What is the biggest REDD+ contradiction?

For almost ten years, a group of banks, corporations, governments and NGOs have been attempting to show the world that REDD+ is a good mechanism for combating climate change.

However, as WRM has sought to learn more about the REDD+ policies that have been designed over the years, and especially, the pilot projects that have been implemented, what we have seen is a consistently failed mechanism that suffers from many structural contradictions (you can find more information about REDD+ on the WRM website).

In spite of this, REDD+ will be a cornerstone of the new global climate agreement that the world's governments are discussing right now in Lima, Peru, and which is expected to be finalized in 2015 in Paris. The new agreement aims to increase financing from the World Bank and Northern cooperation agencies to change forest-related legislation in countries with tropical forests, in order to adapt laws to the market logic underlying REDD+.

Enough reasons for the WRM, together with a group of international organizations and networks, to make a call to action, emphasizing the need to fight not only against REDD+, but also against the oil, gas and mining industries that particularly benefit from REDD+, as well as fighting against globalized capitalism.

This is also a good time to review some of the most serious contradictions of the REDD+ mechanism:

1 - On one hand, REDD+ promoters claim that local communities will not be negatively affected by REDD+ projects, since all projects will be implemented on the basis of the principle of free, prior and informed consent. On the other hand, the implemented projects for the reduction of forest carbon emissions have been designed and defined by technicians from the corporations/NGOs promoting the projects, without giving the communities the necessary and complete information and without consulting with them as to whether or not they wanted to turn their forests into forest carbon 'reservoirs'. To make matters worse, these projects tend to negatively affect food sovereignty, communities' control and autonomy over their territory, as well as local criminalization.

2 - On one hand, REDD+ promoters justify their projects by pointing the finger of blame at communities who depend on forests as the main drivers of deforestation. On the other hand, they downplay the true causes of deforestation and the role played by those who are really responsible, namely the corporations and financial institutions behind the construction of hydroelectric dams, industrial agriculture, large-scale mining projects, oil and gas operations, etc. To make matters worse, these corporations are the ones who benefit most from REDD+ projects through the purchase of carbon credits and the fact that these projects allow them to 'greenwash' their public image.

3 - On one hand, REDD+ promoters tell the communities who live in the area of the project that

‘protecting’ the carbon in their forest will help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and climate change impacts globally. On the other hand, they do not tell these same communities that the ‘protection’ of the carbon in their forest gives big polluting industries the right to continue emitting more carbon emissions into the atmosphere, and that this, in time, will exacerbate climate change to a much greater extent, with impacts on tropical forests as well. On the contrary, REDD+ promoters force communities – whose carbon emissions are almost non-existent – to change their ways of life, while the ‘way of life’ of big corporations in industrialized countries can continue unchanged thanks to REDD+.

4 - On one hand, REDD+ promoters allocate more than half of the money spent on projects to consultants to carry out more and more assessments of the amount of carbon that is supposedly stored today and in the future in the forest within the project areas. On the other hand, these assessments are not reliable, and even worse, they further distract attention from the real causes of global warming.

5 - On one hand, REDD+ promoters claim that reforestation, or rather, the planting of trees, can also be considered as a REDD+ project because it increases the world’s ‘forested’ area and the ‘conservation’ of carbon stocks. On the other hand, this supposed reforestation is carried out through the establishment of large-scale monoculture plantations of eucalyptus trees to supply pulp mills, with industrial and mechanized production processes, a short growing cycle of six years, and heavy use of toxic pesticides and petroleum-based chemical fertilizers.

6 - On one hand, the promoters of REDD+ claim that agriculture can be ‘climate smart’. On the other hand, their means for making agriculture “smarter” is through industrial agriculture that uses transgenic seeds planted in large-scale monoculture plantations with a heavy dependence on petroleum products.

7 - On one hand, an energy company from an industrialized country in Europe or North America that has bought carbon credits from a REDD+ project claims to have documents that prove its ownership of the carbon supposedly stored in a certain area of forest. On the other hand, this forest is thousands of kilometres away from this alleged ‘owner’ of the carbon, and the company knows absolutely nothing about the place where ‘its’ carbon is ‘stored’ or about the people who have roots in this territory that go back for countless generations.

8 - On one hand, the Norwegian government supports the Brazilian government with millions of dollars to reduce emissions from deforestation. On the other hand, that same Norwegian government has just announced that its state-owned oil company, Statoil, is going to drill new offshore wells off the coast of Brazil, which will even further increase the amount of carbon in the atmosphere, as well as increasing its profits – which greatly surpass the amount of money granted to ‘reduce deforestation’ to the governments of Brazil and other countries in the South.

9 - On one hand, REDD+ promoters have succeeded in getting a lot of time and money spent on a secondary cause of climate change: deforestation and forest degradation. On the other hand, governments have spent little time and money on confronting the main problem. To make matters worse, this is not due to a lack of awareness and knowledge of what would actually solve the problem: leaving oil, gas and coal underground.

10 - On one hand, the promoters of REDD+ claim that it will only be possible to save the world’s tropical forests by using mechanisms like REDD+ and establishing the monetary value of nature. On the other hand, for the communities who depend on forests, these forests have countless values that

are beyond measure; it is impossible to put a price tag on something that indigenous communities consider sacred.

And now it’s up to you to make the tough decision of choosing which one of these is the biggest contradiction of REDD+!