Rio Tinto’s biodiversity offset in Madagascar - Double landgrab in the name of biodiversity?

A field report by WRM and Re:Common

In recent years mining companies have become actively engaged in promoting ‘biodiversity offsetting’ as a way of ‘greening’ the mining sector. One offset project in particular, the Rio Tinto QMM biodiversity offset in the Anosy region of southeastern Madagascar, has been widely advertised as a biodiversity offset model.

Rio Tinto and its partners from the conservation sector claim that the company’s biodiversity conservation strategy will not only compensate for biodiversity loss but that mining will even have a “Net Positive Impact” on biodiversity in the end. However, a joint Re:Common and WRM field investigation in 2015 found that the reality is very different from the story in the glossy brochures distributed internationally.

Subsistence livelihoods of villagers are made even more precarious so Rio Tinto can increase its profits. Villagers at one biodiversity offset site felt that restrictions had been imposed without negotiation and with little regard for their situation. Income-generating alternatives to alleviate the loss of access to the forest had been promised but have yet to materialise while severe restrictions on community forest use are already in place.

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