



Protected Areas feed corporate profiting and destruction



Village Kakerekendje, Katasomwa in the territory of Kalehe, East DRC. Ph: CAMV 2019

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This Bulletin articles are written by the following organizations and individuals: Survival International; the Federation of Community Forest Users in Nepal (FECOFUN); the Center for the Accompaniment of Indigenous Pygmies and Vulnerable Minorities in DRC (CAMV); an activist from Brazil; the Forum For Women Farmers' Rights in India (MAKAAM); Missão Tabita in Mozambique and members of the WRM international secretariat.

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Our Viewpoint

The Conservation Industry's Agenda in Times of Crisis



Ph: Nareeta Martin.

This bulletin was planned long before the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) broke out. Its objective is to highlight and warn of the marked tendency to expand so-called Protected Areas, and the risks that this entails—both for forests and the peoples who depend on them. The idea of conserving forests and biodiversity is a very noble goal. So then, what is the problem with the conservation model governing existing Protected Areas, and the plans to expand them?

[Large conservation NGOs that promote the expansion of a model of “forests without people” are still tied to the colonialist ideals](#) with which they were founded. Most of them have alliances with the companies and governments driving deforestation. These organizations, which have expensive advertising campaigns, and which described 2020 as a “super year for nature,” have been promoting the expansion of Protected Areas—despite the evidence of abuses and violence to forest peoples that are linked to this model of conservation (1). In the name of conservation, a profitable industry has been created.

By the end of 2020, the world's governments were expected to adopt a new set of targets for biodiversity “protection” during the meeting of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). These targets are part of the so-called “**Global Deal for Nature**” that scientists proposed in 2017 to complement the UN Paris Agreement. In 2019, proponents of this “Global Deal for Nature” called to “**protect**” **half of the Earth's surface**. In line with demands from several conservationist NGOs and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the first draft of the decisions to be adopted at the CBD conference establishes (among other things) **that at least thirty per cent of the world's oceans and land be designated as Protected Areas or set aside for other conservation purposes by 2030**. The CBD's draft paper also includes a 2050 Vision for Biodiversity with five long-

term goals. The first goal is to achieve **“no net loss”** [https://wrm.org.uy/bulletins/issue-232/in biodiversity](https://wrm.org.uy/bulletins/issue-232/in-biodiversity) by 2030 and an increase in biodiversity of at least 20% by 2050 (2). Meanwhile, the UN climate negotiations this year were expected to move forward with national targets to address pollution levels, with heavy promotion of the so-called **Nature-Based Solutions**. The CBD draft paper also promotes the use of Nature-Based Solutions, which are based on mechanisms to supposedly compensate pollution and destruction, and large-scale “reforestation.”

“High-level” meetings and policy documents (like the CBD negotiations or the UN Paris Agreement) are based on biased analyses of what is causing biodiversity loss and deforestation or what might be stemming this destruction. While sounding the alarm and promoting so-called “solutions”—so that their financial backers and the general public think that “something is being done,”—these very actors and forums continue to promote and facilitate the direct and underlying causes of forest and biodiversity loss.

The current COVID-19 pandemic, however, has forced most of these international meetings to be postponed. Announcements are beginning to circulate about the “global need” to avoid another pandemic like the current one, through the creation of more Protected Areas. This argument fits in perfectly with the agenda that was already in the wings for the “super year for nature” of 2020. Aren’t these calls just an easy way of displacing responsibility for a problem that clearly has deeper structural causes? The goal of creating “more Protected Areas” not only hides the true culprits of deforestation and industrial-scale monoculture and livestock production, it also deepens the imposition of a colonialist vision of conservation that separates “nature” from “human beings.”

There have been numerous promises to align conservation activities with human rights, or with a community- and participatory-based approach (3). However, at the core, the anti-people approach of entities that fund, promote and manage Protected Areas has not changed. None of the proposals that aim to make conservation appear more people-friendly have gotten to the core issues of **who controls land** in Protected Areas, or who decides whether a location is declared to be protected, and what that means. Also, there has been no real recognition of **the underlying colonial and racist roots upon which the dominant conservation model is founded**. As a result, the management of Protected Areas continues to be linked—directly or indirectly—to forced evictions, harassment, violence and sexual abuse of women and children, human rights violations, deforestation and militarization of forest peoples' territories, and the list goes on.

A Global Deal for Profit

The other side of Protected Areas and prevailing conservation activities is their direct contradiction: **they allow destruction of forests and biodiversity to continue, both within and beyond their limits**.

Mining companies, for example, are operating in several so-called Protected Areas around the world. Despite regulations that forbid mining in Protected Areas in Cambodia, mining licenses have been granted in said areas—including in large sections of Virachey National Park. In Namibia, the government allows exploration and extraction of minerals in National Parks. In Ecuador, the government has opened about 13 percent of the country to mining exploration, with many concessions in previously Protected Areas. Even so-called World Heritage Sites are under threat in Venezuela, Mexico, Peru, DRC, Indonesia, Guinea, Cote

d'Ivoire and South Africa, among others. The reality is that industrial-scale logging, mining, fossil fuel extraction and monoculture production have been destroying thousands and thousands of complex co-relationships and inter-dependencies in forests, including with and among forest peoples.

COVID-19 is therefore not an isolated event. **The pandemic has only worsened the ongoing environmental, climatic, social and economic crisis.** While governments are currently occupied with mitigating the worst impacts of the pandemic on their population and health systems, they are doing everything possible to return to “normality” as soon as possible. But **this “normality” was already a crisis for the millions of people** threatened by evictions, violence, poverty, marginalization and destruction; meanwhile, climate chaos was already severely affecting people, forests and other living spaces.

The current pandemic further increases the risk that governments, industries, conservationist NGOs and financial investors will amplify their **narrative of an expansion of Protected Areas** worldwide as a **“global solution” to what they describe as separate climate and biodiversity crises.**

Let's not allow for the imposition of structures and powerful actors who—once again under the guise of the language of crisis—are causing the catastrophe itself.

The call for more Protected Areas addresses neither the root causes of destruction nor does it tackle the threats to which indigenous peoples and peasant and traditional communities are exposed as a result of this destruction. Radical solidarity with those communities facing destruction of their territories requires subject-changing conversations. As activist-researcher Larry Lohmann said, when someone asks: “How is this forest to be preserved?”, they should be answered with another question: **“How can we find out from communities the best ways of contributing to their struggles to defend their own forest practices, including subsistence cycles?”**

(1) See for example, WWF in the DRC's Salonga National Park: Torture, murder and gang-rape, WRM Bulletin, 2019, <https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/wwf-in-the-drcs-salonga-national-park-torture-murder-and-gang-rape/>

(2) See, Campaign For Nature <https://www.campaignfornature.org/home> ; and CBD, Zero Draft of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/efb0/1f84/a892b98d2982a829962b6371/wg2020-02-03-en.pdf>

(3) See, for example, Conservation International, Partnering with communities, institutions and governments, <https://www.conservation.org/about/partnering-with-communities-institutions-and-governments>

Who protects Protected Areas and why?



Ph: Survival Internacional

It looks like everyone's coming around to the conservation industry's plan to double the size of Protected Areas (PAs). They are supposed to extend over thirty (or even fifty?) per cent of the globe. The number is arbitrary, the point is that they are supposed to be the solution to pretty much all the really big problems – biodiversity loss, climate change, and now even – believe it or not – COVID-19!

Wouldn't it be nice! After all, everyone agrees that those are the big issues – everyone who is not starving or being bombed or shot at, that is. But pretending PAs are the answer to any of the above is a really big lie. They will solve none of these. Of course, if the conservation industry tells a lie big enough and keeps repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.

One tragic aspect of pushing fake solutions is that they take attention away from what might be the real ones. But this is worse than that.

Biodiversity loss

Let's take in turn the three issues PAs are supposed to solve. Biodiversity loss should be the most obviously straightforward. After all, if you fence off a large area of land and stop human activity, surely you will end up with more biodiversity than there was in the first place?

There are three really big problems with this idea. First, so-called wilderness is a figment of Europeans' imagination. It is the myth which has, for more than two thousand years, opposed "civilization" to "wilderness" – lands outside the empire populated with hostile, nomadic barbarians. Those are the territories which the Romans sought to "tame" 2000 years ago, mainly because they wanted the resources – slaves, salt, tin, whatever. Now, the conservation industry says it wants them left "wild," but in reality someone is still after their resources, to profit from the tourism, logging, plantations, even mining, which PAs open up.

These areas are not “wild”. Humans have manipulated the landscape almost everywhere for as long as they have – we have – existed. Why not? As the most intelligent species on Earth, why wouldn’t we alter the flora and fauna to suit ourselves, just like many species?

People cleared land with fire, changed the balance of animal populations through hunting, moved plants around on an intercontinental scale, domesticated animals (the dog was the first we know of) – and all that tens of thousands of years before what we now call “agriculture.” When growing and herding became bigger than hunting and foraging (and forget the European fairy tale that agriculture was “discovered” in the Middle East), then the changes accelerated. Pastoralists created new grass plains, their herds moved seeds over huge areas and opened up new spaces. People manipulated plants to produce hundreds of cultivars, which could not survive without human agency. Extensive terracing of hill slopes, seasonal burning, and selective hunting (of beavers for example), altered water courses.

Latest research points to the fact that the big “wildernesses” on Earth – Amazonia, the African plains, the Indian jungles and so on – are human creations forged over thousands of years. This, of course, wasn’t recognized by the European colonists, and still is not in conservation-speak. “Wilderness” has been promoted since the U.S. “Indian Wars” when Native Americans were booted out of the nascent national parks, just another chapter in their subjugation and the “taming” of the West. The racism that was a central element in the conservation narrative’s gestation then is still present today, albeit a bit hidden.

