
Mumbai-Porto Alegre Forest Initiative: Linking the struggle against plantations with alternative local uses of forests

The Mumbai-Porto Alegre (MPA) Forest Initiative is intended to serve as a platform for the joining of forces and for the building of solidarity between actors working on a wide spectrum of issues related to social and environmental justice and forests. As economic globalisation is increasingly affecting local communities, the need to create a global movement for ensuring peoples' rights and forest conservation became an imperative that a number of participants to the World Social Forum decided to set in motion. This young and diverse movement currently comprising some 80 organisations, networks and individuals supports all levels of resistance against plantations. Though plantations are not forests, the conceptual paradigm and operational reality of large scale tree monoculture plantations are antithetical to the struggle to ensure peoples' rights and forest conservation. The struggle against the spread of that type of plantations is therefore an essential part of the struggle of community rights over forest lands.

During the international plantations meeting held in Vitoria, Brazil on building support for local communities against large-scale tree plantations and genetically modified trees, the relevance of the struggle against plantations to the movement for peoples' rights was highlighted in numerous occasions. Various members of this movement (FASE, FOE-CR, WRM, WALHI, Rede Alerta Contra o Deserto Verde, Accion Ecologica) who participated bore witness to a wide range of denounces made by indigenous peoples, local and landless communities, international organisations and including many other countries on the profound violations to human and community rights brought about by plantations. In addition, the devastating effects of plantations on floral and faunal biodiversity, water and soils provided an ever repeating constant in all specific country cases analysed and local experiences narrated.

Principles 1 and 2 of the MPA Forest Initiative state that "Communities that live in and depend on their forests for their survival needs are the true protectors and governors of those forests and forest protection demands that their rights be ensured". As highlighted by the Green Desert Network from Brazil, plantations in the states of Espirito Santo and Southern Bahia have converted fertile, formerly food producing, lands to green deserts of eucalyptus, whilst in the process expelling many communities and peoples. This land conflict caused by the vast intervention on the regional landscape by plantations held by companies such as Aracruz Cellulose, Suzano and Veracel is now in an inspiring stage where local communities are initiating their own processes for reclaiming their lands and rights in order to be able to survive. The Mumbai-Porto Alegre movement fully supports the struggles of the indigenous peoples, quilombola communities (slave-descendants) and landless communities against plantations.

The MPA Forest Initiative opposes the commodification of nature (Principle 12), as is exemplified by the reductionist attempt to see the carbon absorbing property of trees as the main function of those organisms and use this as a justification for the further spread of plantations.

The role that governments can and should play in this respect is to safeguard the interest of all the citizens within their territory, making sure that all peoples' and communities are faced with an

environment that is conducive and encourages own participation and own articulation of needs and necessities (Principles 5 and 6). Regrettably, as case after case demonstrated, governments often play a catalytic role in promoting the spread of plantations and disempowering local populations vis-à-vis corporate interests.

An often occurring common theme that case studies examined shared is the systematic involvement of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization and other International Financial Institutions in promoting and financing of plantations around the world. The Mumbai-Porto Alegre movement for peoples' rights, taking into account the long histories of human and environmental destruction for which such actors are responsible, opposes all their further involvement in any policies or projects that promote the spreading of plantations. (Principle 11)

The Mumbai Porto Alegre Forest Initiative is relevant to the struggle against plantations also because it provides a vision of the alternatives that could be beneficial both for local communities as for forest ecosystems. These institutional mechanisms for the social control by local communities over forests or other converted use lands need to evolve according to the needs of each and every community and the ecological characteristics of the local and regional ecosystems in which they live (Principle 3). Alternatives to the industrial forestry model that are developed and implemented by local communities themselves, profoundly challenge the core of the model that breeds tree monocultures, for they put local peoples' needs back at the centre of importance over their future and the conservation of their forests.

Forest destruction and substitution by plantations result in differentiated impacts on women and it is therefore necessary to recognise "the historical role and positive contribution of women in the governance and nurturing of forests" as well as ensuring "their full participation in decision making" (Principle 4).

The struggle to ensure the rights of local peoples over their lands and forest ecosystem conservation are closely linked to the struggle against plantations. The Mumbai-Porto Alegre Forest Initiative can provide a nexus point between these struggles and others related to forests and forest dependent peoples' rights uniting them on ideological and political common ground, facilitating the exchange of experiences, promoting the adoption of common strategies and ensuring feedback on good practices.

We appeal to all of you to join this process.

The full text of the Mumbai Porto Alegre Forest Initiative can be accessed at:
<http://www.wrm.org.uy/statements/Mumbai/index.html>

If you want to show your solidarity with the principles of this movement or require further information please contact: antonis@wrm.org.uy

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