
[Greenwashing the green desert in Copenhagen](#)

It seems increasingly likely that no binding deal will come out of Copenhagen and that the North will attempt to scrap the Kyoto Protocol. It also seems likely that some sort of deal will be pushed through on reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD). There is a serious danger that REDD will act as greenwash for the North's failure to reduce emissions dramatically. REDD could generate a massive land grab, it could pour money into some of the most corrupt governments and forestry ministries in the world, it could trample on indigenous peoples' and local communities' rights, it could accelerate conversion of forests to plantations and it could create a massive loophole allowing pollution in the North to continue. All the while allowing deforestation to continue.

But with or without a REDD deal, the UN climate negotiations have already caused serious problems for people and forests, through the Clean Development Mechanism's support of industrial tree plantations. "CDM fraud at its worst," as WRM described it in August 2009.

The problem starts with the definition of "forest". So far, there is no agreed definition of forest in the REDD negotiations, but under the CDM definition any area bigger than 500 square metres with crown cover of 10 per cent and trees capable of growing two metres high is a "forest". Even clearcuts are included in this definition of a "forest".

The FAO has long supported the myth that plantations are forests. Recently, the FAO produced a leaflet, explaining that "Negotiations need clear terminology". That much is true. But the leaflet discusses the difference between "sustainable forest management" and "sustainable management of forests". Needless to say both versions of "sustainable management" include industrial tree plantations. The FAO is institutionally incapable of seeing the difference between a plantation and a forest, but will pay intelligent people very comfortable salaries to produce an analysis of the word "of".

A look at the lending of the International Finance Corporation, the World Bank's lending arm to the private sector, illustrates why the definition of forests matters. First the good news. In August 2009, World Bank President Robert Zoellick ordered a complete moratorium on Bank investment in oil palm plantations. The change came after a complaint to the IFC's Compliance Advisory Ombudsman (CAO) by a series of NGOs about the IFC's loans to palm oil giant Wilmar.

As we're dealing with the World Bank, it should come as no surprise that there's also some bad news: The IFC is planning to increase lending for non-oil palm industrial tree plantations. In October 2009, at the World Forestry Congress in Argentina, the IFC's Mark Constantine gave a presentation titled "Increasing Private Sector Impact in the Forest Sector". When Constantine says "forest", he also means "plantations".

Constantine's presentation included a section titled "What have we learned?". But he apparently didn't mention the problems caused by Wilmar's oil palm plantations. Nor did he mention a US\$50 million loan that the IFC gave in 2004 to the Brazilian pulp company Aracruz. The loan was hastily repaid shortly after Aracruz and the local police violently removed the Tupinikim and Guarani

indigenous peoples from their villages that they had reclaimed from Aracruz's monocultures.

Among the “new approaches” that Constantine suggested are to “Increase forest access to carbon market” and to “Invest in plantations and forest industries”. He talked about the need to “Ramp up investments in forest plantations”. While Constantine mentioned the risk of “monoculture / 'green desert’”, this does not mean that the IFC will not be handing out money to expand the green desert.

On 18 November 2009, the IFC announced that it is planning to invest in 250,000 hectares of industrial tree plantations in Indonesia. In the IFC's press release, Adam Sack, IFC Country Manager for Indonesia said that “This new program is part of IFC's commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emission.” IFC states that the plantations could cut approximately 90 million tons of carbon emissions each year and that this supposed reduction in emissions could be traded under the CDM.

IFC describes its proposed projects as “reforestation” that “sequesters carbon by removing CO₂ from the atmosphere.” But it is not reforestation – it is replacing a degraded landscape by a monoculture. And any carbon dioxide stored in the trees will be quickly released, when the trees are used to produce paper or bioenergy.

When the CAO carried out its review of IFC lending to Wilmar's palm oil plantations in Indonesia it found that “Because commercial pressures dominated IFC's assessment process, the result was that environmental and social due diligence reviews did not occur as required.”

In his presentation at the World Forestry Congress, IFC's Constantine asked “How do we measure success?”. His answer, for plantations was “Number of hectares in new plantations. Dollars invested. Number of projects.” History, it seems, is due to repeat itself.

The solution to this is simple. The UN needs a definition of forests that excludes plantations. Then the IFC's plans in Indonesia could be seen for what they are. Not as “reforestation,” or part of a “commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emission,” but as a subsidy to the socially and environmentally destructive plantation sector.

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