A brief overview of deforestation in tropical forests

1. Introduction

UN climate negotiations have sparked a new wave of international interest in the fate of tropical forests. Their destruction, protection and above all, their role as stores of carbon have been debated by climate negotiators, donors like the World Bank, conservation organisations and others involved in the UN climate negotiations since 2007. The debates take place under the name of REDD – Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation. REDD was officially launched in 2007 in Bali, Indonesia, during the annual UN climate summit.

This contrast of international interest, new initiatives and billions of euros dedicated to REDD on the one hand and the continuation of large-scale forest loss on the other hand, has motivated us to dedicate an entire bulletin to the issue of tropical deforestation. The bulletin draws on experience with previous international initiatives to halt deforestation that we have dedicated earlier bulletins to (see http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/19/ andhttp://www.wrm.org.uy/deforestation/indirect.html). Focusing our information on the main countries containing tropical forests (Brazil, DRC and Indonesia), we ask why REDD+ and other attempts to stop forest destruction have not been effective at halting forest loss. This bulletin also highlights the need to join and strengthen efforts that really do halt deforestation – efforts often originating from forest dependent communities and movements supporting the struggle against deforestation. Alongside these ongoing struggles, international actors – climate negotiators, investors, movements, consumers, those of us who buy products originating from the vanishing tropical forests need to urgently face the challenge of not only pointing at the direct but, above all, take action to eliminate the underlying causes of forest destruction.

2. Tropical Deforestation

The rates of forest destruction

Tropical forests continue to be destroyed, and the rate of destruction has become more intense over the past decades. During the 1980s, according to FAO´s last Global Forest Assessment (1), the main statistical overview of the state of all of the world´s forests, an area of 150 million ha was deforested. The largest areas lost were of tropical forests. In the 1990s, forest loss increased to 160 million ha. In the following period 2000-2010, 130 million hectares were destroyed, which seems to indicate a reduction compared with the two previous decades.

However, the data may not correspond to reality. FAO faces a series of difficulties to obtain reliable figures for a number of countries. In addition, its analysis also distorts the real numbers of forest loss because of the forest definition FAO applies.

PLANTATIONS ARE NOT FORESTS !

> The relative “reduction” in deforestation, reported by FAO for the period 2000-2010 is significantly distorted, because FAO confuses forests with plantations. According to FAO,

about 50 million hectares of “forests” were “planted” between 2000 and 2010, often as large-scale industrial tree monocultures. For FAO these plantations alleviate actual forest loss. For FAO there is no net ´forest loss´ when for example in Indonesia, a primary, extremely biodiverse forest, home to forest peoples, is destroyed and the area planted with an acacia monoculture plantation that expels people, does not benefit them otherwise and reduces biodiversity. WRM and other organizations have been campaigning for years saying that large-scale monoculture tree plantations are not forests. Nevertheless, FAO insists on its flawed definition that uses the presence of trees as the basic criterion. (2)

However, the FAO figures do provide a rough idea of the dimension of tropical forest loss as well as trends in deforestation. In the period 2000-2010 in the three continents/regions with most of the tropical forest - *the Amazon basin, the Congo basin and South and Southeast Asia* - net loss in forest areas has been biggest in South America and Africa, with 40 and 34 million ha respectively, followed by South and Southeast Asia where 6.8 million ha of forest were destroyed, most of it in Indonesia.

At the level of individual tropical forest countries, Brazil leads the list of deforestation in the period 2000-2010 with 28 million ha of net forest loss, followed by Indonesia (5 million ha), Nigeria (4.1 million ha), Tanzania (4 million ha), Zimbabwe (3.3 million ha), DRC (3.1 million ha), Myanmar (3.1 million ha), Bolivia (2.9 million ha) and Venezuela (2.9 million ha). FAO data also confirms that mangrove forests continue to disappear rapidly, with a global area that decreased from 16.1 million ha in 1990 to 15.6 million ha in 2010. Indonesia, Australia, Myanmar, Madagascar and Mozambique are mentioned as the countries with the biggest net loss of mangrove forests, with figures likely to be higher than recorded due to the aforementioned limitations of the FAO´s data.

Looking specifically at the category of “primary forests”, it was again South America where the loss was biggest during 2000-2010: 29.6 million ha. The five countries that reported the biggest loss worldwide of primary forests in the past 20 years are Brazil, Gabon, Mexico, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia.

Direct causes of deforestation

The most important direct causes of deforestation are quite well known. These include logging, the conversion of forested lands for agriculture and cattle-raising, industrial tree plantations, urbanization, mining, oil and gas exploitation, hydroelectric dams and industrial shrimp farming. Some common characteristics of most of these activities are that they often, but not always, take place on a large scale, are promoted by corporations, and driven by an industrial export-oriented demand and often involve human rights violations. Other direct causes of deforestation include air pollution, phenomena related to extreme climate events and climate change, as well as fires. There has been a tendency in official documents on deforestation to downplay the aforementioned causes or even awarding companies for new ´sustainable´ initiatives, while highlighting ´slash and burn´ or shifting agriculture, practiced by small-scale farmers, as one of or even the major cause of forest loss. The focus on 'slash and burn' agriculture often goes hand in hand with highlighting phenomena like poverty, population growth and demographic pressure as main contributors to forest loss.

