
[The inclusion of sinks has sunk the Kyoto Protocol](#)

The news have reached the entire world: the Kyoto Protocol has been saved! In spite of this information being formally true, it hides the fact that this does not mean that the planet's climate has been saved, which is the real issue at stake. On the contrary, as it now stands, while not solving the problem it was intended to address, the Kyoto Protocol will impose further impacts on local people through the implementation of carbon sink projects.

Though anticipated, it is sad to confirm that the Bonn meeting of the Convention on Climate Change was more focused on "sinks" than on "sources" of greenhouse gases. This means that instead of seeking means by which to reduce the use of fossil fuels --coal, petroleum and natural gas-- which are at the root of the greenhouse effect, climate negotiators focused instead on means to avoid commitments on fossil-fuel emission reductions.

The meeting was held in a context where the United States --responsible for 25% of the world's total greenhouse gas emissions-- publicly stated that it refused to comply with the commitments agreed to in Kyoto in 1997. Such context facilitated arm-twisting by a major polluter such as Japan, which was finally instrumental in reaching an agreement to "save" the protocol. The solution to "save" it was the inclusion of tree plantations as carbon sinks.

Climate negotiators chose to ignore the increasing number of scientific studies which question the capacity of tree plantations to be a long-term solution to climate change. They also chose to ignore that this mechanism will in fact result in a net increase of fossil-fuel emissions in the North. And they also opted to ignore the impacts that large-scale tree plantations have on people and the environment.

As a result, polluters will now have a licence to pollute under the guise of implementing plantation projects to act as "sinks" for their emissions. Unless local opposition prevents them from doing so, most of these plantations will be implemented in the South, where trees grow much faster than in the North, thus being more "efficient" for carbon sequestration. At the same time, they will be much cheaper than in industrialized countries --where labour and land are more expensive-- and will receive all the necessary support from Southern governments --including repression of local opposition-- desperate to accept any investment which may leave some --however little-- money in the country.

To understand the threat that this will mean to people, soils, water and biodiversity, it is necessary to realize that this "solution" may result --to make theoretically sense from a climate perspective-- in hundreds of millions of hectares of fertile land being converted to large-scale plantations of fast growing species such as eucalyptus. In the South, those lands are already occupied by people, who depend on them for their subsistence. Those people's lands are therefore now under the threat of appropriation to make way to plantations. The areas to be occupied by these carbon garbage dumps host much of the world's biodiversity, much of which could be wiped out by large-scale monoculture plantations. At the same time, these would deplete water resources and result in dramatic changes in the soils where they are implemented.

In sum, with their decision to include plantations as carbon sinks, climate negotiators have not only not addressed the problem they were meant to address --climate change-- but have added new problems to millions of people who will now be facing the appropriation of their lands and resources for conversion to Northern carbon garbage dumps. The price for "saving" the process has clearly been too high and the inclusion of sinks has sunk the Kyoto Protocol and the hopes it had raised. It is now up to people and organizations really concerned with the Earth's future to stop the implementation of this false solution and to force governments to address seriously the issue of global climate change.