines, Earth Beings and the Labour of Trust, first published 21 MAY 2019. <http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/resource/blockchain-machines-earth-beings-and-labour-trust>
- (9) MARX, Karl. Capital, Vol. 1, p.286 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf>
- (10) The yearly energy consumption of the blockchain-powered crypto currency Bitcoin is comparable to that of Austria, the resulting carbon emissions to those of Denmark. For more information see: <https://digiconomist.net/bitcoin-energy-consumption>
- (11) An "Infinite regress" is a sequence of reasoning that cannot come to an end. In his argumentation, Lohman (8) refers to the so-called "rule-following paradox", that was described earlier by language philosophers Ludwig Wittgenstein and Saul Kripke. For a more detailed explanation of this paradox and its implications for attempts of automated interpretation, refer to Lohman's article, pages 23-25.
- (12) WRM. Envira REDD+ project in Acre, Brazil: Gold certificate from carbon certifiers for empty promises. Bulletin 237, April 2018 <https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/envira-redd-project-in-acre-brazil-gold-certificate-from-carbon-certifiers-for-empty-promises/>
- (13) FAUSTINO, Cristiane; FURTADO, Fabrina. Economia verde, povos da floresta e territórios: violações de direitos no estado do Acre. 2014. [http://www.plataformadh.org.br/files/2015/08/economia\\_verde\\_relatorio.pdf](http://www.plataformadh.org.br/files/2015/08/economia_verde_relatorio.pdf)
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- (15) HARVEY, David. Accumulation by Dispossession. 2005, pp. 149, 145–6

## Climatology / Ideology



Foto: NBC News

What might the climate movements of the future be like? That depends on how different definitions of climate change interact. The unavoidable tensions dividing today's climate movements are also tensions among different conceptions of climate. **Building better alliances around global warming action means first recognizing that there are ongoing conflicts over what climate is.**

When educated classes in either North or South imagine that climate is defined by climatology, that itself is a problem for political organization. At no time has it been more urgent to wade into other understandings of climate, when so many people outside the scientifically-sophisticated intelligentsia – peasants, forest dwellers, fenceline communities, children and working-class aunties, to name a few – are ready to take many risks to find a way to move forward on the issue.

### Climatology's View of Climate

Seen in world-historical perspective, climatology's understanding of climate is, at present, extremely **biased, narrow, exclusionary and even bizarre**. Two interconnected features of this understanding are of particular importance. First is the way **it locates the climate problem in molecules**, molecular movements and energy flows as objects in a **"nature" that has been politically divided off from "society."** Second is the reflexive political support it gives to certain archaic fictions of **expert management** as if they could be "solutions" to global warming.

Climatology aspires to divide a "nonhuman" nature (CO<sub>2</sub> molecules, cloud albedo, methane clathrates) from a "nonnatural" society (surplus extraction, labor unions, energy policy). And because it is accepted political practice for modern nation-states to use country-names to label different sectors of this space, it becomes permissible for climatology to identify a certain number of molecules as being emitted by, say, "China." The result is that climatology slips toward colluding in assigning causal responsibility for them to China. At the same time, **climatology is barred from tracing any responsibility for carbon dioxide molecules originating from the burning of coal within the borders of China to other countries whose companies have invested in facilities to take advantage of cheap Chinese**

**labor.** To do so is agreed to lie outside the boundaries of climatology, and thus not to be “about” climate at all.

By the same token, climatology is licensed to use a lot of resources to assign numbers to the comparative “global warming potentials” of various molecules such as methane or nitrous oxide, even if there is no consistent physical basis for such numbers (1). But it isn’t allowed to identify the relative global warming potentials of different capital investments or forest commons practices. No matter how obviously varying those potentials are, they are held to lie “outside” the study of the causes of climate change. Similarly, climatology is permitted to distinguish between molecules of CO<sub>2</sub> (carbon dioxide) and molecules of CH<sub>4</sub> (methane), **but is not allowed to distinguish between two subsets of CO<sub>2</sub> molecules: “subsistence CO<sub>2</sub>” and “luxury CO<sub>2</sub>.”** That distinction continues to be treated as irrelevant to climate change (5).