Stressing the direct, more visible causes of deforestation is highly problematic, because it does not show the sometimes different drivers that are behind such causes. In the case of agricultural activities in forests, on the one hand farmers or communities tend to settle and clear a patch of land when they are forced to migrate and/or survive in such a way because of migration programs, creation of settlement, wars, government policies that promote privatization of common lands – lands

that are already used by people. Such agricultural practices tend to lead to rapid soil degradation as most soils in tropical forests are too poor to sustain conventional agriculture. Consequently, the farmer is forced to clear another patch of forest after a few years. The degraded agricultural land is often used for a few more years for cattle raising (3). However, these agricultural practises should not be thrown into the same pot as traditional shifting cultivation systems used and refined by forest dependent peoples the world over for many generations, guaranteeing their food sovereignty. In these agroforestry systems, forest peoples practice a form of shifting cultivation that does not put at risk the survival of the forest on which they depend.

Underlying causes of deforestation

Over the years, countless initiatives, mostly focused on conservation efforts, have been undertaken to reverse the deforestation trend. Yet, they have had little success, and it has been generally agreed that this is due to the fact that these initiatives focused on the immediate causes of deforestation, while neglecting the underlying causes. These underlying drivers of deforestation are multiple, interrelated, less easily visible, and often little discussed and understood.

By the end of the 1990s, NGOs succeeded to put on the agenda of the UN Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (UNFF) a process to identify the underlying causes of deforestation. With case studies and seven regional workshops with NGOs and representatives of forest communities participating, as well as one global workshop, the main underlying causes of deforestation and actors were identified. (4)

These causes, often inter-related, were organized around the following headings (here we include some of the main causes mentioned under each issue):

- *land tenure*; deep-rooted social structures in tropical forest countries result in inequalities in land tenure, resulting, on the one hand, in a lack of recognition of land rights of communities and, on the other hand, in the privatization of forests for large-scale (corporate) land owners;

- *resource management: the policies*, explicit and implicit, and development plans for forest areas including governance and political issues; unequal access to resources and resource management; lack of recognition of multiple values of forests;

- *trade (especially related to international trade and trade liberalization)*: closely linked to the unsustainable consumption pattern that drives unsustainable extraction practices and other ´development´ activities in forest areas; it provides a strong incentive for export-oriented activities and short-term profit-making instead of long-term sustainability;

- *international economic relations*: related to the macro-economic model, including structural adjustment programs, the creation of external debt and debt-finance and the lack of regulation of transnational corporations;

- *social exclusion*: discrimination against indigenous peoples, subsistence farmers and poor people in general; this issue/cause is often seen as a consequence of the aforementioned issues and causes.

In general, it can be said that many of these factors – to different degrees depending on each country - are still valid, even after almost one and a half decades.

REDD+ and deforestation

International interest in tropical forests was high in the early 1990s, with international NGO campaigns and one of the largest international programmes to halt deforestation in a tropical country – Brazil - launched at the Earth Summit in 1992: PPG7, the Pilot Programme financed by the G7 countries and aimed at tackling deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon. Although this programme laid the ground for, for example, the satellite monitoring that Brazil uses today to track deforestation, it also laid the ground for a territorial reorganization, ensuring the commodification and future appropriation and privatization of nature. (5)

International attention dwindled in the first half of the next decade. REDD has certainly revived this international interest since it was officially launched in 2007, and later expanded to REDD+, with the + indicating that forestry activities and agriculture are also included in the concept. So, has all this effort put into REDD+ for forests and even for “blue carbon” REDD+ for mangrove forests, the pledge of Northern governments to contribute US$ 7.7 billion (6), the renewed attention itself for forests internationally, resulted in reduced deforestation or at least a reversal of the current trend?

Although FAO figures on deforestation indicate a trend of ‘reduction’ in net forest loss in the decade 2000-2010, especially thanks to Brazil and Indonesia, recent reports from**Brazil** and the bigger Amazon region suggest that deforestation is increasing again. According to data from the Brazilian research institute IMAZON, the deforestation rate in December 2012 increased for the fourth consecutive month; comparing the last 5 months of 2011 with the identical period in 2012, data show a duplication of forest loss. (7)

Although more evidence is needed to speak of a consolidated trend, researchers mention some factors that could explain this very recent increase in deforestation:

- the decentralization to states and municipalities of the control of deforestation activities has led to the closure of federal enforcement posts, which often were the only real obstacles for logging companies. This decentralization will likely make application of the forest code more difficult;

- other factors stimulating deforestation are the Brazilian state policy of promoting and funding large-scale infrastructure and energy projects, for example, the Belo Monte dam (8), as well as the advance of sectors like mining and agribusiness in the region.

In addition, the new forest code itself, officially approved in 2012, was heavily contested by civil society and scientists in Brazil, among others because it will make deforestation legal in certain places where it was illegal to deforest before. For example the code reduces in certain cases the size of the legal forest reserves, as well as of the permanent preservation areas that protect streams and rivers.

