

---

## [The Paris Agreement on Climate Change: Promoting tree plantations and reducing forests to tradable carbon stores](#)

The 22nd annual UN climate meeting has come and gone in 2016, with governments celebrating the ratification of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, adopted at the UN climate meeting in 2015. In 1997, the US government did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol, the first UN climate agreement with binding limits on industrialized countries after having insisted that carbon trading be part of the Kyoto Protocol. The US government never ratified the Kyoto Protocol. Carbon trading, however, stayed. And carbon trading became a big distraction from the urgent task of governments negotiating at the UN climate meetings when the last barrel of oil and last tonne of coal would be dug up and burned. Such a plan is still not being discussed at the UN climate meetings, as the first article in this bulletin, 'The Paris Agreement Undermines the Global Campaign to Leave Oil in the Soil' explains.

The idea of compensation as an alternative to reduction also dominates the UN's Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Instead of setting a clear phase-out plan for burning fossil carbon, governments merely agreed to "achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century." That means companies can continue to burn fossil fuel as long as they pay someone to plant trees, prevent forest from being cut or reduce emissions from agricultural production. That may be convenient for the fossil fuel industry and corporations whose profits depend on the availability of cheap oil and coal. But it's a big threat to peasant farmers and indigenous peoples for whom the forest is home. Why? Because it's the land peasant families depend on and the forests indigenous peoples have protected and guarded for generations that corporations now want to use as 'carbon forest'. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change connects initiatives such as REDD+ and 'zero-net-deforestation' with industrial agriculture and industrial tree plantations. Pressure on farming land and forests is set to rise once the Paris Agreement hits the ground. (2)

One trend that helps explain why negotiations to keep oil in the soil and coal in the ground are not on the agenda of the UN climate negotiations is the growing presence of corporate interests at UN climate meetings. For years, corporations from the oil, coal, global food and financial industries would organize parallel events at venues near the UN climate meetings and their industry associations have been present in the UN meeting halls. One newspaper noted the "unprecedented involvement of corporate interests who have fought climate action around the world" at the 2016 UN meeting in Morocco. Those are corporations with a fundamental interest in extracting and burning as much fossil fuel as possible. (3) Earlier in the year, industrialized country governments had opposed restrictions on the presence of fossil fuel corporations at the UN climate meetings when they said they found the concept of "conflict of interest" too hard to define. Australian government representatives, for example, claimed that "there is no clear understanding of what a conflict of interest is and it means different things to different people." They argued that therefore, it should be assumed there was no risk of a "conflict of interest" in representatives of companies whose business depends on selling oil and coal attending the UN climate meetings. So, in Morocco, industry associations representing fossil fuel corporations such as ExxonMobil, Chevron, Peabody, BP, Shell, RioTinto etc. were holding private discussions with government representatives whose task it is to negotiate action to end the use of fossil carbon. It's through extracting and processing fossil carbon

---

that those very companies are among the most powerful in the world. Maybe industrialized country representatives having difficulty understanding "conflict of interest" should have talked to their colleagues attending the 7th meeting of the UN Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in India about their experience with corporate "conflict of interest" and the interference of the tobacco lobby aiming to prevent governmental action against smoking. It may have made them understand that oil and coal companies presenting their industry as a partner in the fight against climate change are applying a well-worn corporate strategy that the tobacco industry also used extensively. Oil and coal corporations attending UN climate meetings will fight for their profits, not lobby governments to take action to stop the burning of oil and coal and natural gas as fast as possible. (4)

But it's not only oil and coal industries that have put the UN climate meetings on their calendar. Plantation companies, global food corporations and the conservation industry have been regulars at UN climate meetings for years. Their hopes are pinned on the Paris Agreement on Climate Change establishing global demand for carbon credits from initiatives that are supposedly reducing emissions from deforestation – demand for their business, in other words.

In 2007, governments introduced REDD as a new way of saving forests into the UN climate negotiations. Since then, the plantations, global food and conservation industries have worked to establish the idea - both inside and beyond the UN climate talks - that payments for reducing emissions from deforestation or for tree planting are a contribution to tackling climate change. Numerous initiatives have been launched on the assumption that payments for carbon storage in trees will reduce emissions from land use. Even though the reality of the past ten years has shown that REDD and similar initiatives in the agriculture sector are false solutions that are unable to reduce large-scale forest destruction while falsely blaming deforestation on peasant farming and shifting cultivation, regional development banks and industrialized country governments keep bankrolling corporate REDD initiatives. (5)