Once climate change has been identified with non-social molecule movements and energy flows, it becomes much easier to imagine that the response to it must lie in schemes of managing these essentially dead, inert units from “outside.” **Climatology also tends to simplify “humanity” into a managerial monolith standing off at some distance.** Climate action “based” on climatology – as so many environmentalists wish it to be – tends to shrink into advocacy of the control or expert “governance” of an external entity.

This form of advocacy tends to lump together policymakers, environmentalists and flood refugees on one side, while constructing an entirely nonhuman climate on the other, with the two linked only via an exceedingly narrow channel. This is followed by management responses from the human world to the climate (such as carbon pricing), guided by a climate scientist profession understood to have a privileged method for interpreting signals passing through this interface with nature while filtering out static from society (2).

This cosmovision has precedents in, for example, colonial forest management, which likewise tended to bracket capitalist practices as unquestionable and connected to a monolithic climate through an interface of scientific management. Under this regime, climate became climate for a blocklike colonial society – for rulers (to secure plantation productivity or nature conservation) but also for their workers (partly to keep them from rebelling). The effects, as historian Richard Grove (3) observes, “were frequently just as destructive or oppressive in their effects on indigenous societies as direct ecological destruction and appropriation of environments and common rights by private capital.” That observation can only be sobering for environmentalists who still hope that climatology can somehow by itself form a first rallying point for a global activism embracing all classes, races and genders.

## The Dominance of the Climatological View

It would be difficult to overestimate how hegemonic this treatment of climate change has become. At official meetings on global warming, for example, **climatologists empowered as spokespersons for “nature” are encouraged to leave the room after they “present the science”, so that policymakers empowered as spokespersons for “society” can get on with their discussions about how to keep capital accumulation going in a greenhouse world.** This rule is set out in black and white in, for example, the mandate of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2013) to assess “the science comprehensively, without bias and in a way that is relevant to policy but not policy prescriptive.” This statement requires “the science” to be a singular object with sharp boundaries that can influence and be

influenced by politics but that somehow comes out of completely distinct, nonpolitical processes.

Networks with names like 350.org reinforce these ignorance-producing dynamics, which see climate action as organized around climatology-guided management of molecule flows. **“Solutions” offered are rigorously limited to an excess of greenhouse-gas molecules** – or, rather, the “molecule-equivalents” dreamed up by climatologists working with the IPCC. Accordingly, the top priority for addressing climate change is not – for example – support for the wide range of already-existing social movements working to keep fossil fuels in the ground, with all of their complex concerns and goals.

## The Damage Done

The 2015 UN Paris climate agreement, for example, set itself up as a passage-point through which a unitary “international community” could formulate ways to hold global average temperature rise in a similarly black-boxed physical climate system to “well below 2° C above pre-industrial levels.” This was **a sign of the culmination of a process of separation of humans from their world.**

Paris’s climatology-based approach also helped keep spaces open for carbon markets. As has by now been extensively documented, such markets not only make global warming worse, but also undermine precisely those traditions of practice that will be needed most in order to turn things around. **Every forest people that has to turn over part of its territory to compensate for industrial emissions whose source it does not know is seeing its own climate-stabilizing land and forest practices undercut by climatology.** Every migrant that arrives in Europe or North America because she has been displaced by plantations of supposedly “carbon neutral” agrofuels is not only a victim of the view that one CO<sub>2</sub> molecule is equal to another in its effect on global warming, but also a person who is being deskilled in the practices needed to curb it.

## Unsettling Climatology’s Dominance

Many climate activists wrap themselves in the mantle of climatology. But why shouldn’t a different strategy be possible? A strategy that, while respecting climatology’s achievements and rejecting denialism, also recognizes that **climatology is profoundly Other to – and, as currently constituted, generally threatening to – the knowledges and practices central to a liveable future?**

The key may lie in understanding that an Other need not always be an Enemy. And that even when it is, certain styles of encounter with it can lead to transformative outcomes.