Another recent report, published by the Amazon Network for Socio-environmental Geo-Referenced Information (RAISG (9)) in December 2012, analyzed deforestation in the whole Amazon basin. It identified 6 factors representing the main threats for the Amazon´s near future: road projects, oil and gas extraction, hydro dams, mining, fires and logging. It reports that 1.1 million km2 – 15% of the whole Amazon region - of the Amazon is occupied by oil and gas extraction projects and plans while mining projects and plans occupy 1.6 million km2 or 21% of the Amazon; it also reports the existence of 417 hydrodam projects, including existing and planned ones (10). The study warns that if the detected threats continue advancing, *“nearly half of the Amazon forest could disappear.”*(11)

The same trend of increasing pressure on tropical forests, including overlaps of large-scale concessions for different activities, is visible in **Indonesia** where, as in Brazil and according to FAO figures, deforestation has decreased over the past decade (2000-2010). However, the reality is likely to be different with environmental groups like WALHI having documented a huge quantity of concessions given to oil palm, industrial tree plantations and coal mining companies, putting the Indonesian forest more at risk and occupying most of the tropical forest areas in the country. For example, in South Sumatra about 66% of the area has been taken over by oil palm, sugar cane, acacia and rubber tree companies. In Central Kalimantan, 78% of the territory has been allocated in concessions, most to oil palm companies but also for mining.

In 2011, the Indonesian government announced a 2-year moratorium on new concessions in forests. But the moratorium has been severely criticized as ineffective by NGOs, first of all for including only primary forests and peatlands while excluding existing concessions, even those that are at the very first stage of the process of implementing their projects for the forest areas conceded. Moreover, soon after the announcement of the moratorium, the amount of land allocated for timber and pulp plantations was more or less doubled, and the moratorium has loopholes for mining activities and some energy and food crops (12). According to Kiki Taufik of Greenpeace Indonesia: *"In Kalimantan, most of the destroyed forest was in regions where coal concessions were already granted (..)"*.(13) A general problem is also that the overall efficiency of the moratorium is difficult to measure because of a lack of reliable deforestation statistics.

In a recent press release a coalition of NGOs claims: *"Indonesia´s forest is shrinking fast each year while local governments are undermining the moratorium by redefining large areas of forest to non-forest so that they are not protected by the moratorium, as well as planning or permitting huge food and agriculture developments."* (14) Besides, more licenses are issued in (natural) forests for utilizing them as "production forests" for timber extraction. And the increase in oil palm area from 7.3 to 9.1 million ha between 2010 and 2012 is another indicator that deforestation still continues. (15)

The aforementioned coalition of NGOs also shows that the REDD+ strategy so far has failed to improve forest governance: *"Meanwhile, the REDD+ National Strategy was prepared with an aim to improve Indonesian forest governance fundamentally and comprehensively. The preparation process was relatively transparent and has involved relevant stakeholders. It acknowledges that currently Indonesian forest governance is facing acute problems, which require extraordinary solutions, aside from 'business as usual' measures. However, this strand of effort is also under attack".*

The **DRC** is the country with most of the tropical forest in Africa, covering two third of the Congo Basin. With a rate of about 0.25% (world average 0.6%), deforestation in the DRC over the past two decades has been relatively less both in terms of area and rate of forest loss if compared to Brazil and Indonesia.

The DRC government announced a moratorium on new forest concessions in 2002. However, it has been criticized as ineffective by forest NGOs. A recent investigation by Greenpeace shows, for example, that industrial loggers are bypassing the moratorium by using artisanal permits, and working without any control or monitoring. (16)

The recent development of the REDD policy since 2007 of the DRC government has been mainly influenced by two studies that include analyses of causes of deforestation. The first study from the US-based Woods Hole Research Center, presented in 2007, concludes that *"deforestation is above all determined by increased population density….mainly associated to the system of slash and burn agriculture".* The study also cites firewood collection and small-scale charcoal production as drivers.

The second report, by consultancy firm McKinsey, also points to the demographic pressure as the first factor to address in relation to deforestation.

Both reports have been heavily criticized by civil society organizations, including indigenous forest-dependent peoples in the DRC, for pointing to local communities as primary drivers of deforestation and forest degradation while downplaying the notorious role of industrial logging. Greenpeace challenged the assumptions and analysis presented in the report of McKinsey and pointed out that in the most intact forests of DRC, the biggest threat is not shifting cultivation but industrial logging. Concession logging in these forests is causing forest degradation, a phenomenon affecting much larger areas than those affected by deforestation for subsistence use. (17) Furthermore, civil society organizations claim that the increased extraction of firewood has been caused mainly by the demand from the rapidly increasing urban centers. (18) Long-standing armed conflicts and the overall situation in DRC have caused, and continue to cause massive displacements and urbanization.

A new report on causes of deforestation and forest degradation in the DRC was recently published, elaborated by the civil society REDD Working Group on Climate in the DRC, in collaboration with FAO and with the assistance of the Belgian University of Leuven. It provides a qualitative analysis of deforestation and forest degradation in the period 1990-2005 based on interviews with “experts” and scientists in different DRC provinces, recognizing the existence of different stakeholders and forest ecosystems around the country. The study includes a table of causes of deforestation per province, as reported by the “experts” and scientists interviewed, concluding that shifting cultivation is the most mentioned direct cause and urban growth the most mentioned underlying cause of deforestation in the different provinces. To a much lesser extent, industrial logging and other activities are mentioned. However, the report does not show how each factor contributes to deforestation in quantitative terms. This seems to be the object of a second part of the study using remote sensing and field verification. (19)

Is REDD+ able to halt deforestation?

REDD+ is about reducing deforestation, not halting it. Therefore, the scheme assumes that tropical forests will continue to be destroyed, just less so than now. In addition, are REDD and other related initiatives like the payment and trade of environmental services really able to protect better the world´s tropical forests?

