Women raise their voices in three continents

Vast areas of land where diverse and rich ecosystems predominate are being replaced with large scale tree plantations in the South. These plantations –whether eucalyptus, pines, rubber, oil palm or other- are resulting in serious impacts on local communities, who see their ecosystems and livelihoods destroyed to make way to industrial tree plantations. Apart from affecting communities as a whole, they result in specific and differentiated impacts on women which translate in their disempowerment.

What most people in Europe are unaware of is that the European Union is a major actor in the promotion of such plantations in the South, and is therefore playing a role in disempowering women in the South. While the EU has signed a number of treaties and conventions and developed a major body of legislation aimed at achieving gender equality in the European Union, the issue of gender justice seems to lose its importance for the EU outside its borders.

The articles below are the result of three workshops conducted in late 2008 in Papua New Guinea, Nigeria and Brazil within the framework of a joint project between Friends of the Earth International and the World Rainforest Movement.

In the case of Papua New Guinea the workshop was carried out in collaboration with the local organization CELCOR/Friends of the Earth-PNG. It refers to oil palm plantations that are being mainly promoted to feed the European market with palm oil (used in products such as cosmetics, soap, vegetable oil and foodstuffs) as well as for the production of agrofuels.

The second case is that of Nigeria –organized in collaboration with Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria- which is about rubber plantations established on the lands of a local community by the France-based Michelin company for producing rubber used in the manufacture of tyres.

And finally the Brazilian case –in collaboration with NAT/Friends of the Earth Brazil- is about eucalyptus plantations set up by three companies -the Swedish-Finnish Stora Enso, Aracruz Celulose and Votorantim- for producing pulp for export to Europe for converting it there into paper.

The main aim of this collaborative effort is to support the struggle of these and many other women facing similar situations throughout the countries of the South. At the same, we aim at raising awareness among EU citizens –women and men- about how their governments are promoting policies that favour corporate investments in the South and on how those investments impact on communities in general and on women in particular. As a result of increased awareness, we hope that EU citizens and their organizations will join in the effort to create a socially equitable and environmentally sustainable world –North and South- where gender justice can become a reality for all. The voices of Southern women are becoming louder.

The full report is available at; http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/women/fullreport.pdf and the summarized version at: http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/women/summaryreport.pdf