Monoculture tree plantations and trade in environmental services

Companies that promote monoculture tree plantations for the production of pulp, charcoal, timber and other purposes have attempted to ride the wave of the growth of*PES* by claiming that their plantations also provide *environmental services*.

Anyone walking through a eucalyptus plantation would have to wonder what kind of “service” is being provided by an area that is full of nothing but a single type of tree, with no other plants, no animals, and is managed with conventional agricultural practices like the widespread use of toxic pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

Nevertheless, these companies have successfully managed to sell the idea that their plantations absorb carbon. One example is the Plantar company, based in Minas Gerais, Brazil, which in 2010 succeeded in having its carbon project, based on monoculture eucalyptus plantations, officially recognized as a CDM project under the Kyoto Protocol, despite countless criticisms (32). Other Brazilian eucalyptus plantation companies have “sold carbon” through the Chicago Climate Exchange (CCX), a voluntary carbon market. FACE Foundation of the Netherlands has established tree plantations in Ecuador in order to “sell carbon”, causing serious problems for local communities and the local environment (33). European companies are also actively pursuing the “carbon trade” in Africa, such as Green Resources of Norway, which is promoting plantations for this purpose in countries like Tanzania, resulting in major social, environmental and economic impacts (34).

In the meantime, these companies and their allies are now seeking to present evidence that their plantations also offer other *environmental services*. In doing so they have a major advantage in their favour: FAO continues to use a definition of the word “forest” that allows monoculture tree plantations to be classified as forests. In order to capitalize on this advantage, studies are being carried out to demonstrate that monoculture tree plantations, if they are “well designed”, can also provide other “ecosystem goods and services” such as clean water, habitat for animals and firewood as a source of energy. They are also working on developing ways to price these “services” provided by plantations (35).

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32 - http:// www.wrm.org.uy/countries/Brazil/LetterPlantarCDM.pdf

33 - See publication “carbon sink plantations in the Ecuadorian Andes”, www.wrm.org.uy

34 - Karumbidza, Blessing and Wally Menne, “CDM carbon sink plantations in Africa: a case study in

Tanzania”, Timberwatch, 2010

35 - Bauhus, Jürgen, et al. Ecosystem Goods and Services from Plantation Forests. CIFOR, 2010