Brazil and Indonesia, respectively number one and two in the list of countries with most forest loss in the 2000-2010 decade, are also key countries in various REDD initiatives. Yet, REDD plans in these countries say little about the large-scale direct drivers of deforestation such as industrial logging, agriculture, mining, oil and gas extraction, hydrodams and infrastructure that have driven large-scale deforestation. And, as the recent information presented in the previous section shows, these factors tend to continue driving deforestation in these countries. Furthermore, these different drivers linked to an export-oriented production, go hand in hand with promises of ´development´ and ´progress´, and promote other phenomena like internal migration and urbanization in and around these large-scale projects in the forest areas that drive deforestation even further.

This same set of large-scale drivers of deforestation is expected to advance more and more in Africa, too. For example, in the DRC, the government – citing the McKinsey report - projected in 2009, that based on World Bank and IMF economic growth projections for the country large-scale activities like mining, oil and gas extraction and industrial agricultural activities in a ´business-as-usual´ scenario for the period 2010-2030 will result in 12-13 million ha of forest loss. Although these institutions might have exaggerated these projections as they are in line with their neoliberal interests to promote large-

scale private sector growth, should the projection become reality, the deforestation rate would become about 40% higher than it is today.(20)

The promise REDD+ is expected to fulfill in the DRC is then to prevent this increase in forest destruction and at the same time guarantee the economic growth and investments that were to be stimulated by the increased deforestation. The presented solution is to locate part of the large-scale activities in areas considered as ´marginal´, or to promote reforestation – which can include large-scale monocultures – of already “degraded forests”. The McKinsey report recommends, for example, afforestation programs on close to 7 million ha of lands and reforestation on 4 million hectares of “degraded forests”. Development of large-scale industrial agriculture, mainly oil palm, is “recommended”. 40.000 jobs are promised.

However, the McKinsey report and similar documents intended to prepare countries for REDD, ignores the experience from the contemporary process of land grabbing in Africa and other continents. That reality shows that companies have little interest in locating their plantations on “degraded” areas, among others because productivity is likely to be low in these areas. And it is difficult to find fertile land that is not already being used by local people.
For the McKinsey consultants, local communities and possible conflicts with them do not seem to exist. REDD country reports rarely address underlying causes of deforestation, and when they mention direct causes like industrial logging, their role is usually downplayed. The assumption of many REDD promoters (see box on “actors”) is that large-scale activities that cause forest destruction can be made “sustainable”, as simple as that.

THE PRACTISE OF DECLARING ACTIVITIES THAT DESTROY FORESTS “SUSTAINABLE”

Since the 1990s, most of the biggest global corporations active in forest destruction have committed to “sustainability goals”, often also related to some sort of certification scheme. Many international palm oil companies, responsible for millions of ha of forest destruction in Indonesia and Malaysia, joined in the Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). Also, industrial shrimp farming, a main cause of deforestation of mangrove forests together with oil exploration, is now being promoted as ‘sustainable’ if it comes with a certificate. Oil and gas companies, having caused innumerous spills in the high-biodiverse forests of Ecuador, also increasingly claim to adhere to sustainability policies.

The biggest mining companies in the world set up the International Council on Mining and Metals.(21) Participating companies are committing to implement the so-called “Sustainable Development Framework”: Companies will seek “independent' certification and report on 10 principles, including one that commits the mining companies to “Contribute to conservation of biodiversity and integrated approaches to land use planning”. Industrial logging, too, has been “transformed” into a “sustainable” activity. Clearcut logging practices in primary forests were the main direct cause of forest loss in countries like Malaysia in the early 1990s. The practise was the focus of campaigns and calls for boycott of tropical timber in the global North already during the 1980s. Since then, so called “sustainable forest management” for timber production has been on the rise. FAO figures show that in 2010, about 1.6 million ha of forest already had some sort of management plan which according to FAO is an important step towards “sustainable forest management“. FAO summarizes that “there is progress towards sustainable forest management at the global level“. Yet forest loss continues largely unabated.

Local communities complain about environmental damage caused by “selective logging” and violations and repression against them, including from companies claiming to practice ´”sustainable” logging. For example, Greenpeace has reported that SIFORCO, a subsidiary of the German-owned and Swiss based Danzer Group operating in the DRC, is involved in a severe social conflict in the Yalisika community that has included arbitrary arrests, rapes and beatings.

This happened years after Danzer was the first logging company in the DRC to get FSC-certification for its “sustainable forest management”. SIFORCO is DRC´s second-largest logging company and a major producer and trader of hardwood timber. (22)The Brazilian state of Acre has been portrayed internationally as an example of sustainability and forest conservation. Yet, the quantity of timber extracted has increased about fourfold during the past decade of increased “sustainability”, leading to serious forest degradation and environmental destruction as documented in recent reports. (23)

In summary, it appears that the ´polluter pays´ principle has been transformed over the years in the ´polluter is certified and awarded´ principle.

A pattern of land grabbing and false solutions

The aforementioned recent reports and statements from researchers and NGOs from the main tropical forest countries all show a pattern of land grabbing, of increased control of tropical forest areas in corporate, mostly private, hands.