The second problem with the idea that PAs protect biodiversity is the fact that there is not much evidence they are particularly good at it. It is impossible to measure with comprehensive accuracy (what exactly do you count?), but studies indicate that land under indigenous management does a much better job than PAs. It is finally becoming axiomatic that some 80% of biodiversity is in indigenous territory.

The third problem is that PAs can actually lead to biodiversity loss. By evicting indigenous peoples (and forget the lie that such evictions are a thing of the past, they are not), those shown to protect biodiversity are stopped from doing what they have been doing very well and are thrown out, to the eventual detriment of the landscape.

If we are genuine about putting the brakes on biodiversity loss, the quickest, cheapest and well-proven method would be to support as much indigenous land as possible, and to return back to their control that which has been stolen from them as much as practicable.

Climate change

The notion that PAs will help solve the climate crisis is easy to demolish, so much so that one has to wonder how anyone could have come up with the ludicrous idea in the first place. Briefly, if the world produces the same pollution as now, but from just 10% of its surface (or 5%, or whatever) then it does not matter what is happening in the 30% (or whatever) under “protection.” The effect on the climate remains exactly the same. The logic is inescapable: You can fence the land, but you cannot fence the wind.

If burning fossil fuels is behind climate change, then the solution is equally simple – burn less, and forget fake solutions like “offsets” and “net zero.” But it is a fantasy to think that can happen without lowering consumption in the richer countries, which use vastly more energy

than the poorer ones. Whatever happens, the massive and growing inequality must start being corrected, for all our sakes.

More PAs will not help the fight against climate change.

COVID-19

The idea that more PAs will prevent or reduce pandemics is new, and is an obvious attempt to exploit the current crisis to promote the “fortress conservation” agenda, which has no relationship to the epidemic whatsoever. It is a cynical marketing ploy.

Coronaviruses were first discovered by science decades ago. As we now all know, COVID-19 (COronaVirus Disease from 2019) originated in a non-human animal species before jumping to humans. We do not yet know the species where it started. It might be wild bats or something else. There might have been an intermediary host, such as pangolins – widely obtainable in China and reportedly farmed there – but we do not know that either. This is not surprising: The bacterium behind the Plague, (75-200 million deaths) is known, but the means of transmission, generally reported to be rat fleas, may have really been human to human. The notion that COVID-19 came from the wildlife trade is not established, and it is probably meaningless.

Anyway, humankind has doubtless suffered from diseases originating in other animals for as long as our species has existed. We have always lived up close to animals. Influenza, which hastens or causes the deaths of perhaps 290,000-650,000 people annually, comes originally from a jungle fowl via its domesticated descendants such as chickens and ducks. Measles, which kills about 140,000 people a year was originally from domesticated cattle. (At the time of writing, about 130,000 are thought to have died from COVID-19.)

There are millions of types of virus, they are everywhere, including inside us, they mutate and they have probably been around since the first living cells. They are part of life’s fabric.

More PAs will do nothing to prevent pandemics. If anything, they will have the reverse effect by increasing overcrowding through pushing people off their lands and into urban slums, already home to about a quarter of the world’s city dwellers.

What type of PA would help in these three problems?

PAs as they are now would not solve any of these problems and could easily make some worse. It would however be easy to conceive of a Protected Area which would help protect biodiversity: It would be simply to protect indigenous land rights. The problem is that, apart from some inconsequential lip service, there is no evidence that this is what the proponents of PAs have in mind.

At present, there are two sorts of PA. One exists in areas where local populations are relatively numerically and politically strong. No PA can be created there without accommodating their needs. National Parks in the UK, for example, incorporate working farms, and even whole villages and towns. There are no restrictions on entering or living in them. The people are not moved out, because they have significant political clout. The other sort – fortress conservation – is the norm in Africa and parts of Asia. It is how national parks were first conceived in the USA. The local people, almost always indigenous to the area, are

pushed out by force, coercion or bribery. The best guardians of the land, once self-sufficient and with the lowest carbon footprint of any of us, are reduced to landless impoverishment and add to urban overcrowding.

There is no reason to think that the new call for doubling PAs means anything different. Its proponents are still talking largely about “wilderness” in places like Africa or Asia, precisely where indigenous peoples live, where fortress conservation is alive and well established, and where people are being kicked off their lands as this is being written (such as in the Congo Basin or with the Indian tiger reserves).

Who wants PAs and why?

PAs are heavily promoted by conservation NGOs, governments and corporations. The NGOs want as much money as possible to maintain their dominance over more and more of the world’s surface, which they see as threatened by locals. Governments hate self-sufficient people who are difficult to tax and control and who tend to be sceptical about the state’s claim to override the community. Corporations look for more consumers, and to extract more raw materials, often from “wilderness.” They need places where they can claim to “offset” carbon, to greenwash their image as much as possible.

The result is that billions of dollars of taxpayers’ money are funnelled into conservation areas that ignore all checks about upholding human rights, which are routinely violated there. Most such projects are run by NGOs, profit-making private companies, or both. They are established in collaboration with logging, extractive industries, trophy hunting, tourism concessions, and agribusiness. They take the land which has long sustained a way of life for local people and refashioned it to churn out profit for a few outsiders. In some areas, there is a clear overlap of, for example, mining concessions with protected areas. Conservation NGOs are, at least in part, controlled by the corporate bosses who sit on their boards, partner with, and fund them, why expect anything different?

The Messok Dja Protected Area in the Republic of Congo is one example. It costs US 24 million dollars, of which 4 million dollars is administered by the UNDP. This includes contributions from the Government of Congo, and a tourism, a palm oil, and a logging, company, as well as two conservation NGOs.

The idea of fortress conservation – PAs protecting land from the locals’ wanton rapacity – is a colonial myth. It is an environmentally damaging fairy tale rooted in racist and ecofascist ideas about which people are worth something, and which are worthless and must be pushed out and impoverished, or worse. A good number of environmentalists know this, but their voices are muted by worries about career damage or legal action.

By stripping rural people of their largely self-sufficient lifestyles (hunting, herding, gathering and growing their own food and medicines) and forcing them into the money economy at its most miserable level, more PAs will in fact lead to more biodiversity loss, exacerbate climate change and increase the likelihood of pandemics, exactly the reverse of what is claimed. If the fortress conservationists win their battle, the effect will be further impoverishment and hunger for millions. Local people are unlikely to stand for it, and in some places will simply be driven to retake their lands by force. That will spell the end of those PAs forever.

None of this is to say that many believers in fortress conservation and Protected Areas don't believe their big lie: They do. They cling to it as an article of faith as tightly as any zealot. Ultimately, it is a disaster for them too, as their work will eventually be shown to be counterproductive. But the tragedy inflicted along the way, on the people and nature they are damaging, is so much graver. If we care about biodiversity and climate change, they must not be allowed to prevail. Biodiversity depends on human diversity. That is the key which must be rapidly stitched into a conservation ideology for the future, for our planet, and for all humanity.

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Nepal: A False Solution for the Conservation of Chure Region and its Impacts for Forest Peoples



Campaign of Community Forest Groups against the Protected Area centralized by the government in the Chure region. Ph: FECOFUN

The Chure region comprises the youngest mountains in Nepal and is located between the plain low lands (Tarai Madesh) in the south and the mid-hills (Mahabharat range) in the north. It covers 12.78% of the national territory (1,896,255 hectares) and expands over 36 districts (1). Forests cover 72.37% of this region (1,373,743 hectares). **Due to strong corporate pressures for extracting minerals and other raw materials for infrastructure projects, the annual deforestation rate is very high (2).** More than 5 million people live in the Chure region and their livelihoods mainly depend on agriculture and community forests.

Chure is a one of the main watersheds for the conservation of surface and underground water for the plain area and low land (Tarai Madesh). This region is also highly valuable for its biodiversity, wildlife and their habitats and for maintaining connectivity between different protected areas in Nepal. Indigenous Peoples and local communities depend on this region for their livelihoods and other bio-cultural purposes. Regardless, **corporate extractive operations have been over-exploiting these forests and, as a consequence, landslides and flooding are continuously increasing**, which have huge impacts to the population living downstream of the Chure watershed and their agriculture lands.

Most of the forest areas in Chure are community forests (about 60%) and fall under one of the 2,837 Community Forest Groups, which are legislated under the Forest Act 1993 (now Forest Act 2019). The remaining forests are mostly under governmental management, and a large area is under the Protected Areas of the Parsa, Chitwan, Banke and Bardia National Parks and the Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve. However, in the name of controlling illegal extraction activities in the Chure region, **the Government of Nepal declared in 2015 all the region, including the community forests, as an Environmental Protection Area, which curtailed the tenure rights of the Community Forest Groups**. The authority over this Protected Area has been given to the Chure-Terai Madhesh Conservation Development Board, established by the Government of Nepal at the national level.

In this way, Community Forest Groups, companies from the forestry sector, the Protected Area's authorities and the Chure-Terai Madhesh Conservation Board, are formally claiming their rights and regulatory roles over the Chure region. Peasants and landless people are also claiming their rights over this land, forests and water sources, which they need for their livelihoods. Despite this, different governmental levels (local, provincial and federal) have been issuing **licenses to companies for mining in the watersheds or rivers/streams of the Chure region** and hence, the corporate sector continues to extract and exploit the forests, watersheds and rivers/streams for their commercial benefits. Due to such multiple claims over the same region, the **conflicts between these actors have continuously grown in the last years, which resulted in even more deforestation and environmental degradation**.

Forest Regeneration through Community Forests

According to the 2014 Chure Forests Resource Assessment, there were over 38 thousand hectares deforested in the Chure region from 1995 to 2010 due to encroachment from extractive activities, illegal logging and forest fires. However, the 2015 Assessment shows that forests in Nepal, including those in the Chure region, have in fact increased due to community interventions (3).