Two overlapping approaches might help. One is to show how **climatology is an expression of only one particular history among many**, and that its procedures, terminology, assumptions, permissible conclusions and so forth have all been shaped by political conflict and political bias. The other is to **help open up dialogues between climatology and other understandings of climate** that can expose where previously-hidden conflicts lie and what might be done to acknowledge, confront and deal with them. Listening carefully to the nuance of the resulting arguments is itself a way of challenging climatological hegemony over climate movements and deepening respect for all, not just some, of the radically different sides of climate activism.

To understand climatology in this way is not to be ignorant or unappreciative of it, but, on the contrary, to understand better what it can and cannot do.

### Exposing Climatology to Its Contemporary Interlocutors

Anyone who has listened to grassroots communities concerned about climate change in places like Molo in West Timor, the paramo of the Ecuadorian Andes, the central Indian forest belt, rural northern Thailand, the Brazilian Amazon, and also, often, central London or Los Angeles – will have noticed that their conceptions of the phenomenon tend to share a number of features not shared by climatology.

For one thing, the climate change stories told by many indigenous and peasant peoples tend not to revolve around how humans affect or are affected by the behavior of nonhuman objects such as carbon dioxide molecules or flows of energy. Likewise, the crucial turning point in such stories is not the moment when certain quantitative limits are breached, or when professional managers fail to contain the consequences.

Consider the example of Totonac scientists in the Huehuetla region of Mexico's Sierra Norte de Puebla, as explained by anthropologist William D. Smith (4). Like climatologists, the Huehuetla scientists have registered increased unpredictability in regional rainfall patterns and linked it to, for example, the drying-up of springs and destructive floods. But for them, unlike for climatologists, observing such changes without being aware of the historical embeddedness of the observations in the history of the ability to make and apply them signifies a breakdown in science itself. Such observations, if they are to be rigorous, need to track and take action concerning a historical loss of respect for springs, their spirits, and the good labor of communities that rely on both, together with a weakening of the agency of the water itself and its ability to chasten the disrespectful and hence preserve itself and the situated community whose solidarity is defined by it. **Good science, on such a view, sustains itself partly by being aware of its own biases and its situated nature** and cannot absent itself from discussions of topics such as respect, disciplined presence of mind, “good labor” and so forth. It does not try to replace that awareness – as climatology and an environmentalism that looks to climatology for validation are both prone to do – with a mythological origin story featuring priestly experts in mystical contact with a nonhuman, molecular infinite.

On this view of science, climate and climate change are not features of a “natural world” about which indigenous peoples have somehow come up with a competing “indigenous theory” that differs from climatology. **The heterogeneity involved is far more radical than that.** What happens when certain indigenous or peasant practices are thrown together with climatology, accordingly, is not a disagreement about how to interpret or manage the movements of carbon molecules, nor some kind of adversarial “politics of knowledge,” but something different in kind and more far-reaching.

**Climatology, by contrast, tends to view critical political commentary about itself more simplistically, as evidence of deficiency or denial of the facts.** What is lost to the wider world in such processes of short-circuiting is not only vital arguments that need to be had, but also the awareness that such arguments are possible. It is this lack of awareness – and not the divergences between climatological and non-climatological processes of thinking themselves – that turns differences among climate movements into conflicts. **When “climate**

**justice” becomes no more than a matter of fair distribution of CO2 molecules**, abstract energy, effects of temperature change or carbon tax burdens – rather than of open debate about land, work, patriarchy, extraction, class, race, pollution and so on, **then strife over climate injustice is not going to be contained, but increased.**

The idea has to be embraced that **many climate movements are as deeply Other to one another as commons and enclosure movements of centuries past.** Claims that climate activists are “all on the same side” and should shut up about their differences and concentrate their fire on “common enemies” like oil companies or Donald Trump are retrograde and disempowering.

Climatologists who insist that it is their duty to policymakers to confine their research to following greenhouse gas molecules and energy transfers are not necessarily always your friends. Like most everybody else, they are ideologists who – even if usually unconsciously, and with whatever good intentions – are taking sides in profoundly intercultural struggles involving class, race and gender whose origins go back to long before the Industrial Revolution.

But you, too, have the right to participate in defining what climate change is. If other worlds are possible, then so, too, are other climatologies.

