
[False solutions to climate change enabling land grabbing in Africa](#)

Next week an international farmers' conference will take place in Mali to stop land grabbing. Organized by La Via Campesina, it is aimed at opening a space to listen to and learn from local peasants, mainly from African countries, on what they have to say about land grabbing and to unite forces to resist the process and build future strategies.

A few days after, in Durban, South Africa, thousands of people representing governments, the big polluting companies and big conservation NGOs, but also people struggling for climate justice, will meet for the 17th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Land grabbing is taking place in Southern countries at alarming rates. In Africa this trend is scandalous: 60 million hectares of land traded in 2009! (1) Foreign governments, pension funds, wealthy individuals and corporations are buying huge tracts of lands to make way for monocultures, from tree plantations to industrial agriculture, and even for financial speculation.

Within the UNFCCC, the framework for consolidating and amplifying land grabbing is being built. Governments and corporations are paving the way to continue doing business as usual instead of seriously addressing climate change and drastically reducing carbon emissions – too much energy and money has been spent in creating and promoting false solutions to climate change.

In the words of La Via Campesina, in its “Call to Durban” statement: “Under the UNFCCC, developed countries and polluting corporations, historically responsible for most greenhouse gas emissions, are allowed all possible tricks to avoid reducing their own emissions. For example, the carbon market and carbon offset mechanisms allow countries and companies to continue polluting and consuming as usual, while paying small amounts of money to help poor people in developing countries reduce their emissions. What actually occurs is that companies profit doubly: by continuing to contaminate and by selling false solutions. Meanwhile, under REDD, poor people are stripped of many of their multiple rights to use communal forest lands, even as new land-grabbers emerge to consolidate large tracts by evicting farmers in order to traffic in carbon credits.”(2)

False solutions to climate change are pushing for land grabs in the South. Communities are displaced and territories occupied with monoculture tree plantations to act as carbon sinks or to be traded as wood chips or pellets for energy, or in the case of oil palm to produce oil.

Conflicts related to monoculture tree plantations in Africa are on the rise. A recent case in Uganda involves the UK-based New Forests Company, which is responsible for forcibly evicting 22,500 people from their land to make way for carbon sink plantations.

Oil palm plantations are also causing numerous conflicts in countries such as Liberia, Cameroon, Uganda and Ghana, among others. For example, in Liberia, the Malaysian company Sime Darby, which received a 220,000-hectare land concession for oil palm plantations, was denounced by local communities for being “engaged in active land clearing, destruction of our sacred sites, destruction of

our crops, damming of our creeks and streams, filling in of our swamps, destruction of grave sites, destruction and pollution of our drinking water sources, forceful displacement of our people without adequate compensation, active planting and cultivation of oil palm including the massive establishment of an oil palm nursery without our free prior informed consent.” (3).

In Cameroon, the US-based SG Sustainable Oils (SGSO) is planning a 30,000-hectare oil palm plantation in the South West Region in an area directly adjacent to Korup National Park and Rumpi Hills Forest Reserve, and another 40,000 hectares just to the east of that plantation and adjacent to Bakossi National Park and Banyang-Mbo Wildlife Sanctuary. Opponents say: “The oil palm plantation will displace and disrupt the social and economic situation of over 30 villages (over 3,000 people). Their culture and way of life is closely tied to these forests, which provide these villages with clean water, food, and important income-earning capabilities. Most of these villagers rely heavily on farming to feed their families and earn an income. It is unclear how local villagers will be compensated for the loss of their forest and farms. Some documents suggest that villages will be resettled and/or will be allowed to remain, but will be surrounded by oil palms.” (4)

REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) is among the newest false solutions that will also serve to expand land grabs. There are several cases reported of communities being expelled or displaced from their territories or communities whose rights to use their lands and forests are jeopardized by REDD projects.

The recent WRM publication on the REDD pilot project in the Democratic Republic of Congo being undertaken by Conservation International and the Walt Disney Company in the two forest reserves of Tayna and Kisimba-Ikobo describes the numerous flaws and rights violations of these kinds of initiatives. The report says: “We were able to determine that the consent for the implementation of the REDD project in the Kisimba-Ikobo reserve has numerous flaws and is, at best, only partial. Moreover, the process has only deepened an ongoing conflict in which land and forest use rights are at stake. Part of the community is opposed to the REDD project because it merely reinforces the creation of a 'community' reserve which, in fact, has stripped these communities of their rights over their ancestral lands and forests. In a recent letter addressed to the governor of the province by dissatisfied communities from this reserve, they state that they are opposed to the REDD project because it does not respect their rights to the land and they have not been given the opportunity to express their demands.

“The significant percentage of the population of Kisimba and Ikobo who already opposed the creation of the nature reserve and now the REDD project are being even further marginalized. The REDD project promoters seem to simply ignore the fact that this part of the population did not provide its consent for the project, and they are doing nothing to attempt to resolve the conflict.”(5)

False solutions to climate change are at the very least distracting, if not criminal. The time has come to be aware that the real solution to climate change is for polluting countries to cut carbon emissions at source.

Teresa Perez, WRM, teresap@worm.org.uy

1- <http://farmlandgrab.org/post/view/19559>

2- http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1109:la-via-campesina-call-to-durban&catid=48:-climate-change-and-agrofuels&Itemid=75

3- Letter of complaint to the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) from members and inhabitants of affected local communities within the proposed Sime Darby 220,000 ha oil palm

concession in Liberia, October

2011, <http://www.forestpeoples.org/topics/palm-oil-rspo/publication/2011/letter-complaint-roundtable-sustainable-palm-oil-rspo-members->

4- See WRM Bulletin 165.

5- WRM Publication “Conservation International REDD pilot project: a different kind of Disney production”. Available at http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/REDD/DRC_REDD_en.pdf