Based on field observations and many reports, **it is clear that the Community Forest Groups have been widely contributing to the conservation of the Chure forests**. Their actions include: controlling forest fires, managing open grazing, reducing illegal logging as well as fauna and flora trafficking and controlling soil erosion through natural regeneration of forests. For this purpose, each Community Forest Group has their own long-term forest management plan, which has been approved by the Divisional Forest Offices under the national forest legislation.

The Forest Act of 2019 gives forest communities the right to demand any part of the national forests as a community forest, considering the community's interests, their management capacity and the distance between the requested forest area and the community's settlement. In the Chure region, more than 350 new Community Forest Groups are demanding specific areas of the remaining national forests based on the Forest Act of 2019. However, **the Divisional Forest Offices are hesitant to handover such forests because these are being allocated for mining and logging concessions to private or government-controlled companies.** These concessions in turn generate royalties for the central government.

Centralized Protection Areas curtails Communities' Rights

The lack of effective forest management under governmental supervision has led to very high deforestation rates in Nepal. **Corporate extraction activities are continuously increasing to supply raw materials for the large-scale infrastructure projects (highways, railway lines, airport, hydropower dams, etc.).** After declaring the Chure Environmental Protected Area, the newly formed Chure-Terai Madhesh Conservation Board, was set to implement different so-called conservation activities. Unfortunately, the Conservation Board started to curtail the forest tenure rights of the Community Forest Groups in the name of enforcing environmental protection laws in the region.

Therefore, the Federation of Community Forest Users (FECOFUN), which represents the Community Forest Groups (4), started since 2015 to organize strong protests against the centralized Protected Area, by mobilizing the Community Forest Groups. As a result, the central government issued a notice in 2016 for securing and respecting forest tenure rights of Community Forest Groups. However, **FECOFUN continues to demand the dismissal of the Chure-Terai Madhesh Conservation Board and the withdrawal of a centralized Protected Area.** These interventions from the central government are creating many obstacles for the Community Forest Groups to exercise their legal rights, which should be secured under the Forest Act of 2019.

Green Climate Fund, FAO and the government are promoting a false solution for the Chure forests!

The Government of Nepal, together with northern developmental agencies -including USAID (US), JICA (Japan), GIZ (Germany) and SNV (Netherlands) -, as well as the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and FAO, has invested a huge amount of money in the Chure region through governmental agencies and the Chure-Terai Madhesh Conservation Board. However, the results and outcomes of such investment are very low due to corruption, non-transparency and weak governance of the Board and governmental agencies. In front of this situation, **the Green Climate Fund (GCF) board approved in 2019 a project entitled "Building a Resilient Churia Region in Nepal (BRCRN)"** and the Ministry of Forests and Environment (MoFE) of Nepal and the FAO will be the Executing Entities of this project. The GCF will provide US 39.3 million dollars for this project, which includes different components for a so-called "climate-resilient sustainable natural resource management", such as climate-resilient land use practices, forest protection and restoration and capacity-building. (5)

One fundamental issue that has been mostly silent is that companies in the forestry and extractivist sector, governmental agencies and the Chure-Terai Madhesh Conservation Board

are continuously violating human rights in the Chure region. **Communities' access to forests for their subsistence livelihoods is being deprived due to the violent enforcement of the Environmental Protection Area. Besides, extractive companies are suppressing and killing environmental defenders** (6). There is no mechanism in the GCF project that helps securing human rights nor addressing the issue of human rights violations in the region.

The Constitution of Nepal, under the Environmental Protection Act of 2019 and the Climate Change Policy of 2019, guarantees preferential rights to local communities in the forests. When a project is to be established, there needs to be a clear sharing of the benefits with the local communities, a community-based adaptation program and allocation of 80% finance to the local communities during the utilization of climate finance available from international funding mechanisms. Unfortunately, this project has undermined all of these national legal and policy provisions. The National Designated Authority for the GCF (the Ministry of Finance) has already indicated that the GCF project funding will be provided to the Chure-Terai Madhesh Conservation Board through a government controlled 'Red Book'. **The Board wants to use the GCF money for evicting people and Community Forest Groups.** These groups and the landless households (who have no land registration certificates) want to maintain and strengthen their land and forest tenure rights. Though there is no grievance redress mechanism for affected local communities.

There are many legal cases against the Chure-Terai Madhesh Conservation Board related to corruption. It is very likely therefore that the Conservation Board will also misuse the GCF money. **The Conservation Board has been mobilizing a large amount of money to create increasing obstacles to the Community Forest Groups campaign in the Chure region.** Therefore, communities are demanding to dissolve this Board.

Under this conflicting situation, **the already funded GCF project will** face many more obstacles in its implementation phase and it will **increase existing land tenure tensions**, something that has not been analyzed in the project proposal.

Moreover, in the Chure region, more than 50% of the households lack land ownership certificates and, hence, they are counted as landless households. The GCF project has not included any component or sub-component to address the **problems of forest-dependent landless households.** Therefore, this project will have a huge impact for the landless households, as **they might be displaced** during the implementation phase. The project has proposed only the use of Community Forest Groups, which is one of their strategies to **exploit the existing structures of forest communities in the name of a climate-resilient project.**

The Chure region is highly affected by the profit-making extractivist industries which have been continuously politically protected for maintaining their own commercial benefits. **The GCF project is totally silent in addressing those devastating challenges generated from the corporate sector and is very loud in blaming forest-dependent people as forest encroachers.**

The reality is that the majority of the Chure region is managed by Community Forest Groups. Nevertheless, they are not truly recognized in the GCF project for what they are and represent, as they were not recognized by the Protected Area managed by the Chure-Terai

Madhesh Conservation Board. Therefore, **forest communities are not happy with the GCF funded project and they will continuously organize and campaign to secure their community rights over their forests.**

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Democratic Republic of the Congo: The Batwa and Their Return to Ancestral Lands in the Kahuzi Biega National Park



Village Kakerekendje, Katasomwa in the territory of Kalehe, East DRC. Ph: CAMV 2019

More than four decades after the Batwa were expelled from their ancestral forests—what is now considered the Kahuzi Biega National Park (PNKB, by its French acronym)—a group of Batwa, exasperated by their extreme poverty and by unfulfilled government promises, decided to return to the Park. This was despite legal restrictions in force in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Since then, these indigenous riverside Batwa regularly clash with the “eco-guards,” sometimes leading to the loss of human lives.

The 1971 creation of the Kahuzi Biega National Park (PNKB) in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) left thousands of Batwa in a very precarious situation. **The indigenous**

Batwa peoples were culturally destroyed from the loss of their forests. Despite this fact, the Park was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1980. The usurpation of the indigenous Batwas' ancestral lands without compensation, **had and continues to have particularly devastating impacts on Batwa women**—whose main tasks were to feed and take care of their families. Since then, indigenous Batwa women have been stripped of their livelihoods and confined to very precarious living conditions, leaving them exposed to exploitation and violence.

This extreme poverty sometimes leads indigenous riparian Batwa peoples to enter the Park—despite current legal restrictions—in order to obtain vital resources necessary for their subsistence, such as honey or medicinal plants. In effect, Law N° 14/003 on nature conservation from February 11, 2004 **strengthened the repressive regime**, with a view to guaranteeing the protection of species, ecosystems and natural habitats. Article 10 of the aforementioned Law establishes «(...) protection of wild species of flora and fauna at every stage of their biological cycle.» However, the Law also allows for certain exceptions to conservation measures, mainly in the interest of health and public safety, as well as the food security of riparian populations in protected areas. Unfortunately, these exceptions are difficult to implement, as there are no enforcement measures.

Evictions within the PNKB took place over the course of two decades: the 1960s and 1970s. **About 6,000 Batwa were forcibly evicted from their ancestral lands.** Between 1970 and 1985, the Batwa were expelled, respectively, from the hills of Chatondo, Katasomwa, Munango, Kabona, Kakumbukumbu and Bukulula...spaces that until now have been located in an elevated part of the Kahuzi-Biega National Park. These hills are located between the territories of Kabare, Kalehe and Shabunda, in Sud-Kivu province in eastern DRC.

According to the 2017 census carried out by the National Institute for Statistics, and the non-profit organization, the Center for the Accompaniment of Indigenous Pygmies and Vulnerable Minorities (Centre d'accompagnement des Autochtones pygmées et Minoritaires Vulnérables, CAMV) in Sud-Kivu, there are approximately 9,608 indigenous Batwa people occupying 101 villages bordering the high-altitude part of the PNKB—precisely in the territories of Kabare and Kalehe, in Sud-Kivu province.

In 2014, with the support of the NGO, Forest Peoples Programme, CAMV began a dialogue with the Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation (*Institut Congolais de Conservation de la Nature*, ICCN), under the Whakatane Mechanism (1). The interest in that dialogue was for the ICCN/PNKB to recognize the Batwa people's contribution to conservation, and to not see them as competition for the Protected Area, but rather as allies in the sustainable management of the Park. CAMV aims to reconcile the demands of biodiversity conservation with the needs of riparian Batwa communities.

Between 2014 and 2019, there were many other subsequent attempts at conflict resolution between the PNKB and the Batwa (2). The 2014 Dialogue of Whakatane, and the 2018 Dialogue of Miti-Center, sought to find a lasting solution to the problem of lack of lands. Unfortunately, **all of these initiatives were a dead letter** in the absence of a monitoring commission to effectively implement the recommendations. The indigenous Batwa peoples denounce the Congolese government's indifference to their demands. **The Park's largest donor is the German Development Bank KfW.** In 2016 alone, approximately US \$2 million came from KfW (3).