*Larry Lohmann, The Corner House*

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## New name for old distraction: Nature-Based Solutions is the new REDD



Ph: Upsidedown World

Fads are ideas or things that are embraced enthusiastically and then dropped when the next fashionable thing comes along. We are familiar with the idea of fads in fashion, for example. **International forest policy has produced its own collection of forest conservation fads over the past decades:** Payment for Environmental Services (PES), Ecotourism, Integrated Conservation and Development Projects – and more recently, RED, REDD, REDD+ and jurisdictional landscape REDD.

The 25<sup>th</sup> UN climate conference in December 2019 in Madrid, Spain, will be remembered **as the moment where the UN and conservation industry discourse and propaganda over REDD+ were replaced by the new forest conservation fad: Nature-Based-Solutions.** “We want to rapidly scale up private sector finance and leverage the potential of nature to help achieve the Paris Agreement goals,” explained the CEO of the international emissions trading association (IETA), a corporate-led group that aims to establish global carbon markets and which is now excited to embrace the new term, Natural Climate Solutions. (1)

Nature-Based Solutions (some use the term Natural-Climate-Solutions) are a dangerous distraction from preventing disastrous climate change. One reason for this is that like REDD, **Nature-Based-Solutions are promoted as a compensation tool:** this means that companies are going to call themselves carbon-neutral even though they keep burning petroleum and coal. All that is required is some investment into reforestation (tree planting), forest restoration or a new Protected Area. **The trees, the argument goes, will soak up excess carbon from the atmosphere.** Oil and coal companies will keep pocketing their profits and emissions from burning petroleum and coal will keep piling up in the atmosphere because the carbon in the trees will eventually also end up in the atmosphere, along with the carbon from the petroleum or coal. This is what makes **Nature-Based-Solutions so attractive to the fossil fuel industry.**

## Oil corporations and conservation NGOs unite to promote next false solution

Among the many spaces promoting Nature-Based-Distractions at the UN climate meeting, one stood out. On 5 December 2019, the International Emissions Trading Association (IETA) launched its initiative called **Markets for Natural Climate Solutions**. (2) The founding members include the oil and gas companies Shell, Chevron, BP, and Woodside Energy and the mining company BHP-Billiton. They are joined by a US-based tree planting organisation, the Arbor Day Foundation, while the initiative's advisory panel includes the US-based conservationist groups The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, Environmental Defense Fund and Earth Innovation Institute. (3)

Revealingly, none of the company quotes included in the IETA press release mentions the need to stop burning petroleum and coal. Instead, the quotes from **the petroleum companies underline their industry sector's expectation for the UN climate negotiations to adopt the rules for a global carbon market**. Shell's climate change adviser, David Hone, says that "Natural climate solutions [...] offer significant opportunity for carbon dioxide removal. For this to happen, the world needs a widely recognised robust market to channel capital to nature-based projects, while ensuring the highest standards of carbon accounting." Chevron's Arthur Lee wants "a well-designed market in which carbon offsets resulting from natural climate solutions could be traded." What is needed, however, to avoid climate chaos, is an acknowledgement that these main corporate drivers of pollution are profit-driven and promote **false solutions as distraction from the urgent task to keep petroleum and coal in the ground**. (1)

A second meeting, this one organized by conservationist NGOs The Nature Conservancy and Conservation International, revealed another way in which **the conservation industry is paving the way for continued fossil fuel burning**. At the meeting, speakers from both organisations suggested that countries in the global South where forest loss is high could easily fix that problem with compensation mechanisms. (7) By doing so, they argued, countries would not only be compensating for all the carbon dioxide emissions in their country, but could also build up carbon "storage" that could be sold to others (something called in the climate jargon as "negative emissions").

Peter Ellis from The Nature Conservancy suggested in relation to the voluntary commitments countries have made under the UN Paris Agreement, which are called Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), that "over half of the tropical forest countries could deliver half of their [NDCs] (4) with Nature-Climate-Solutions. [...] Some can achieve 50 per cent of their [NDCs] only with improving Reduced-Impact-Logging for climate," he continued, claiming that this was "achievable without undercutting timber production." (6) What is perhaps most remarkable in these claims is the acknowledgement, contrary to logging and previous conservation industry claims, that "Reduced-Impact-Logging" has a negative impact.