On the one hand, transnational corporations are increasing their access to land through concessions that provide rights to forest destroying activities. These are also increasingly developed under a “sustainable” flag. The problem however remains that while individual activities may improve (but most often do not), the expansion of these activities will continue to destroy forests, exposing the futility of trying to address a problem of scale with qualitative changes at an individual project level. It is true that several measures can be taken in certain cases to mitigate some of the worst impacts, like technical improvements. However the overall trend of increasing extraction of natural resources and expanding large-scale monocultures for export to ‘feed’ the unsustainable and corporative-driven consumption model – an underlying cause of deforestation -, can only result in more and accelerated forest destruction in the near future and more conflicts with and problems for forest-dependent communities.

THE EXPECTED INCREASE IN UNSUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

If the industrialized countries of the global North maintain current patterns of consumption, and urban elites in the so-called “emerging” economies of the South follow the same trend, the UN Environmental Program (UNEP) predicts that by the year 2050, the global consumption of minerals, ores, fossil fuels and biomass will reach 140 billion tons annually, an amount three times bigger than today.(24) Roughly 70% of manufactured consumer goods in the European Union (EU) depend on metallic and non-metallic mineral substances that Europe is forced to import, often from tropical forest regions. Manufacturing a mobile phone, computer or TV screen requires between 40 and 60 different raw materials such as lithium, tantalum, cobalt and antimony, which are becoming increasingly difficult to acquire. The demand and prices for these substances are rising and will continue to do so. Friends of the

Earth Europe showed, in another study, evidence of the dependence of the EU on both domestic land and indirect land use involved in the products traded to the EU. The land consumption is as much as 1.3 ha per capita in the EU, while countries like China and India use less than 0.4 ha per capita. 60% of the lands used for Europe´s demand for agricultural and forestry products come from outside the EU.(25) While few consumers in the EU are aware of this, the TNCs involved in the different sectors are perfectly aware of the tremendous profits they can expect from the combination of grabbing more lands for the expected increase in consumption, high prices and opportunities for speculation on financial markets.

On the other hand, areas are being grabbed to be transformed to protected areas as is the case with REDD+ projects. Many country reports on REDD+ propose a ´zoning´ for the tropical forests lands to define which will be the forest area to be protected and which forest will continue to be available for industrial and other activities. With land tenure issues, including the lack of recognition of land rights of forest peoples – *an underlying cause of deforestation* – generally neglected in the zoning proposals, such zoning will likely increase land and tenure uncertainty for forest peoples.

According to FAO, globally the forest area for conservation of biological diversity, mostly located inside protected areas, increased by more than 95 million ha since 1990, most of it in the period 2000-2010. Most of these areas were created in South America. The result has been conflicts with local communities. In several cases, local communities have been expelled, then needing to find a living elsewhere. While forest in the protected area may have been increased, migration of families who lost access to these now protected areas many times lead to more deforestation. Moreover, conservation projects of the REDD type, based on carbon storage, and supposed to function in future through carbon trading, will be linked to the continuation and even expansion of polluting activities elsewhere, in or outside tropical forest areas, mainly in the global North.

Therefore, often the same actors involved in forest destruction are involved in projects that aim to protect forests, for example through REDD+ projects.

ACTORS INVOLVED IN BOTH DEFORESTATION AND REDD+ ACTIVITIES

Although REDD+ in its name is about reducing deforestation and enhancing carbon stocks in forest areas, the idea of the REDD+ promoters is to make the mechanism function through carbon markets which introduces a totally different idea: the idea that by protecting forests in one place, a company is able to destroy forest elsewhere or otherwise pollute the environment through industrial extraction or production. The REDD+ project is used to compensate for that destruction elsewhere. This explains why actors behind REDD are not only involved in conservation efforts but also in forest destruction.

For example, a Greenpeace report shows how the World Bank has played a crucial role in supporting the DRC government to develop its REDD+ strategy but it has equally played a leading role in the development of forest policies in the DRC that have privileged the industrial logging sector and caused deforestation. (26) The World Bank has also been actively supporting tropical forest countries in implementing other policies and activities that cause forest loss.

Transnational corporations are increasingly involved in conservation efforts, while continuing to destroy forests and pollute the environment with their extractive activities. For example, in Indonesia, where mining is a direct driver of deforestation, several large mining companies invest in conservation projects. (27) Rio Tinto, one of the main global mining companies, said that it hoped to use REDD, “as an economic tool to offset Rio Tinto’s carbon footprint and to conserve biodiversity”. BHP Billiton, another global player, is one of the founding members of the Kalimantan Climate Forest Partnership (KFCP) in Indonesia, a REDD+ project causing many problems for local communities. (28) The company has a 335,000 hectare coal mining concession in Maruwai, Central Kalimantan, and plans to expand its iron ore mining operations.

Other actors in this group are donor governments like Norway. Norway has committed to invest US$ 1 billion in both Brazil and Indonesia to reduce deforestation while at the same time, its state pension fund have invested in palm oil companies involved in converting forests into monocultures. (29)

Financial market institutions are also important actors that both invest in destructive industries, as they always did, but are also keen to invest in forest carbon projects as a new business opportunity. About 50 financial companies like Merryl Linch, Standard Bank and JP Morgan are organized in the Carbon Markets and Investors Association, according their web site *“promoting efficient market solutions to combat climate change”*. (30)

Also big conservation NGOs like WWF involved in setting up REDD pilot projects, are keen to ´help´ corporations in making their destructive activities ´sustainable´ and/or ´certified´. Conservation International and The Nature Conservancy also are involved in several similar initiatives.

