
REDD, Deforestation and its Causes

It is becoming increasingly evident that efforts by governments, NGOs, institutions and corporations to make REDD their principal strategy for reducing deforestation in countries with tropical rainforests are not working. Trees continue to come down at record rates in the name of “development projects” such as mining, industrial palm oil, soy and other crops, hydroelectric power plants and infrastructure for facilitating the displacement of raw materials. Even supposed “sustainable forest management” ends up causing more destruction.

There is also mounting evidence that the REDD projects being promoted in countries with tropical rainforests are creating diverse problems for local communities, as shown in several articles in this bulletin. This situation prompted WRM to write a guide for communities – also cited in this bulletin – called “10 Community Alerts about REDD” based on different countries’ experiences with the initiative. Communities report that one of the main issues they face are restrictions on their traditional use of forests and control over their territories.

It is important to remember that long before REDD came about, even those with just a minimal understanding of the problems related to tropical rainforests already knew that the best way to combat destruction of forests was to guarantee the territorial rights and usage of these forests to the people who inhabit and depend on them. There are abundant examples throughout the world that prove that where these rights are ensured, there is better forest conservation.

Perhaps one of the few positive aspects of recent REDD negotiations at the UNO Convention on Climate Change – which is organizing a new round this month in Doha, Qatar – is the fact that it puts the discussion on the causes of deforestation on the table once again. Since the first discussions regarding REDD, one of the issues that has most harmed forest peoples is that their countries, in an effort to be “ready for REDD”, have insisted that these communities are the principal perpetrators of deforestation due to “practices” such as itinerant farming. It is equally outrageous that the “big development projects” mentioned before do not get the same treatment, but rather continue to be promoted as important actions toward “development” despite the destruction they cause.

Furthermore, with REDD and the growing efforts to also commercialize other environmental services, the big corporations involved in tropical rainforest destruction are weighing the opportunity to “compensate” for their destructive actions with REDD projects or other projects aimed at turning “environmental services” into a business.

Although REDD’s days may well be numbered internationally due to a lack of funding, large corporations’ eagerness to compensate for their destructive actions with “green” ones – to justify the unjustifiable – does not seem to abate. For these companies, which only continue to get bigger, this type of mechanism is of vital importance at present as the contradictions inherent in the destructive model of natural resource exploitation become starker and starker: the effects of climate change, environmental degradation and deforestation, to name a few.

We believe it will take great resistance and mobilization of the communities affected by mega

“development” projects, along with the support of national and international solidarity, to ensure sufficient strength to make sure that governments adopt effective measures aimed at diminishing deforestation, and shift their focus onto those who are really causing the destruction.

And moreover, urgent measures must be taken against the underlying causes of deforestation – namely, the most industrialized countries’ completely unsustainable model of production and consumption must undergo a structural change. This cannot be achieved by changing individual attitudes, but rather requires bold action from governments to scale back the power of corporations and big money in general, and mainly that of finance capital. In addition to recognizing the rights of forest communities, this path is essential if we truly want to reduce deforestation.