The African Development Bank's Strategy for Agricultural Transformation in Africa 2016-2025, for example, does not mention the word "agroecology" even once. However, the document includes 12 major references to "climate-smart agriculture", a dodgy concept that mainly aims to expand control of the agrochemicals and seed industry over small-scale farming. The AfDB Strategy for Agricultural Transformation in Africa also promotes carbon trading. The document talks about promoting "green growth" and investing among others in "large-scale sustainable and climate-smart agriculture." The Bank proposes investments "in partnership with" private sector funds such as the Livelihoods Fund for Family Farming (which includes Danone and Mars among its investors) the Moringa Fund (co-founded by the Rothschild bank), or Althelia Climate Fund. The forthcoming report 'The Kasigau Corridor REDD+ Project: a crash dive for Althelia Climate Fund' by the organisations Counter Balance and Re:Common exposes what Althelia Climate Fund investments mean to local communities: historical injustices of land allocation are reinforced and those hit hardest by restrictions imposed by the REDD+ project derive few if any benefits from the project. (6)

"What does the UN Paris Agreement mean for forests and forest peoples?" – that's the central question for all articles in this bulletin. One article explores why it is that even though the talk of urgency for action to tackle climate change increases each year, the Paris Agreement does not mention the words fossil fuel, petrol or coal even once. The following two articles look at how forests are included in the Paris Agreement and who benefits from initiatives referring to this explicit inclusion of REDD in the Paris Agreement. The mislabelling of plantations as forests and the promotion of industrial plantations as a result of the Paris Agreement are discussed in two articles. Finally, the Ibi Bateke tree planting carbon project in the DR Congo connects the carbon trading mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol, the Clean Development Mechanism, with the Paris Agreement. Even before the first

---

trees were planted, the project was marketed as the success it never was.

There is little doubt that the UN Paris Agreement on Climate Change is bad news for forests and for communities and indigenous peoples for whom forests provide not just a livelihood but also the physical, cultural and spiritual home. Their struggle in defense of forests and a way of life that recognizes the value of forests far beyond the carbon price tag that REDD+ has reduced forests to, is more important than ever. Ignoring the clear evidence that industrial tree plantations create huge problems to local communities and are no solution to the climate crisis, the Paris Agreement has also opened a new door to a further expansion of monoculture tree plantations. Stepping up resistance against these massive expansion plans for industrial tree plantations, erroneously justified as a contribution to tackling climate change, will be important in the years ahead. That is also why we must continue to demand that the FAO correct its misguided forest definition. Please support the letter reminding FAO once again that plantations are not forests and that the FAO must urgently revise its forest definition! (7)

We hope you will enjoy the bulletin!

(1) More information for example in the WRM publication Trade in Ecosystem Services. When payment for environmental services delivers a permit to destroy. <http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/trade-in-ecosystem-services-when-payment-for-environmental-services-delivers-a-permit-to-destroy/>

(2) Planting enough trees to soak up and store the carbon in line with the Paris Agreement's 2°C target would likely require around 10 million kilometres<sup>2</sup> of land by the end of the century. That is an area the size of the Sahara or the US. See for example, Smith 2015:

<http://www.nature.com/nclimate/journal/vaop/ncurrent/full/nclimate2870.html> Williamson 2016:

<http://www.nature.com/news/emissions-reduction-scrutinize-CO2-removal-methods-1.19318>

(3) Article in the Guardian newspaper on 6 November 2016: Marrakech climate talks: giving the fossil fuel lobby a seat at the table. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/nov/07/marrakech-climate-talks-giving-the-fossil-fuel-lobby-a-seat-at-the-table> and Corporate Accountability International report Uncovered: Fossil Fuel Industry Has Back-Door Access to U.N. Climate Talks. <https://www.stopcorporateabuse.org/blog/uncovered-fossil-fuel-industry-has-back-door-access-un-climate-talks>

(4) The World Health Organisation report 'Impact assessment of the WHO FCTC: Report by the Expert Group' writes that "the role and activities of the global tobacco industry remain by far the most important obstacle to action across all aspects of the FCTC."

[http://www.who.int/fctc/cop/cop7/FCTC\\_COP\\_7\\_6\\_EN.pdf](http://www.who.int/fctc/cop/cop7/FCTC_COP_7_6_EN.pdf)

(5) See for example, REDD: A Collection of Conflicts, Contradictions and Lies.

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

(6) Forthcoming Report by Re:Common and Counter Balance: The Kasigau Corridor REDD+ Project in Kenya: a Crash dive for Althelia Climate Fund.

(7) You can sign the letter urging FAO to revise its forest definition here: <http://wrm.org.uy/all-campaigns/support-the-letter-urging-fao-to-revise-its-forest-definition/>