
[Intensification of land grabbing and more concentration of land ownership in the era of "green capitalism": News from Indonesia](#)

On April 17, farmers around the world celebrated the Day of Peasant Struggle, in tribute to the 19 peasants of the Landless Workers Movement (MST) of Brazil who were killed by police on April 17, 1996, as they fought for land reform. Today, one of the main peasant struggles is against land grabs and concentration of land ownership that profoundly affect peasant communities, indigenous peoples and other communities who depend on forests. This struggle has become even harder, not only due to the expansion of agribusiness, mining, oil and gas, monoculture tree plantations, hydroelectric plants, etc., but also by new phenomena such as the "green land grabs" in an era which we can call of "green capitalism or green economy". Indonesia is a case in point, with some signs of hope and many of concern.

In this bulletin, we show how the process of land concentration and land grabbing has become even worse in the global South, especially in regions with tropical forests. In Cambodia, the number of families affected by land disputes tripled in just one year. In Brazil, Fibria, a company controlling large expanses of eucalyptus plantations and owning some of the world's largest pulp mills, sold part of its land to a financial market company while at the same time maintaining control over the eucalyptus monoculture on the same land. Resources from this sale were intended fund, among others, it's the company's expansion plans. Another article explains how the approval of GM eucalyptus by the Brazilian authorities serves as a stimulus for the future expansion plans of plantation companies like Suzano. In Liberia, the World Bank is effectively proposing "green land grabs" by recommending "compensation with biodiversity credits." We also warn of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) initiative to certify not only industrial logging and monoculture tree plantations, but also the so-called "ecosystem services" in forest areas, adding legitimacy, and thus facilitating the expansion of such projects. Finally, while land grabbing continues, there are a number of processes, some new others not so new, which directly or indirectly worsen the process of land grabbing and concentration of land ownership, including the so-called "green land grabbing".

In the case of Indonesia, a country with one of the largest areas of tropical forest in the world, these forests have been appropriated and largely destroyed by corporations, often for export-oriented production. According to the Indonesian NGO Walhi (1), the timber sector controls 25 million hectares of land classified as forest, tree plantations take up 10.1 million hectares, oil palm plantations 12.5 million hectares and mining 3.2 million hectares. These, together with other sectors, control about 57 million hectares of a total of 120 million hectares of forests in the country.

The acquisition and concentration of land ownership within this violent, predatory model has further intensified in the context of the "green" economy or "green" capitalism. According to the NGO Walhi, "green land grabbing" has already resulted in 2.6 million hectares of land having been acquired by actors promoting projects and schemes such as REDD+. They aim to trade carbon for the benefit of polluting companies and countries in the North, especially in Europe. The government of Norway, for

example, has recently invested in projects to "avoid deforestation" and supported so-called "ecosystem restoration" activities in the provinces of Sumatra, Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara, Kalimantan, Papua and Maluku. But their policy is incoherent. While investing in REDD+, Norway also invests in the expansion of the predatory and violent model. In Indonesia, the Norwegian state-owned company Statoil announced the expansion of oil extraction activities while the state pension fund continues investing in coal mining. (3)

Furthermore, a large number of peasant and indigenous communities in Indonesia resist and defend their territories against these incursions. According to the Peasant Alliance for Agrarian Reform (AGRA, acronym in Bahasa), in recent years, the number of hectares in dispute between companies and communities reached at least 5.6 million hectares of land, involving nearly 1 million families. Clashes with state and private security forces have resulted in hundreds of peasants being imprisoned and persecuted as well as dozens injured or even killed, such as in the recent conflict with the tree plantation and pulp company Asia Pulp and Paper, APP (2).

As a result of this serious situation, as well as years of struggle and pressure by the communities and organizations in Indonesia, the Indonesian Government and its President, Joko Widodo, have finally signaled a willingness to change track. On the one hand, the country's REDD Agency was closed, while at the same time, President Widodo promised to transfer 12 million hectares of forests to indigenous and non-indigenous communities for community management. This April, in an event organized on the island of Lombok by Walhi, HuMa, KNPA (Coalition of civil society organizations for an Agrarian Reform) and the Epistema Institute, the new Minister of Environment reaffirmed this commitment.

The commitment is obviously laudable. However, for this "new track" to become reality of Indonesia's forest policy, it is important:

- That those 12 million hectares include the areas under dispute between communities and large logging, plantation, mining companies, etc. areas the companies appropriated;
- That the government publicly recognizes that REDD+ -type projects, all of which have been financed with external resources, have failed to reduce deforestation. In 2014, according to Walhi, deforestation reached 5.6 million hectares, while the Government admits a little more than 1 million hectares. It would also be important to recognize that REDD+ has also been a failure for communities, especially because they had to hand over control of their territories to large foreign NGOs and/or companies that determine what can be done on the land, leading to restrictions and prohibitions (4).
- That the government resume sovereignty over forest policy and recognize that the most effective way to preserve forests, and thereby mitigate forest-related climate change is not through REDD+ nor through new trends inspired by it, such as Blue REDD, Landscape REDD or "climate smart agriculture", fueled mainly by the World Bank and governments of the North (see [WRM Bulletin of July 2014](#)). The most effective way of conserving forests is to ensure by law that communities who depend on them regain control over their forests and territories. This measure has been proven to be effective in other countries. For example, in Brazil, indigenous lands have been regularized, guaranteeing control of communities living on them; those are the best preserved forest areas of the country and the world.
- That the government prioritize, once and for all, policies oriented towards their own people in order to restore their land, rather than prioritize, as it has done until now, forest policies that

facilitates the destruction of forests and the territories of communities by large corporations. According to the NGO Walhi, if the current government policy does not change, it is expected that large palm, logging, mining and other companies will increase control over the forests in Indonesia, from 57 million hectares so far to about 80 million hectares by 2020. This means devastation across a far greater area than the 12 million hectares that the government has promised to return to communities.

A change of track not only requires that communities and NGOs be attentive and vigilant throughout the whole process to ensure the return of land promised by the government. But also and above all, it requires strengthening and supporting local resistance and struggles in defense of their territories and forests to convey a clear NO to the continuation of a government policy that allows land grabbing, including "green" land grabbing by large companies.

We hope that every April 17 celebration with actions and demonstrations throughout the world will be an additional encouragement and source of strength for the people's struggle in countless countries.

(1) <http://www.walhi.or.id>

(2) <http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/pulping-the-local-food/>

(3) See

<http://www.zacks.com/stock/news/168321/statoil-awarded-new-exploration-license-offshore-indonesia>

And <http://www.redd-monitor.org/2015/03/26/norways-climate-pollution-oil-gas-coal-and-carbon-trading/>

(4) <http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/redd-a-collection-of-conflicts-contradictions-and-lies/>