Other initiatives specifically on certification should also be mentioned. FSC has been certifying millions of hectares of industrial tree monocultures as ‘sustainable´, in spite of all the negative impacts of these plantations, reported by local communities. By doing this it has strengthened the position of the companies that own these plantations. FSC is also increasingly involved in REDD and carbon offset activities, and several companies involved in tree carbon projects use the FSC certificate to secure carbon certification and sell their carbon credits.

All these actors are key actors, with the UN at the forefront, that defend the so-called “green economy”, presented as a “win-win” approach that tackles both the economic-financial and environmental crises, by redirecting investments to so-called “natural capital”, as well as new, supposedly clean technologies (such as those based on biomass) and the “carbon market”, as well as the trade in “environmental services” in general. (31)

Conflicts and resistance

The increasing land grabbing in forest areas for both destructive and protective (REDD) activities is resulting in less and less space for forest peoples and forest-dependent communities.

In the aforementioned study of RAISG (32) on deforestation in the Amazon basin, a series of maps of the different main threats (road projects, logging, mining, oil and gas, hydrodams, and fires) were developed and compared with maps of indigenous areas. The study shows that 95% of the lands of

the nearly 400 indigenous peoples in the region are affected by one or more of these threats. (33) Figures of the study show, for example, the existence of 96 thousand km of roads in the Amazon of which 9,5 thousand km run through indigenous territories.

In Indonesia, a coalition of NGOs point out that *"The National Forestry Council (DKN) records ongoing forest management conflicts in 19,420 villages in 33 provinces throughout Indonesia, as shown in cases like Mesuji, Senyerang and Pulau Padang. The total area in dispute is the highest compared to other agrarian sectors, covering more than 1.2 million hectares (HuMa, 2012) (34) "*. Up to 2012, the NGO WALHI had received complaints and supported communities in 113 cases of land grabbing by companies that led to the criminalization and arrest of 147 people. In addition, WALHI received 66 reports of intimidation and violence, not to mention the shooting of 28 people and death of 10 people including women and children in a conflict over palm oil plantation. (35)

In the Eastern DRC, a case study of a REDD+ pilot project developed by Conservation International and funded by the Disney Corporation shows that this REDD+ project strengthens a type of nature reserve that strips local communities of their customary rights. Therefore, communities from the Kisimba-Ikobo Primate Reserve have been opposing the project that further complicated the struggle for their customary rights over their territory, as well as their right to manage the forests they depend on.

Initiatives that try to address issues like the lack of recognition of territorial rights of forest and forest-dependent peoples and poor forest governance - *underlying causes of deforestation* - and that also try to involve in a meaningful way local advocacy groups and forest communities, face many difficulties to make progress. An example is the FLEGT initiative (http://loggingoff.info/).

FLEGT

Illegal logging, practiced in most of the tropical forest countries, has a devastating effect on communities and biodiversity, while the extracted timber and wood-based products are unwittingly bought by consumers and companies in consumer countries like in Europe, which makes illegal logging financially viable and undermines efforts to deal with the issue.

The Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) and especially the Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPA) between wood producing countries in the South and the European Union (EU) are initiatives that aim to ensure that wood sold in the EU can be shown to be legal. The EU FLEGT initiative aims to tackle root causes of illegality, which include lack of clarity about land rights, corruption,and the excessive influence of the timber industry over forestry policies and legislation.

One of the main positive results of this process up to now is the strengthening of the role of organized civil society in forest policy making in tropical forest countries where these VPAs have been negotiated. However, one of the main concerns is the slow implementation process once VPAs have been signed. An effective Legality Assurance System (LAS) in the countries that export the timber is an essential part of the VPAs. Yet, putting functioning systems in place that reliably tracing the tree from its place in the forest until the export harbor, is proving a difficult task.

While the VPAs aim at addressing illegality of timber trade in the exporting country, the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) is a legislation that focuses on the trade of timber into the EU. The

EUTR has become operational on 3 March 2013; it defines that from that date onwards all operators that put illegally sourced timber on the EU market can be prosecuted. If FLEGT is to truly reduce illegal logging, effective implementation of the EUTR will be key. But there are fears that EU countries may not be ready to actually implement the legislation and that illegally sourced timber will continue to enter the EU market. (36)

3. A renewed call to stop deforestation

Who benefits from forest conservation?

- Forest-dependent peoples

Forest-dependent communities are the first and main group to benefit from an end to forest destruction. A Pygmy indigenous leader from Eastern DRC states that *"The forest and the indigenous peoples could be described as inseparable friends. The life of a pygmy depends 100% on the forest because the forest is our home 'par excellence'. I can state that without the forest, there can be no life for indigenous peoples".* (37)

With the trend of increased land grabbing in forests, both for destructive extraction and for "protection" activities, the struggle of most of the forest-dependent peoples to defend their customary land rights has become harder. In spite of the progress made at the international level in terms of legislation, at the national level still much has to be done for international agreements to translate into recognition of forest peoples' rights.