The Return of the Batwa to the PNKB

Against all expectations, in October 2018, some 40 Batwa families from the village of Buhobera in the territory of Kalehe decided to return to the PNKB. Thereafter, many other Batwa people from Kabare and Bunyakiri joined them. The Batwa people used the Bantu people for manual labor to produce wood charcoal and planks. In the current situation, given the extreme poverty of the Batwa and their constant quest for survival, it is not surprising to observe such abuses. “Returning to the Park may have seemed like an opportunity to make the most of the moment,” said an autonomous Twa leader from Kabare.

Since the indigenous Batwa peoples’ occupation in Kahuzi Biega National Park, violent and sometimes deadly altercations between indigenous Batwa people and park rangers have escalated. Many measures have been taken to calm this crisis. On several occasions, the PNKB tried to use force (burning houses, use of firearms, arrests, threats) to dissuade the Batwa from staying in the Park, but it was all in vain. On the contrary, most of these attempts at deterrence lead to often deadly confrontations.

To date, there have been almost ten deaths, and numerous people have been wounded—both on the side of the Batwa and the park rangers. **Some Batwa leaders are currently languishing in prison, while there are arrest warrants for others.** In this regard, it is worth highlighting the example of Chief Twa Kasula from Muyange village, in the Miti group in Sud-Kivu. On February 24, 2020, this Twa leader and seven other Batwa people—including two women—were given severe sentences of **between one and 15 years in prison, as well as fines.** The military tribunal of the Bukavu garrison sentenced them for illegal possession of firearms and destruction of flora within the Kahuzi Biega National Park, their ancestral territory. Many observers stated that these proceedings did not respect the conditions of due process: the judges heard all eight cases in one day, and delivered verdicts that same day. Furthermore, because the Batwa people did not have the chance to choose a lawyer, the court appointed a public defender the day before the proceedings. Under these conditions, the public defender did not have enough time to prepare the defense for the eight Batwa people (4).

Furthermore, some local organizations that accompany the Batwa are accused of convincing them to stay in the Park permanently. As a result, these organizations face threats from security services.

It is clear that if this return had been authorized and planned in accordance with the 2014 roadmap (which foresaw the establishment of pilot areas within the Park where the Batwa could manage the biodiversity in a sustainable way), it would have been possible to guarantee both the rights of communities and the protection of biodiversity.

Frequent clashes between park rangers and Batwa people, which have escalated since the Batwas’ return to the PNKB, should raise questions for all parties in this conflict—both nationally and internationally. Urgent measures must be taken to discourage those who are destroying the world heritage that is the PNKB, and above all, so that the instances of violence we see today do not recur. Adequate and sustainable mechanisms must be implemented to protect and promote the rights of the Batwa, as well as to protect the biodiversity of the PNKB.

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(1) The goal of the Whakatane Mechanism is to evaluate the situation in different protected areas of the world, and—where communities are negatively affected—propose solutions and put them into practice. It also defends and supports fruitful alliances between peoples and protected areas.

<http://www.whakatane-mechanism.org/fr>

(2) -2014: Recommendations from the dialogue held in Sud-Kivu, between riverside-dwelling Pygmies from PNKB and the Kahuzi Biega National Park from September 25 to October 4, 2014;

-2018: Conclusions from the exchange that took place in Miti-Center (Kabare territory in Sud-Kivu province) on February 2, 2018, about the issue of inter-community tensions that Shi and Twa (Pygmy) communities face, as well as the administration of the Kahuzi-Biega National Park at the Miti-Katana axis in the Kabare territory of Sud-Kivu province;

-2019: Bukavu Declaration that came out of from the high-level dialogue regarding lasting protection of the Kahuzi-Biega National Park, and the peaceful coexistence among the Park, indigenous peoples and other riverside communities.

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Indonesia: What is an Ecosystem Restoration Concession?



Hutan Harapan forest conflict in Jambi. Ph: EJ Atlas

Most of the forests in Indonesia are State-owned. In the past decades, so-called “production forests,” which account to more than 50% of the State-owned forests, have been given out to private companies, mainly logging and plantation industries. This has resulted in massive forest destruction for timber, palm oil and pulp and paper production. (1)

The category of Ecosystem Restoration Concessions (ERCs) was officially launched in 2004 in order to reverse the deforestation trend in “production forests”. ERCs were created by, on the one hand, conservation groups including the British Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), BirdLife International and its Indonesian affiliate Burung Indonesia and, on the other hand, the former Ministry of Forestry (2). The main idea was to create a market-oriented governmental tool capable to reverse deforestation in those “production forests,” that in spite of the forest destruction still are considered to have high potential for conservation.

In order to receive a restoration license from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, one has to create a company and present a business plan. The license is granted to the company for a period of 60 years and is renewable for another 35 years. The first company to receive an ERC was PT REKI in 2007, for the Harapan Rainforest Project in Sumatra. PT REKI is the license holder, while the three aforementioned conservation groups created a non-profit foundation that became the major shareholder of PT REKI.

The regulation for the management of ERCs establishes that the license holder should promote restoration activities to “re-establish a biological balance”. **Once that balance is reached, logging can be allowed again.** In the meantime, the ERC allows income generating activities, including selling of credits for ecosystem services such as carbon, conservation of biodiversity or water resources, as well as ecotourism and production and sales of non-timber forest products. Cultivating medicinal and ornamental plants, bee keeping and animal raising are also options the license holder can explore. The regulation defines that the ERCs should ensure an equitable benefit-sharing with local communities. By 2016, a total of 15 licenses had been given out for 573,455 hectares of land in Sumatra and Kalimantan. (3)

Over the years, **big conservation NGOs active in Indonesia around these schemes, such as WWF, TNC and Birdlife, succeeded to mobilize considerable funding for this idea** has been coming from European donor agencies and institutions. The German development bank, KfW, for example, has invested until 2016 at least 15.6 million euros in three ERCs. (4)

Has the private “restoration” model worked?

Since the ERC model was created in 2004, **deforestation has only further increased in Indonesia**, both in terms of primary forest loss as well as in terms of total tree cover loss. (5) Why has the ERC model not been able to reverse the trend of continuous destruction?

First of all, the overall area covered by ERCs is insignificant if compared with the total area of “production forest” in Indonesia, an estimated 69 million hectares by 2015. It means that the 15 licences of ERCs conceded totalling 573,455 hectares cover only a tiny 0.8% of the total area of “production forests”. Even if the government’s target of another 1.7 million hectares for ERCs would have been accomplished, that would still only cover about 3.2% of the total “production forests” area. (6)

But a fundamental question remains. Have the existing ERCs been successful in reversing forest destruction within their concession areas? The available documentation points to the opposite direction. For example, the Harapan Rainforest Project has been the scene of illegal logging, a direct cause of forest degradation and deforestation, whereas large-scale conversion into oil palm plantations has also taken place. Besides, intense and unresolved land disputes have unfolded with communities disputing access to and control over parts of the concession area. (7)

In 2018, forest fires destroyed 16,000 km² of the Bukit Tigapuluh National Park in western Sumatra. It is in the same region where, since 2015, the PT Alam Bukit Tigapuluh (ABT) company, set up by the NGO WWF in partnership with the Frankfurter Zoological Society (FZS) from Germany, runs an ERC. The forest destruction caused by the fires would have motivated the peculiar decision of the Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry in 2019 to end its forest conservation partnership with WWF, three years before it would expire. According to a spokesperson from the government, “WWF Indonesia has a concession and it was burned and they couldn’t manage it”. The ABT concession company, on its turn, said the fires were likely caused by people illegally encroaching the area and clearing it by burning. (8)

In 2019, forest fires affected the ERC of the Katingan Peatland Restoration and Conservation Project in Central Kalimantan, created in 2013 by the conservation NGOs Wetlands International, Puter Indonesia Foundation and the UK project developer Permian Global. The ERC is managed by the company PT Rimba Makmur Utama. The ERC lost at least 2,000 hectares of forests due to the fires and thus also lost carbon credits that are being bought by the transnational oil company Shell, which ultimately were transformed into hot air. Shell buys pollution credits from this project arguing they “compensate” their carbon emissions. Also in this ERC project area, conflicts over land and land use have been reported, in this case with Dayak indigenous communities. (9)

Who benefits from these “restoration” concessions?

ERCs follow a logic similar to the World Bank’s promoted ‘Public-Private’ Partnerships (PPPs). ERCs, just as PPPs, are long-term deals where public money is used to support a private company that supposedly could provide better results than the State, in this case, for ecosystem restoration activities. The conservation NGOs behind ERCs have complained about the “limited options for income generation” and the “high costs” and demanded for more public support and incentives. (10) Only the selling of carbon “credits” stands out as a profitable option, which explains why 10 out of the 15 existing ERCs in 2016 sold carbon “credits”, and why **ERCs are being called the “Indonesian REDD”**, since the government, different from other tropical forest countries, closed its REDD+ agency in 2015.

Meanwhile, the aforementioned examples show that forest destruction continues taking place inside ERCs, and therefore the real impact of ERCs on reverting forest destruction becomes at the very least, questionable. Unquestionable though are the **millions of dollars of mainly European development aid agencies that have been running into the bank accounts of the big conservation NGOs, which create and own so-called conservation companies**. No public records can be found, nor on how the millions of dollars so far were spent or on how much the funds benefited the shareholders of the ERC companies. These are some of the unanswered questions that lie around a process where so-called conservation NGOs transform themselves into a profit-driven conservation industry.

The wider context: bigger pressure on forests and communities

16 years after its launch, the ERC concession model is still functioning. What’s more, “forest restoration” has become the slogan of the day in international spaces where forest policies are discussed. Forest restoration is an essential part of the newest trend of Nature Based Solutions (NBS), much highlighted during the last UN climate conference in Madrid in 2019, and which is being considered now as the “new REDD+”.

