What "rights" are defended in the Paris Agreement and in the plans with false solutions to the climate crisis?

There are many analyses of the Paris Agreement and the reasons why it is a disaster for the climate. One critique is that it does not address the basic issue of human rights. Meanwhile, beyond the text itself, the Agreement actually guarantees and strengthens the rights of transnational corporations and financial institutions. Indeed, these institutions were endorsed in the side events that took place in Paris, in which they announced plans and financing of false solutions to the climate crisis. The objective: to transform problems into opportunities for the private sector, as in the case of the REDD+ mechanism and the new "ambitious reforestation plans," announced before and during the Paris Conference.

In order to guarantee their interests, large corporations and financial institutions count on governments to be true defenders of their rights. This is no different from what already happens, very explicitly, in international negotiations around free trade agreements. Big oil companies, for example, must be very satisfied with the Paris Agreement, as they affirmed their right to continue contributing to the climate crisis with impunity. Without once using the words "fossil fuels," governments nonetheless guaranteed the right of these companies and their shareholders to continue extracting and profiting from oil, gas and coal.

Not incorporating in a binding way the historic contribution and differential responsibility of industrialized countries that have emitted the most carbon dioxide (CO_2), is another way the Paris Agreement implicitly recognizes those countries' rights to extract fossil fuels and pollute. This condones large companies' rights to continue promoting and profiting from a destructive production and consumption model, while the negative impacts are borne by millions of people in the Global South.

However, large corporations' and financial institutions' influence is not limited to the official conference and Agreement. The REDD+ mechanism for example, while indeed referenced in the official text of the Agreement, actually received more emphasis in side events sponsored by Northern governments. These governments are interested in "offsetting" their emissions, while Southern governments are interested in the financing offered. In the first days of the Conference, the governments of Germany, Norway, and the UK, along with the World Bank, announced billions of dollars in total financing to invest in this false solution to the climate crisis. Meanwhile, together Brazil and the European Union put guidelines into the current Paris Agreement on how a future carbon credit market for REDD+ projects could work.

In the "Global Landscape Forum," a parallel event organized by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the "AFR 100" Plan was launched. This Plan hopes to "recover" 100 million hectares of forests in Africa considered to be “degraded” or totally deforested, and it promises to create jobs and improve the welfare of the population (2). Ten African countries have already committed to “recover” over 30 billion hectares of land. The World Bank would offer billions of dollars in financing, and an additional US $540 million would come from North American and European investors specialized in “green” businesses.

It is undeniably important to reforest areas affected by destructive activities, but it is essential to discuss how and in whose benefit this is done. There are serious doubts as to the sincerity of financial institutions like the World Bank and “green” investment funds, which are always alert to new opportunities in “green capitalism”—whose logic places profit over the wellbeing of local communities.

Part of the World Bank's legacy is having co-financed the failed Tropical Forestry Action Plan (TFAP), a “reforestation” plan launched in the 1980s. The TFAP sparked riots in communities in countries like India, where, under the motto of “reforestation,” TFAP actually promoted monoculture tree plantations that benefitted the private sector and further destroyed forests. The World Bank continues to be one of the main promoters of monoculture tree expansion for pulp and other purposes, through its private sector arm, the International Finance Corporation (IFC). At the same time, the Bank is one of the main promoters of REDD+. In Mozambique, for example, the IFC is financing the Portuguese company Portucel, which is taking arable lands from farming communities in order to plant eucalyptus trees, undermining the food sovereignty of the people.

The participation of “green” investors in the AFR100 Plan also raises serious concerns, given that these same actors are already involved in so-called “reforestation” activities in Africa. These activities promote monoculture tree plantations, and their eye is on businesses like the carbon credit market and logging. One of the main companies that invests in carbon credit plantations is the Norwegian *Green Resources*, which has already been denounced in Uganda for destroying the livelihoods of the local communities through their carbon sequestration “reforestation” project. (3)

The AFR100 Plan is similar to another plan launched in July 2015 by President Dilma Rousseff of Brazil, one of the most important countries in the world for tropical forests. In an official visit to the United States, the president announced “recovery” of no less than 12 million hectares of forest. Here again skepticism is appropriate, since Brazil is the country in the Global South with the largest area of monoculture eucalyptus plantations for export-driven pulp production. Also involved are transnational corporations like the Swedish-Finlandish *Stora Enso*, and increasingly, investment funds that become landowners. The government erroneously calls these plantations “planted forests,” thereby making them eligible for the government's “reforestation” plan. Monoculture tree plantations are a strategic sector for Brazil, and the government incessantly seeks to promote its expansion, even using genetically engineered trees.

The articles in this newsletter highlight how the policies arising from the climate negotiations in fact involve rights violations. One article reflects on the relationship between REDD+ and rights, focusing on weak application of the principle of Free Prior Informed Consent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Another article, from Thailand, discusses popular struggles against hydroelectric dams and their huge impacts, exposing the fallacy of promoting dams as a source of clean energy. Finally, there are articles about the struggles of indigenous communities: the BriBri peoples in Costa Rica mobilizing against a REDD+ project in their territory, and the Pataxó people mobilizing against the *Stora Ensa* and *Fibria* eucalyptus plantations on their territory. The Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) reports on the impacts of extractive activities in indigenous communities in the Global North, which are carried out by companies buying carbon credits from projects in the Global South.

Good Reading!

(1) http://www.redd-monitor.org/2015/12/15/cop21-paris-redd-and-carbon-markets/
(2) http://www.wri.org/news/2015/12/release-african-countries-launch-afr100-restore-100-million-hectares-land
(3) http://www.redd-monitor.org/2015/11/27/the-swedish-energy-agency-has-frozen-carbon-credits-purchases-from-norwegian-plantation-firm-green-resources/