In Indonesia and DRC, indigenous peoples land tenure rights are still not officially and widely recognized. Meanwhile, in countries like Brazil with several direct causes of deforestation putting pressure on forest areas including indigenous lands, the present trend is one of more violation of indigenous land rights as well as legal attempts pushed by conservative sectors in the parliament and judiciary to review constitutional rights of indigenous and traditional peoples, so that the access to natural resources for private interests in these communal areas is facilitated.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN VOLUNTARY ISOLATION

Most people are unaware of the existence of indigenous peoples who wish to maintain isolated from the world we live in or, as is sometimes the case in the Amazon, have historically sought isolation by using forms that enabled them to maintain distance from the outside world or even from other indigenous peoples that have a regular contact with the outside world.

The wish to live in voluntary isolation is often a chosen option, based on violent or otherwise negative experiences with invasions of their territories in the past. However, it has been increasingly difficult for these peoples to maintain their isolation. The process described in this bulletin of increased grabbing of forest areas, further put at risk the continued voluntary isolation because most often the areas where these peoples still are able to survive on this planet and maintain their mode of living are the very areas targeted by land grabbers.

Increasingly, peoples living in voluntary isolation are being harassed and attacked by activities that at the same time destroy the forest on which they depend, and also it has been

reported in South America that they have been affected by REDD projects.

Different realities of Indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation can still be found in all continents in tropical forests, but it is clear that they will only be able to survive if their areas will not be subject to some or other form of appropriation.

- The importance of tropical forests for humanity

Forests are not only important for those who directly depend on them, they fulfill a series of functions fundamental for the maintenance of life of the planet and for humanity.

A coalition of Indonesian NGOs exposes the impacts of deforestation for Indonesian people: *"we have been witnessing massive disasters due to the shrinking of forest that serves as water catchment area and supports other ecological functions. Floods in Jambi, Central Kalimantan and the massive one in Wasior, Papua, should have been considered a wake-up call for forest governance sector. Recent floods in Jakarta, partially caused by deforestation to the mountain sources and banks of the 13 rivers that flow into Jakarta, provide a further reminder to the government of the consequences of not following through on their commitment to save the remaining forests."* (38)

It is extremely concerning that studies on the impacts of climate change, a phenomenon that has the dominant production and consumption model at its root, highlight that climate change further aggravates the process of forest destruction. A recent study carried out by NASA focusing on the Amazon affirms that since 2005 the region has been showing signals of degradation because of climate change. According to the study, the Amazon forest was unable to recover from the big 2005 drought in the period up to 2010, when the area was affected by another severe drought period. This can affect heavily ecosystems in terms of structure and function inside the Amazon forest region. (39)

The rights of Nature and the intrinsic value of forests

Another reason to mention among the arguments to halt deforestation are the so-called "rights of Nature", that recognise the intrinsic value of forests. Although rights of Nature appears as something new for many, the concept is an integral part of many indigenous cultures and beliefs from around the world. The issue recently gained visibility and importance when Ecuador in 2008 included the inalienable rights of Nature in its new Constitution. Although this might appear more wording than practice, the idea is a radical break with the trend of land grabbing and privatization in tropical forest areas and a valuable new "tool" in the struggle against deforestation.

Towards a strengthened struggle against deforestation

The UNFF process on underlying causes of deforestation recommended in 1999 the need to establish democratic mechanisms for decision-making over natural resource management, including recognition of territorial rights of indigenous peoples and other traditional communities; a need to introduce changes in the current international macroeconomic policies, including the trade liberalization process; and a need to modify current unsustainable consumption patterns. (40)

To halt deforestation, the underlying causes need to be eliminated. Important actions towards this end include:

- **Recognition of the rights and control of forest and forest-dependent communities over their communal territories** with special attention for the indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation, who increasingly face difficulties to maintain their way of living. The demarcation of the territories of indigenous peoples is an efficient way to halt deforestation, and recognizing indigenous peoples rights also involves recognizing the rights of Nature and respect of human rights. According to studies from Brazil, forests are more protected within these territories, than in comparable forest areas outside these territories.
- **Combat the social exclusion of forest-dependent peoples and support their efforts to manage and govern their forest territories.** Forest peoples are increasingly organized to defend their rights in many forest-rich countries, and carry out their economic activities based on agroforestry and the collection of non-timber forest products. They face many difficulties and challenges. Forest-dependent communities in Brazil, organized in the National Council of Populations that live from the Forests (CNS), continue to suffer threats and leaders have been killed recently because they exposed loggers that illegally invaded their territories. In Indonesia, the movement of community-based forest management is increasing but the recognition is still very limited: out of the nearly 39 million hectares of forest on which utilization permits have been issued, only 0.5% have been granted for the people's benefit. (41)
- **Define forests by their true meaning** for forest-dependent peoples; exclude industrial tree monoculture plantations from the definition, they are not forests.
- **Expose the pattern of false solutions** like "sustainable" large-scale activities in tropical forests, REDD+, trade in environmental services, public-private partnerships, "green economy", etc that actors mentioned under the box "Actors Involved in Both Deforestation and Redd+ Activities" promote or support. Governments spend loads of money on such "solutions" and a broad spectrum of NGOs lots of time and efforts. Therefore, governments should urgently ´wake up´ and stop promoting false solutions because they do not halt deforestation and do not reduce social and environmental injustice.
- **Prefer to consume less instead of buying certified products** from large-scale operations and companies. Put pressure on governments to spend the billions of dollars given to corporations and financial institutions to alternatives to the dominant and unsustainable production and consumption model, for example locally and regionally sustained forms of production. We reiterate the call of the international Oilwatch network: *Leave the oil beneath the soil and the coal in the hole!*
- **Expose the actions of transnational corporations** and other actors that lead the land grabbing process described in this bulletin. Join the Campaign to Dismantle Corporate Power and Impunity. (42) While by the end of the 1990s, the lack of regulation of transnational corporations was mentioned as an underlying cause of deforestation, the past decade has shown that TNCs themselves with all their operations and the influence they exercise represent a main threat for the future of tropical forests.