ERCs fit perfectly well into the new concept of NBS, given the carbon credit business that most of the ERCs already practice. Peter Ellis from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) – one of the main conservation NGOs involved in ERCs in Indonesia - suggested that carbon emission reductions could also be achieved by improving “reduced impact logging”. (11) This fits into the ultimate objective of ERCs: to **restart logging activities once the “restoration” will be completed**. But experiences, for example from communities in Brazil in the Amazon state Acre, considered by the big conservation NGOs and the World Bank as a “success story of green economy” in the tropical forest, show how the so-called sustainable logging has contributed to only more forest degradation, deforestation and logging. (12)

In the case of the Harapan Rainforest Project, a road project aiming at connecting a number of large coal mines in South Sumatra to the Bayung Lencir river in Jambi province is planned to cross the ERC. Although the Ministry of Forests stopped the project at its first attempt to build the road in 2013, the project was submitted again to the Ministry in 2017. (13) With local governmental support, the chances of approval increased, but no final decision has been taken yet. (14)

Another additional pressure on Indonesian forests is the new push for transition to a so-called “low-carbon” economy based on “green” or “clean energy”, strongly pushed for by the European Union as part of its Green European Deal. “Green” or “clean energy” and “low-

carbon” sounds nice, but in practice it means a “high” level of more forest destruction for mining, especially cobalt and nickel, essential minerals for the exponential increase in demand expected for electric transport. Indonesia has huge deposits of such minerals in Kalimantan, Molucas and on Papua. “Clean energy” also includes the destructive push for agrofuels such as sugar cane plantations, as well as for hydropower dams and also geothermal energy, heavily promoted by the Indonesian government itself as part of its own “low-carbon” economy policy. (15) New legislation has been approved in 2014, with the assistance of the World Bank, that considers geothermal mining not a mining activity, and as such not a harmful activity, in spite of its damaging impacts and of the fact that most of the extraction sites are inside forest areas.

Final remarks

Both the more recent push for “green energy” as well as the rise of ecosystem restoration concessions since 2004, have a strong European footprint. While in 2004 European official development aid agencies supported ERCs as an opportunity for European polluters to “compensate” their emissions while European governments could show being concerned about the need for “conservation”, nowadays, the **European Union sees Indonesia as an important provider of strategic minerals for its “green energy” transition.** The forest and social destruction caused by the rush on minerals for Europe’s “green energy” transition will increasingly become evident, and this, on top of the “regular” destruction that European investments continue causing, make ERCs to remain a useful tool for “compensating” pollution while showing a supposed concern about “conservation”.

All of this not only means an increased pressure on Indonesian forests as a result of “forest restoration”, “compensation”, “green economy” and the well-known destruction of the extractive and plantation industry. **These different top-down projects and their expansion plans will increasingly dispute the same spaces,** as shown by the case of the coal transport road crossing the ERC of the Harapan Rainforest Project. ERC projects and other restoration and conservation initiatives in Indonesia tend to expand their areas, taking advantage of the brightly new Nature Based Solutions projects and the new funding options that appear (16). At the end of the day, those agents with the power to conduct this process of dividing and re-distributing the lands will seek to maintain an image of social responsibility, so some communities, if not evicted, might be allowed to remain, nevertheless they might then also encounter oil extraction, restoration concessions, geothermal energy and other business projects in their territories. And what’s worse: with a perfectly legal license to be there.

Insisting in business approaches to so-called conservation and forest restoration such as ERCs and other similar “restoration” initiatives in Indonesia means continue blaming communities for forest destruction, creating more restrictions on their use of forest and also promoting more co-optation, division and conflicts among and with communities. That is what the Indonesian experience with ERCs shows, and which is very similar to experiences with REDD+ elsewhere. (17) An extremely challenging picture for communities on the ground. Joint reflection and careful alliance building from the ground to build a stronger resistance to counter this top-down and destructive process appears an urgent task, of utmost importance.

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Brazil: Plantation Company Suzano Covers Up its Devastating Impacts with Claims of “Conservation”



The Atlantic Forest (or *Mata Atlântica*), one of the most biodiverse biomes, once stretched along the coastline of Brazil. Also covering parts of Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina, it coexisted with indigenous and other traditional communities for generations. Today, it survives mostly in small patches and Protected Areas, which are largely managed by private companies. (1) The so-called central corridor of the Atlantic Forest is located in Brazil's south-eastern states of Bahia and Espírito Santo.

These states also house hundreds of thousands of hectares of eucalyptus tree plantations, mostly owned by pulp and paper company Suzano S.A. In 2019, Suzano Papel e Celulose S.A. and Fibria Celulose merged to form the world's largest short-fibre eucalyptus pulp producer, Suzano S.A. The company owns pulp mills, paper mills and energy plants, all located in Brazil. It also owns the biotechnology company, Futura Gene, which was the first company to obtain a permit to commercially release one type of Genetically Engineered (GE) Eucalyptus tree in Brazil. This scale of production has resulted into over one million hectares of eucalyptus tree plantations, and represents a major threat to the remaining Atlantic Forest.

A key tactic that pulp and paper companies use to keep expanding their plantations and business, is to market themselves as “green” companies. Suzano claims to be “a global reference in sustainable use of natural resources.” (2) The company also states that the conservation and restoration areas it has created “are interspersed with eucalyptus plantations in order to produce forests mosaics that help maintain balance of the ecosystem.” As a result, it claims that its Restoration Program, which began in 2009, “promotes sustainability through the restoration of natural capital and its inherent ecosystem services.” (3)

The company uses these statements to greenwash its operations, thereby legitimizing its expansion and positioning itself as “part of the solution” instead of the problem. For Suzano, forests are natural *capital* that could lead to more profits for the company. Unsurprisingly, Suzano also has partnerships with conservationists NGOs like WWF, The Nature Conservancy and Conservation International (4). Yet, it is clear that the company's propaganda aims to undermine the well-documented and very serious impacts that both

Fibria and Suzano, - and now Suzano S.A - continue to cause to forests and life spaces where local communities depend on. (5)

It should also be noted that most of the areas set aside for conservation within the companies' concessions are, in fact, mandated under Brazilian law, which demands that 20 per cent of all rural properties inside the area of the biome Atlantic Forest be maintained as legal reserve areas. Besides, the funds that these companies spend on Protected Areas or conservation activities can come or go away according to the company's terms. News portal Mongabay reported how when Suzano was renewing its licence on more than 22,000 hectares of eucalyptus in the area around the Protected Areas of Córrego Grande and Rio Preto, it did as many small properties instead of just one big undertaking to avoid paying any "environmental compensation", which is the money companies have to pay to Protected Areas whenever they engage in initiatives with high environmental impact. (6) And although Suzano claims that it is "protecting" more than the Brazilian law mandates, these "green" patches are highly fragmented and surrounded by monocultures. And the more fragmented a forest is, the more threatened and therefore the more susceptible to fires it becomes.

Another important issue to highlight is Suzano's trading of Green Bonds on the stock market to raise money to *invest* in these "conservation" activities. Suzano is the largest Brazilian issuer of Green Bonds. According to the company, the millions of dollars raised were invested in "projects that generate environmental and financial gains at *our* forest and industrial operations" (emphasis added). (7)

In this context, WRM talked with Ivonete Gonçalves, a long-time researcher and activist from Brazil, in order to reflect on Suzano's conservation activities. Due to space constraints, this is a summary of her answers, but you can access the full answers in Portuguese [here](#).

WRM: Based on your experience, why do you think the Suzano company is so "concerned about" conservation and biodiversity?

Ivonete: Pulp and paper companies always makes statements that don't line up with reality. I have seen this for almost thirty years. The historical movement shows that this strategy comes from the capitalist mode of production, so it is not new. They always acted with information that was disconnected from reality. They are experts in concealment. It is an illusion when the company is applauded for claiming that it "has more forests than plantations." This illusion has been invented with the clear goal of creating a favorable climate for the company, during times of deep reflection about the replacement of native forests with plantations and the consequences this has for humanity.

Suzano needs to indicate which audience it is speaking to. Surely it is talking to its partners and board of directors, because the people in the region already know how [these companies] act, since they have been here for a long time. For a company of that size, it is not possible to be concerned about conservation or biodiversity. One only need look at their track record—of the expansion of their plantations causing deforestation—for this discourse to be discredited.

And today, with so many genetic modifications, we do not know exactly what species [of eucalyptus] is there. And the destruction continues. It is enough to see, for example, how much groundwater is absorbed daily by each tree; and there are about 1,500 trees per hectare on a total of more than one million hectares of eucalyptus trees. In addition, about 80

cubic meters of water are supplied per minute to each of the two plants in the region. And we have to take into account the various poisons with different uses and modalities, which are spread manually or by plane—relentlessly applied at each stage of production. We must also highlight the impoverishment of the soil, since “All life on our planet depends on a living soil: the water in rivers and wells, vegetation, human health, food and even the climate. The erosion, floods and desertification that are so frequent today are a result of dead soils” (8). And on top of all the ills caused by companies like Suzano, rural communities—oppressed by eucalyptus plantations—are unable to grow healthy food because they are periodically bathed in poisons from the commodity plantations. Trees used for paper feed relentlessly on poisons.

Thus, concepts such as “conservation” or “biodiversity” were distorted to the point of not being recognized by those who live in the area, or by any sensible person who is deeply familiar with the region.

WRM: In your opinion, how can a company whose business was and continues to be a direct cause of large-scale deforestation so calmly claim to be a “leader in sustainability”?

Ivonete: The development of concepts to manipulate an ideology of sustainability only exists within the discourse of the companies and their allies. And these concepts try to make the cruelty of the operations of companies like Suzano more agreeable to specific audiences. This cruelty appears in different moments, beginning with the destruction of the Atlantic Forest—one of the most diverse ecosystems on the planet!