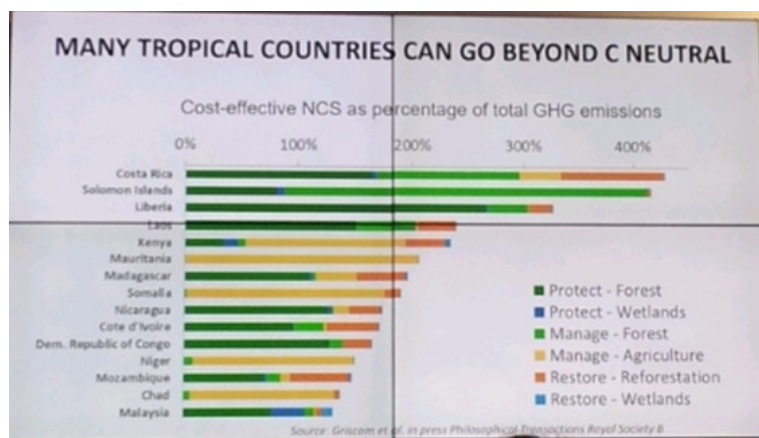


Image shown at side event "Climate Action in the Tropics: Evidence and Policy for Scaling Up Natural Climate Solutions"

### From civil society calls to halt deforestation to corporate enthusiasm for restoration

Another shift was perceptible at the last UN climate conference in Madrid. The rhetoric on REDD+ at least included a recognition that deforestation is releasing greenhouse gas emissions and needs to be halted. Under Nature-Based-Solutions, however, the focus is shifting towards the need for Restoration. Global food and agriculture commodities companies that made pledges for Zero-Deforestation supply chains, which they know they cannot keep, (8) will be rejoicing: **Deforestation seem to have successfully been pushed off the agenda. And the replacement, Restoration, is full of opportunities for the corporate sector** (see the "Collection of Concepts that Kill Forests" in this bulletin). The threat that remains in the discourse about Nature-Based-Solutions and Restoration is that as with REDD+, **the blame for all that "degraded forest" in need of Restoration is put not with the corporations responsible for large-scale deforestation and forest degradation, but with peasant farming**. The search for "available" land for these Restoration initiatives will put more community land and land used for peasant agriculture at the risk of outside control, with the argument that these initiatives are needed "for the climate". Restoration initiatives promoted ever more loudly as Nature-Based-Solutions at the UN climate meeting thus risk **expanding a land grab from the forest onto a much wider area of land under peasant agriculture**.

IETA's CEO wants to make Natural Climate Solutions "an investable asset class," – a new possibility for capital investors to make money. That is why IETA launched their "Markets for Natural Climate Solutions" together with the oil companies, and why IETA was lobbying climate negotiators to finish the rules for carbon markets under the Paris Agreement. Perhaps it was good that UN climate negotiators were unable to agree on the rules for the carbon trading Article (Article 6.4) of the Paris Agreement. (5) It might mean less private sector money looking for a lucrative investment that will threaten peasant farming. Besides, **if preventing climate chaos is the goal, carbon trading must be abandoned, not expanded**. It would be a good start if UN climate negotiators would take the main goal seriously and just focused their minds on action to keep petroleum, gas and coal in the ground.

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(1) IETA press release: <https://www.ieta.org/page-18192/8185755>