Final remark

We hope that with this brief overview we have not only shared information about the process of tropical deforestation, its underlying causes, actors, impacts and impacted but also motivate our readers to support the struggle against deforestation. This is obviously a huge challenge but also a fundamental task for all to put effort into. It is about supporting and defending true solutions instead of false solutions, it is about supporting efforts to dismantle corporate power instead of strengthening it

and, above all, it is about building stronger alliances among communities opposing forest loss and among people in the North and South. The International Day of the Forests on the 21st of March provides an opportunity to reiterate that halting forest loss will remain an illusion until action is undertaken to eliminate the underlying causes that drive deforestation.

Notes:

1 - http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i1757e/i1757e.pdf
2 - See WRM briefing on ´Forest definition´ at http://www.wrm.org.uy/forests.html
3 - http://www.wrm.org.uy/deforestation/indirect.html
4 - http://www.wrm.org.uy/deforestation/process.html
5 - http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section2/brazil-continued-destruction-of-forests-and-biodiversity-in-the-state-of-acre-considered-a-model-of-the-green-economy-in-the-brazilian-amazon/
6 - http://www.redd-monitor.org/2011/09/22/no-redd-platform-issues-wakeup-call-to-funders/
7 - http://oglobo.globo.com/pais/exclusivo-desmatamento-na-amazonia-da-sinais-de-voltar-crescer-7389285
8 - http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section2/brazil-belo-monte-an-illegal-and-immoral-hydroelectric-dam-project-that-violates-numerous-rights/
9 - A group of NGOs and governmental departments working on social and environmental issues in the Amazon using geo-referenced information
10 - http://www.oeco.com.br/reportagens/26723-atlas-amazonia-sob-pressao-240-mil-km2-desmatados-em-10-anos
11 - http://raisg.socioambiental.org/objectivos
12 - http://news.mongabay.com/2012/0722-chart-indonesia-forest-moratorium.html
13 - http://www.redd-monitor.org/2012/05/04/deforestation-in-indonesia-continues-despite-the-moratorium/
14 - http://www.redd-monitor.org/2013/01/29/indonesian-ngos-demand-action-saving-indonesias-remaining-forests-can-no-longer-be-delayed/
15 - Suhadi, Zenzi, 2012. Indonesia: Oil palm plantations and Industrial “Plantation Forest” (HTI) violate human rights destroying Indigenous People’s Identity. WRM bulletin 185
16 - http://www.greenpeace.org/africa/en/Press-Centre-Hub/Press-releases/Greenpeace-DRCs-moratorium-on-industrial-logging-being-bypassed/
17 - Greenpeace, 2010. “Redd en DRC: menace o solution".
18 - MECNT. 2012 “Étude qualitative sur les causes de la deforestation et de la dégradation des fôrtes en Republique Democratique de Congo ». Groupe de Travail Climat REDD et UN-REDD
19 - ibid
20 - ibid
21 - http://www.icmm.com
22 - http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/publications/forests/2011/stolen%20future.pdf
23 - http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/172/Brazil_Acre.html
24 - http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/167/UNEP_report.html
25 -http://www.foeeurope.org/sites/default/files/publications/FoEE_Briefing_Europe_Global_Land_Demand_1011.pdf
26 - www.greenpeace.org/france/PageFiles/266591/redd-en-rdc-menace-ou-soluti.pdf
27 - http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/167/REDD_Indonesia.html
28 - http://www.wrm.org.uy/boletim/184/opiniao.html
29 - http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/167/REDD_Indonesia.html

30 - http://www.cmia.net/
31 - http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/175/viewpoint.html
32 - A group of NGOs and governamental departments working georreferenciamento
33 - http://raisg.socioambiental.org/mapa-online/index.html
34 - http://www.redd-monitor.org/2013/01/29/indonesian-ngos-demand-action-saving-indonesias-remaining-forests-can-no-longer-be-delayed/
35 - Suhadi, Zenzi, 2012. Indonesia: Oil palm plantations and Industrial “Plantation Forest” (HTI) violate human rights destroying Indigenous People’s Identity. WRM bulletin 185
36 - For more information on FLEGT, see www.fern.org
37 - http://www.wrm.org.uy/forests/Forests_Much_more_than_a%20_lot_of_trees.html
38 - http://www.redd-monitor.org/2013/01/29/indonesian-ngos-demand-action-saving-indonesias-remaining-forests-can-no-longer-be-delayed/
39 - http://www.mo.be/artikel/amazonewoud-takelt-af-door-klimaatverandering
40 - http://www.wrm.org.uy/deforestation/process.html
41 - http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section2/indonesia-oil-palm-plantations-and-industrial-plantation-forest-hti-violate-human-rights-destroying-indigenous-peoples-identity/
42 - http://www.stopcorporateimpunity.org/