And since this is an opinion, I am going to share some reflections that I believe are relevant to this moment in history. Faced with the major world crisis due to the Covid-19 virus, I think it is important to reflect and seek new directions. I am here as a traveler in this time, seeing this past-present of land expropriation, of a reality of environmental injustice, where I also live and experience the dire consequences of the Suzano and Stora Enso project. I take advantage of the forced retreat caused by nature to think and dream globally with local awareness, without trying to exhaust the issue or establish it as the only truth. But this is something that I think is healthy for the South and the North; because the global situation brought on by Covid-19 affirms that we are all vulnerable, and that the capitalist economy does not “save” anybody. In that way, nature has taught me, during my years of research and experience with eucalyptus and other monoculture plantations, that “pests” do not exist. What exists is imbalance. As we swap diversity for (mono)cultures around the world, with a whole bundle of synthetic inputs, we are throwing the global ecosystem out of balance; and pathogens are transforming. They are getting stronger and attacking plants and animals, and even humans. In contrast, I have seen through experience that with Agroecology projects, all beings integrate naturally without causing harm; and the ecosystem is in balance and gives life—abundant life—for all beings.

A society based on monocultures is exclusive and promotes acute social inequality—which leads to the impossibility of covering basic needs like food and water for most people. Let us therefore include a space to share global experiences, to foster hope among minority groups—both in the countryside and the city. I think the time has come for companies like Suzano, Stora Enso and others—with their long track records of expropriation of nature and people—to return the focus to those who have rights: peoples and territories.

WRM: What is Suzano's strategy? What does "conservation" mean to this company?

Ivonete: Suzano claims that almost 40% of its areas are used for conservation.

However, it is easy to show that this information is false. To prove it, it is enough to go around the numerous tree plantations (understood here as commodity plantations) lining the roads and communities, and see how much Atlantic Forest is visible; or one can do this with geoprocessing images. Even considering the three Conservation National Parks of the Atlantic Forest, the percentage that the company publicizes is not reached. Together, the three parks do not total 100,000 hectares. The Pau Brasil National Park is 19,000 hectares, the Monte Pascoal National Park is 22,383 hectares, and the Discovery National Park is 21,213 hectares. That is, together they add up to 62,596 hectares of native forest. Meanwhile, in the same region where the Parks are located, in the southernmost part of [the state of] Bahia, Suzano and Stora Enso have more than one million hectares of eucalyptus trees.

Suzano and Stora Enso's invasion of a large part of the territory causes conflicts; and the conflicts are at the root of the establishment of the tree plantation complex in this region. There are countless conflicts stemming from land disputes, involving indigenous and quilombola communities and small-scale landless farmers. There is a strong lobby to repress any initiative to seek rights. Repression is carried out via State apparatus such as the police and the courts of justice. Any initiative by the communities to defend their territories is repressed, and the leaders are persecuted. Today, the extreme right-wing policy installed in the country reinforces this strategy.

WRM: Did the communities' situation improve with the company's conservation programs?

Ivonete: Those strongly impacted have not seen any improvement; neither has any observant visitor. In these times of crisis, the situation is even more tense. The few public policies oriented toward the population impacted by the eucalyptus plantation project have been totally destroyed. Small farmers no longer have institutional support or reinforcement.

What mitigates the problem are the initiatives generated by movements of rural landless workers—mainly the MST (Landless Workers Movement), which has various settlements and has been working tirelessly to produce food. Healthy, agroecological food without toxins. The MST also has a national plan to recover degraded areas, and in Bahia the goal is to plant a million plants of different varieties, using the agroecological system.

- (1) Mongabay, Brazilian state invites private companies to run Atlantic Forest parks, 2016, <https://news.mongabay.com/2016/12/brazilian-state-invites-private-companies-to-run-atlantic-forest-parks/>
- (2) Suzano, About Us, <https://ve.linkedin.com/company/suzano>
- (3) UN SDG Partnership, How Suzano's Restoration Program transforms degraded, pastureland into regenerative, native Brazilian vegetation, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=30660>
- (4) Suzano Papel e Celulose, Green Bonds Annual Report, 2017, http://ir.suzano.com.br/fck_temp/16_32/file/Suzano_Green_Bonds_Relat%C3%B3rio%20Anual%202017%20-%20EN.pdf
- (5) See information on Fibria's impacts at: <https://wrm.org.uy/es/?s=fibria>; and Suzano's impacts at: <https://wrm.org.uy/es/?s=suzano>
- (6) Mongabay, In Brazil's Atlantic Forest, conservation efforts drown in a sea of eucalyptus, 2017, <https://news.mongabay.com/2017/04/in-brazils-atlantic-forest-conservation-efforts-drown-in-a-sea-of-eucalyptus/>

(7) Idem (4)

(8) PRIMAVESI, Ana. MANUAL DO SOLO VIVO. 2016. 2nd revised edition. Expressão Popular. San Pablo. 2016.

Patriarchies in the Forests in India: Communities in Peril



Illustration: MAKAM

The history of land conflicts in the forest areas in India is invariably bound to the imposition of the British Empire's colonial rule over these forests as territories to capture for their own commercial uses. **India's contemporary forest policies are derived from these colonial rulers and their priorities.** Several measures were introduced by the Department of Forests and Environment in the 1980s with the aim of decentralizing forest governance and overcome the legacy of autocratic governance (1). However, evidences largely point to the authoritarian control and techno-scientific and bureaucratic management of the forests by this Department, to the peril of the communities who live with their forests.

These policies of control are juxtaposed against forest communities' cultural heritages, which manage their everyday lives in rhythmical relation to the ecological living. The *Adivasis*, as the traditional forest dwellers of India are called, were classified as "Scheduled Tribes" and were accorded special status through a constitutional enactment after independence. With a de facto control over their land and having evolved appropriate methods of cultivation with minimal ecological imprint, such as their shifting cultivation systems of "*nevad*" in Madhya Pradesh, "*valra*" in South Rajasthan or "*podu*" in Andhra Pradesh, they are known to have "worshipped their land and raised their children on its bounty" (2). **Gradually, state interventions and the heavy footprint of the Forest Department have however eroded these systems.** The state now renders more appropriate to sanction these practices often on the basis of insignificant crimes supposedly perpetrated by *Adivasis* or forest dwellers, despite them being the custodians of the forest.

Women experiencing the changes around forest ownership, relationships and practices

My research in Western India, in Southern Rajasthan, reveals that women have played a central role in the conservation of forests as much as they have depended on the forests for their livelihoods needs since centuries. All too often however, the colonial narrative dominates the script of forest management. Little reference is made to the inter-

dependencies between communities to claim spaces and live in varied environments with their respective cultures of civilizations. **Viewed within this perspective of interdependencies rather than a colonial and growth-oriented linear chronology perspective (3), one can understand the management and conservation practices of forest communities.** Forest communities, as knowledge bearers, identify sacred and symbolic meaning for life-sustaining-resources within their livelihood and living practices; as gatherers and managers of herds and flocks, who practiced shifting agriculture while foraging for food and herbs within the forests.

And within these interdependencies lie the stories of women. Their lives and roles in conservation and protection are visible as they patrol the forests and penalize those who break collectively agreed norms for protection and regeneration, such as rotation and fencing. The rhythms and culture of their practices are embedded in the relationship nurtured with these regions over generations, with women as the flag-bearers of this relationship and knowledge system, given their everyday living practices and rituals.

Yet, women are seldom accorded formal acknowledgment of these roles, even in traditional governance structures, given their patriarchal structures of decision-making across the central regions of India. (4)

Across the country, the Forest Department and its functionaries continue to largely claim the forests as their territory, and to impose their authority through the imposition of the Forest Conservation Act and subsequent legislations, especially in regions designated as reserved or protected forest. **Concepts of territory and boundaries, drawn from masculinist discourses of conquest and capture, of fencing and 'divisions', dominate in order to create administrative spatial barriers imposed upon an ecological continuum that was the forest.**

Through the use of institutional patriarchies, the Forest Department has entrusted to itself the role of judging supposed violation of forest rules. In this way, the Department continues to penalize and render criminal the forest dwellers for acts of 'encroachment' or by making communities responsible for the destruction of forests and adopting aggressive acts of 'eviction'. The roots of the conflicts lie in the gap between formally recognized land ownership and customarily held and managed land, also leading to land grab by outsiders and environmental degradation (5) The trend of introducing private property regimes into former commons has increased not only the perception of self as othered, but also the communities' risk of poverty, poor health, and human rights abuses. Thereby also rendering insecure the tenure rights within patriarchally constructed legal frameworks acceptable to the government.

The violence and exploitative processes experienced by women seem like a metaphor to the departure from the ways communities have known of living and being in their forest based societies. While *Adivasi* societies were not free from violence and from the footprint of patriarchies, there was a recognition of women as holders of these societies as well as social means to address social ills against women as they arose. However, with the passage of decades, **patriarchy has deepened its inroads through market means of private property regimes into forest lands and through the perception of women as secondary.**

Most explicitly, the masculine presence of the state in the forests has been in the form of a security apparatus that aims to combat what the state labels as ‘left wing extremism’ as well as human rights and research activists. It is common knowledge that the forest governance systems are highly flawed, with large tracts of barren land being labelled as forests and vice versa. Reduced land available for communities, distress migration due to development induced displacement and increasing incidence of violence in forest areas are driven by the ambiguities in implementation of laws which often times are crafted to serve the manipulations of the market actors and the authoritarian state. Within this vortex, **women are mostly exposed with everyday struggles to the rage of local forest rangers.** As they protect their forests, they also protect the same forests that the forest mafias wish to claim for their plunder while at the same time, they resist the diversion of forests that the state may allocate for its commercial interests, as has occurred in the Hasdeo region of Chattisgarh or the Talabira region of Odisha (6). These commons terrains that have been the source of sustenance and heritage as shared and sacred spaces are now terrains for communities to claim, resist diversions and have little opportunity to manage, as the Forest Department and mainstream Conservationists dismiss and deride their wisdoms in order to “protect” the forests from those who in fact have guarded, protected and coexisted with these same forests!