- (2) REDD-Monitor: Launched at COP25, IETA's Markets for Natural Climate Solutions is greenwash for the oil industry. <https://redd-monitor.org/2019/12/11/launched-at-cop25-ietas-markets-for-natural-climate-solutions-is-greenwash-for-the-oil-industry/>
- (3) IETA website, A New Initiative from IETA to Bring the Power of Markets to Natural Climate Solutions. <https://www.ncs.ietas.org/>
- (4) The commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions which countries made under the UN Paris Agreement on climate change are called Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs.
- (5) See for example: <https://www.boell.de/en/2019/12/20/process-brink-collapse-confronts-world-move>
- (6) Peter W. Ellis et al (2019): Reduced-impact logging for climate change mitigation (RIL-C) can halve selective logging emissions from tropical forests. Forest Ecology and Management. Volume 438, 15 April 2019. Pages 255-266.
- (7) Meeting organised by The Nature Conservancy and Conservation International at the NDC Partnership space on 5 December 2019: NDC Partnership Climate Action in the Tropics: Evidence and Policy for Scaling Up Natural Climate Solutions.
- (8) See, for example, WRM Bulletin (201 9): OLAM Palm Gabon pretends to use the Forest Definition to implement its 'Zero Deforestation' pledge. WRM Bulletin 245, September 2019.

## RECOMMENDED

### The Development Dictionary

This 1992 book, edited by Wolfgang Sachs, compiles more than 15 key concepts that served as a basis for, and a way to expand, destructive discourse about "development." Each of the concepts analyzed in the book synthesizes a set of assumptions that reinforce the Western world view, wherein certain aspects and subjects of reality are highlighted and others are excluded. This is a necessary reflection that is still current today. Read it here.

<http://shifter-magazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/wolfgang-sachs-the-development-dictionary-n-a-guide-to-knowledge-as-power-2nd-ed-2010-1.pdf>

### Traps, Dilemmas and Contradictions of the Rights Discourse in the Forests

Another reflection around a key concept for forests and forest-dependant people is the WRM's Bulletin 234, from November 2017, which reflects on the concept of Rights. What can we learn for movement building and supporting forest peoples' struggles from the dilemmas, contradictions and traps that have emerged in "rights" discourses? Read the bulletin here.

<https://wrm.org.uy/bulletins/issue-234/>

### Nature-Based Solutions: Whose interests are behind?

A post from the REDD-Monitor blog opens up the space for a needed debate about the politics surrounding so-called nature-based or natural climate "solutions". Among others, it makes clear which actors are "loving" this initiative: oil and gas corporations in hand with their partners, the big international conservation NGOs who also support carbon offsets and REDD. Read the article here.

<https://redd-monitor.org/2019/04/05/is-the-new-natural-climate-solutions-campaign-a-distraction-from-the-need-to-leave-fossil-fuels-in-the-ground/>

### FSC: Rebranding logging as a "sustainable" activity

ARTE, the European TV channel, broadcasted a documentary about FSC entitled: "The exploitation of primary forests: Can an ecolabel stop the forest industry?" Journalists traveled to several countries to investigate what FSC certification looks like on the ground, and whether it protects the forests and the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities that live in and near the forest. The almost one-hour documentary concludes that over the

past 25 years of its existence, FSC has failed even to slow down the logging industry. “We can only save the rainforest with legislation, not with labels.” Watch it here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gmp0IFAV41Q>

### **Regulated Destruction: How Biodiversity Offsetting enables environmental destruction**

A recent report by Friends of the Earth International highlights how classic, stringent regulations are being swapped for much more lenient compensation and offsetting schemes. Specific sectors, such as the global food, agriculture and aviation industries, use these schemes to maintain their social license to continue their destructive activities and ward off the threat of regulation. The report explores and unpacks the myths behind biodiversity offsetting: what it means, and how it enables the destruction of nature and undermines environmental protection. Read the publication here.

<https://www.foei.org/resources/publications/regulated-destruction-biodiversity-offsetting-environment>

### **Statement from Indigenous Mapuche and others in Chile: No to market-based schemes!**

Chile was to be the host of the UN Climate Summit. But in the face of a massive popular uprising against the neoliberal economic model, Chile cancelled the Summit and it was moved to Spain, yet Chile retained the Presidency of the COP. The Global Justice Ecology Project and Biofuelwatch collected testimonies warning about the dangers of the so-called “natural climate solutions” being promoted at the Summit, since in Chile, these schemes have led to vast tree plantations, destroyed forests, led to forced displacements, loss of fresh water, toxic incinerators and huge devastating copper and lithium mines. See the video in Spanish with English subtitles here.

<https://vimeo.com/378431292>

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