Negotiating the Forest Rights Act (FRA)

The FRA was proposed as a means to address the ‘historical injustice’ towards *Adivasi* and recognizes community forest rights and individual forest rights. The movements and individuals, who came together under the umbrella of the Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD) to propose and push for enactment of this Law, were primarily focussed upon the protection of community forests. Their arguments derived from the intuitive wisdom of the *Adivasi* way of life and not from a gendered position (in fact the author was subjected to the ire of the leaders of the movement who rejected gender concerns and explicitly rejected gender positions as international developmental opportunism). The inclusion of women as a joint holder was an issue that was “quietly slipped in with no significant resistance, since women are part of the society and need recognition for their roles”, as Sarin, a leading member of CSD acknowledged at a 2017 MAKAAAM Meeting which looks for the recognition and rights of women farmers in India.

The focus in the implementation of the Act however came to be overwhelmingly about claiming individual property rights, influenced by the mainstream view of patriarchal societies and driven by NGO and civil society efforts as progressive liberals sought to implement the FRA Act effectively in a “rights framework”. (7) Therefore recognition of claims in the names of individuals became the key issue, and registering women’s names as joint holders became the gender priority. Driven to ensure the implementation of the Act, **a persistent overwhelming private proletarian regime has compelled *Adivasi* communities to swim into the private property tides.** It is only with the adoption of the FRA 2006 that tribal societies have begun to include women in ownership of land through FRA claims, although several societies had adopted such patriarchal norms of registration of private properties much earlier.

The provisions within the Act for representation in decision-making bodies has also led to the inclusion of women in the Forest Rights Committees, yet, there is continued resistance to their active participation in traditional decision-making forums and to transfer the joint claim record to the Revenue Record of rights (8), to the negation of the provisions of the FRA

2006. Attempts are also ongoing to obfuscate the separations of the JFM from the Forest Rights Committees and giving recognition as the JFMC under the FRA in contravention of the provisions of the law. From a democratic governance perspective, women have realized that this is important to resist as the FRA is a legal enactment and must override, but the financial incentives convince people to give false promises of benefits to continue to allow the JFM to prevail. The fact that JFMCs are currently being endowed with large repositories of cash endowments from the CAF Act (9) resources makes it difficult to turn down or reject the JFM. Thus **the JFM programme, introduced as a progressive scheme in an otherwise authoritarian bureaucratic regime, to promote progressive governance strategies of 'participatory forestry' through steps such as women's representation in leadership, remains largely controlled by the authoritarian Forest Department to undermine the Forest Rights Act,** and to ensure the continuance of the control of the Forest Department over community forest resources.

Recent legislation for so-called "compensatory afforestation" deepens this irony, divesting the indigenous traditional dwellers' forests into numerous purposes on the one hand, and of occupying land elsewhere to "compensate" for that which was diverted. Diversion of forests continues to be a strategy for increasing the growth of the state by providing mineral resource access and for releasing land to the project of development. Although the Forest Rights Act makes provisions for consent to be mandatory from impacted communities, **the processes of consent is either circumvented or thwarted altogether.** Women have repeatedly emphasized how such alienation and dispossession cause a deep fracture in their ways of life as ecological communities, a point that forest officials have often dismissed as a fiction of a past long gone.

The 1988 National Forest Policy acknowledged "the tendency to look upon forests as revenue earning resource" and the New Draft views forests as a means to enhance income potential and for their emphasis on timber and productivity. The 1988 National Forest Policy spoke of "Creating a massive people's movement with the involvement of women," with the "principal aim of ensur(ing) environmental stability and maintenance of ecological balance..." and that "The derivation of direct economic benefit must be subordinated to this principal aim". These objectives have however been overwhelmed by the practices for economic gain and are increasingly diluted with a minimalist and instrumentalized engagement with women, primarily as labour for the actions that the Forest Department undertakes.

In sharp contrast, women describe forests as their abode, living space, livelihoods resource, lifeline for sustainability and maintenance of an ecological existence, a safe space. Hence, **the conservation and management of these forests represent a lifeline and cultural tradition that is practiced almost intuitively and based on centuries of inherited wisdoms.** At a recent press meeting organized by MAKAAM, (a women farmers rights forum) seeking to strengthen women's claims to forests, the women from Mandla Madhya Pradesh highlighted this relationship and spoke about the rich biodiversities that have nurtured their needs. They listed 24 species that provided uncultivated, medicinal plants, and non-timber forest produce that provided them income, apart from the fodder and fuelwood from dried wood that they gathered from the forests. More recently, however, the forests have become spaces of fear and scarcity since women keep foraging resources even as they are pursued, criminalized and penalized by an increasingly vigilant Forest Department.

This has changed the social relationships with the forests as well as the intra community relationships as Adivasi or tribal communities are influenced by religious and cultural

practices of mainstream patriarchal societies and simultaneously drawn into the web of Property regimes. The future is in peril for these communities and their forests as they transit towards confrontation with regimes that have scant respect for their ways of living and knowing while having deep interest in the commodities to be derived from their lands.

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Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch, MAKAAAM (Forum For Women Farmers' Rights), India

(1) The Joint Forest Management Scheme aimed for peoples' participation in social forestry and afforestation

(2) Baviskar EPW 1994 pp 2945

(3) Skaria Studies in History, Sage pub 1998 pp194

(4) 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. See <https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/india-women-commons-and-patriarchy/>

(5) ILDC <https://landportal.org/book/thematic/indigenous-community-land-rights>

(6) Read <https://www.newsclick.in/Chhattisgarh-NCL-Mine-Operated-by-Adani-Group-Faces-Roadblocks-Owing-to-Tribal-Resistance>

Mining has emerged as a significant hurdle to recognition of rights of community, along with areas where sanctuaries are to come up. Nandini Sunder documents the most notorious example is of Ghatbarra village in Chhattisgarh which was granted community forest rights in 2013 in the Hasdeo Arand forests (over 820 hectares out of the 2300 hectares claimed) but found its title abruptly cancelled in 2016; <http://nandinisundar.blogspot.com/2019/04/why-forest-rights-act-is-not-only.html#more>

(7) See for example WRM Bulletin, Traps, dilemmas and contradictions of the rights discourse in the forests, 2017, <https://wrm.org.uy/bulletins/issue-234/>

(8) The forest claims need to be recorded into the revenue records or the Record of Rights in order for the process to be considered fully completed and binding

(9) CAF Refers to the Compensatory Afforestation Fund or commonly known as the CAMPA Act, an enactment recently passed in 2016 by GOI whereby the State sets up an authority to receive funds from industries against compensation for afforestation "crediting thereto the monies received from the user agencies towards compensatory afforestation, additional compensatory afforestation, penal compensatory afforestation, net present value and all other amounts recovered from such agencies under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980". For a reading of this enactment go to briefing note at http://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A2016-38_1.pdf

Panama: Other Perspectives on “Doing Conservation”



Ngäbe-Buglé Comarca, Panamá. Ph: Flickr/misc.mar

Many governments, NGOs and even corporations are planning to increase the number of Protected Areas around the world, with the goal of reducing deforestation and biodiversity loss. But experience has shown us that the prevailing conservation model that continues to be used does not consider Indigenous Peoples or other forest-dwelling communities as critical agents in the preservation and stewardship of forests. On the contrary, most Protected Areas prohibit human presence.

Despite the difficulties the Ngäbe-Buglé people are facing due to the pandemic, what follows is a transcription of some exchanges that we had with Rogelio Montezuma, head of the Committee for the Defense of the Ngäbe-Buglé Comarca [large indigenous territory protected by law]. In 2010, the Ngäbe-Buglé indigenous people carried out a strong resistance to prevent their territory from being handed over to mining and dam companies. They had to endure criminalization, massacre and brutal repression from the police, but it was a conscious struggle for the life of their community.

As a result of this strong resistance, in 2010 the government of Panama abolished the law that was going to reform the mining code, and it legislated to prohibit mining exploration and exploitation, as well as hydroelectric dams, in the Ngäbe Bugle comarca. The Barro Blanco dam could not be canceled because it was outside the limits of the comarca, even though it does impact and affect Ngäbe communities that live on the banks of the river where the dam was built.

Cerro Colorado, which was intended to be opened up to the mining industry, is considered an important biological place in Mesoamerica, and is the lung of the region.

It was during the construction process of the Barro Blanco Dam that the government of Panama—along with international conservation organizations—moved forward with the implementation of Protected Area (PA) management programs in indigenous communities within the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor on the Panamanian Atlantic (CBMAP, by its

Spanish acronym). 14 priority Protected Areas are envisaged for this corridor. The Ngäbe-Buglé Comarca is part of one of three macro-regions with high biodiversity.

WRM: In your experience, what does “doing conservation” mean to the Ngäbe-Buglé people?

Rogelio: The communities by nature have always conserved forests as well as their relationship with their environment, harmoniously creating coexistence among all living beings.

WRM: What do you think is essential in order for forests to be preserved by Indigenous Peoples?

Rogelio: In order to preserve forests, there must be awareness of the importance of doing so, as well as of the use and benefit that a water source gives us, and the production of food for survival that does not threaten or destroy the environment.

WRM: In your experience, what were the impacts caused by the creation of the Protected Area?

Rogelio: There is a protected area that borders the Ngäbe-Buglé Comarca territory, which causes uncertainty among the people. Certain practices are restricted there, such as hunting and the use of trees, among other things. This directly creates social conflict, since there was no prior agreement about these restrictions. When they pass a resolution to create a Protected Area, that is the first time they tell people about it, and they do not leave affected communities with any options.

WRM: How did this affect forest conservation and the social fabric within the communities?

Rogelio: Conservation without the true participation of the communities that live in and depend on forests causes a lot of unrest and questions. This is because many of the decisions made are arbitrary and inconclusive. To use natural resources for business is to not consider the consequences for indigenous peoples.

Mozambique: Letter-Response to Portucel and ORAM



Ph: Missão Tabita

Missão Tabita is a Mozambican civil society organization of a religious and humanitarian nature. The organization wrote an article that profiles **rural communities' perceptions of the impact that Portucel's industrial plantations have on their lives**. The article was published in WRM's electronic bulletin ([available here](#)). It was written using information gathered from meetings and interviews with members of communities affected by Portucel, in Ile and Namarroi districts in Zambezia province; as well as from direct observations made in the field.

Missão Tabita and WRM received letters from Portucel ([available here](#)) and ORAM ([available here](#)) demanding the right to respond to the article, supposedly because it was not true. However, neither Portucel nor ORAM were able to support their claims and prove that the article presents false information.

ORAM accuses the article's authors of insinuating that it received money from Portucel, which it vehemently denies. However, a mere fragment of the article talks about ORAM, wherein it reads: *"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 a maneuver by Portucel."* This sentence in no way expresses that ORAM has any kind of financial relationship with Portucel, nor that it has received any money from the company, directly or indirectly.

The previous sentence does refer to the fact that ORAM was in some way involved in the demarcation of communal lands in some of the communities affected by Portucel, including the communities where there are plans to install small dams. ORAM's letter confirms this information.

In regards to the project to build small dams to promote vegetable crops, the communities that were contacted have the perception that ORAM is working in partnership with the company—which according to ORAM is not true.

The relationship between Portucel and ORAM is not clear to the rural communities that were interviewed. On countless occasions, the communities confuse the actions of these two entities; this confusion is fueled by the misinformation that characterizes Portucel's actions.

ORAM's and Portucel's letters do not respond at all to the myriad issues addressed in the article, nor do they add new contributions to the issues discussed therein; they are merely descriptive letters of the work carried out by both entities. Thus, for example, they mention Portucel's Social Development Program, which supposedly is *“one of the pillars of value that the company shares with local communities, supporting them in their economic and social development.”*

Over the years, since Portucel's entry into communal areas in Zambezia province, we have received information from several affected communities about: promises of jobs in exchange for giving up their lands and *machambas* (agricultural plots); promises to build schools and health centers; and promises to improve access roads and to open up water wells. All of these promises were made in the context of community consultations, one of the steps required by law to obtain the Right to Use and Exploit the Land. It was because of these promises, and the enormous pressure that they say they felt, that the vast majority of community members gave up their lands to Portucel. Many claim that they did not give up their lands of their own free will, but rather were pressured by the company to give up their lands; and to this day, they are far from seeing their lives improved. They are unable to say whether this pressure—which they report was mostly from local leaders and structures—took place with Portucel's knowledge. However, the promises were made by the company, and the local government was present at all times.

The information that Missão Tabita publishes comes from ongoing work with affected communities; its aim is always to transmit the communities' perceptions and feelings as faithfully as possible. **The negative impacts of Portucel's plantations in rural communities are visible.** These communities are still poor. They have difficulties in accessing water. There are no schools in good condition nearby, nor health centers in good condition. They do not have galvanized roofs on their homes. So where is this life improvement? That improvement that caused them to give up their lands—their only wealth!

Missão Tabita is not the only one that continues to denounce the visible negative impacts or the absence of positive impacts of Portucel's plantations. There are several studies by other non-governmental organizations regarding the same complaints and situations. There is a whole process to try to resolve these issues with the company, which refuses to accept responsibility for the problems—thus exacerbating the rural communities' discontent. Meanwhile, the company spends time and resources on a Social Development Program that the supposed beneficiaries themselves are unfamiliar with, and in which they do not see a big positive impact—because that is not what was promised to them.

The communities that Portucel calls strategic partners, for the most part, are not aware of the company's Social Development Program. Nor are they aware of the complaint mechanism, and therefore use it very little. **People continue to feel wronged and deceived.** Missão Tabita stresses that some people have been harmed from the loss of their *machambas* and crops since the beginning of the project. According to members of the communities that we interviewed, the “negotiation” of the transfer of community land is done individually. The company negotiates directly with owners, to give them about 1500 meticales (about US \$24)

for the work of clearing their *machamba*—which is done by the owner and contracted family members. This work is not payment for the *machamba* itself, but for the work of clearing the land and the *machamba*, which they themselves gave up to the company. Is this the promised employment?

So far, the company justifies the issues communities raise as stemming mostly from a lack of information and communication between the company and the communities. Missão Tabita believes that this analysis is **a gross simplification of communities' concerns, considering that many are simply not interested in seeing their way of life altered. They do not want to live surrounded by eucalyptus trees; and they have no notion of the negative impacts that this kind of plantation will have on their machambas, in terms of water availability, use of pesticides, etc.**

Missão Tabita, Mozambique

An organization whose main objective is to seek peace and social justice, promoting human rights—including the right to land and natural resources, particularly for rural communities that directly depend on them.

RECOMMENDED

Land conflicts between plantation company SOCFIN and communities in Sierra Leone

Civil society organizations welcomed a Technical Committee report set up by the government of Sierra Leone to look into a legal dispute between the multinational company Socfin and communities affected by the company's oil palm plantations in the Malen Chiefdom in Sierra Leone. The completion of the report concludes the investigative phase of the conflict resolution process concerning the land conflict between Socfin and communities in the Malen Chiefdom and is an important step towards finding a resolution to the long-standing land dispute.

Read further here in Spanish and French

ES: <https://wrm.org.uy/es/?p=18360>

FR: <https://wrm.org.uy/fr/?p=16327>

International appeal to stop violence against the peoples in Colombia

Different national and international movements, organizations and networks condemn and vigorously denounce the systematic and selective murders of comrades from rural and urban organizations in Colombia, without the government or multilateral institutions having done a responsible follow up of the murders and massacres perpetrated. Since March 6, when the first case of COVID-19 in Colombia was reported, more than twenty social leaders have been murdered. We stand in solidarity with and demand justice for all those comrades from various Colombian peoples' organizations. On top of killings, there are constant threats and attacks against trade union and peoples' leaders in all regions of this South American country. The appeal also invites to speak out against these developments and carry out actions to verify and investigate the gravity of the peoples' plight, denouncing and exposing this situation and urging the Colombian government to fulfil its responsibility and commitment to achieve peace in Colombia. Read the appeal in English and Spanish here.

<https://seguimosenlucha.org/index.php/2020/04/29/llamamiento-internacional-para-detener-la-violencia-contra-el-pueblo-colombiano/>

Legalising land theft in Brazil while the focus is on Covid-19

While most media is focusing on the Covid-19 crisis, new land laws in Brazil stand to usher an unprecedented dispossession of rural land in Brazil, expanding deforestation and destruction, pushed by the greed of the agribusiness and logging industries. If the Brazilian National Congress approves by May 19 the Provisional Measure (PM 910) signed by president Jair Bolsonaro in December 2019, millions of hectares of federal public land can be privatized by authorizing a “self-declaratory procedure” to eliminate bureaucracy. This will also result in the eviction of thousands of small farmers, rural people and communities into urban peripheries. Forest destroyers, in the meantime, are rapidly advancing, with a 63.7% growth in deforestation only in April in the Brazilian Amazon. Read more information here and here in Portuguese and here in English.

PO: https://www.grain.org/system/attachments/sources/000/005/853/original/Land_Robbery_in_Brazil_complete_version_PT_footnotes.pdf

PO: <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2020/05/08/desmatamento-na-amazonia-cresce-63-7-em-abril-grileiro-nao-faz-home-office>

EN: <https://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/29613>

How have Asian Governments responded to the COVID-19 Pandemic?

In the opening article for the Focus on the Global South newsletter, Shalmali Guttal alerts on how lockdowns in Pakistan, India, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Philippines have left millions of informal sector, agricultural and migrant workers, street vendors, and entertainment and hospitality workers stranded without wages, shelter, food and health care, and have prevented farmers, fishers and herders from crucial food production activities. She further alerts on one of the biggest dangers of emergency measures that are supposed to protect people during exceptional circumstances, such as COVID 19: they can persist indefinitely. COVID-19 has provided an opportunity for political leaders/regimes in many countries to enact policies that favour their interests, which can become institutionalized and be used in other circumstances that ruling regimes deem exceptional. Read the article in English here: <https://focusweb.org/how-have-asian-governments-responded-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

An activist resource pack in front of the pandemic

The African women network against resource extraction (WOMIN) has compiled useful information for activists confronting the measures against the pandemic. The compilation gathers basic health information, tools to help organizing work (how to access legal aid, how to care for your community in a crisis, how to organize meetings and workshops online), as well as readings for further analysis and research, especially from an eco-feminist, gender-justice and radical analytical lenses and with a conscious effort to profile African movement and activist contributions to this growing debate. Access the compilation in English here: <https://womin.org.za/resource-library/an-activist%E2%80%99s-covid-19-resources-pack.html>

The Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) plant 1,000 trees in an encampment in Paraná, Brazil

500 native trees and 500 fruit trees were planted at the Maila Sabrina camp, during the closing of the Training Course for Pedagogical Collectives of the Schools of the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) in Paraná. The action is part of the National Plan “Plant Trees, Produce Healthy Foods”, launched by the MST at the end of 2019, with the goal of planting 100 million trees throughout Brazil, over 10 years. The mystical and political act of planting trees denounced the perverse and destructive logic of agribusiness and the mining

market. See the note in English here: <https://www.mstbrazil.org/news/mst-families-educators-plant-1000-trees-encampment-paran%C3%A1>

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

Did you miss the last issue of the WRM bulletin "Communities resisting deforestation and greenwashing tactics". [You can access all the past issues of the WRM bulletin at this link](#)

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This Bulletin is also available in French, Spanish and Portuguese

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