
Honduras to "buy" Canadian carbon dioxide

Last September Canada reached a controversial deal to "buy" oxygen from Honduras within the framework of a "debt for nature" swap and the Clean Development Mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol. CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) will "forgive" about U\$S 680,000 of Honduras' U\$S 11 million debt with Canada. In exchange, a so-called joint implementation office will be established in Honduras to promote tree plantations and monitor forest conservation programmes in that country. Canada will benefit by getting credit for "cutting" emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

As in other similar cases since the idea of forests and tree plantations as carbon sinks was launched as a possible way of mitigating global warming, the powerful hand of industry is behind this project. In fact, this allows a major carbon dioxide-producing country -such as Canada- to be able to avoid implementing real measures to either reduce carbon emissions at source or to implement the conservation of its own forests. Such measures would for sure be resisted by the Canadian industry, which emits huge volumes of CO₂ to the atmosphere, as well as by logging companies, responsible for deforestation in numerous regions of the Canadian territory. The disappearance of the boreal forests in Quebec during this century is a good (bad) example of the way in which they act.

In Honduras the idea was enthusiastically announced by the Minister for the Environment Xiomara Gomez, according to whom this is a good opportunity to obtain resources from developed countries for forest protection. Honduras is also expecting that the USA and Germany will come to similar agreements on "oxygen sales". Nevertheless, the Honduran authorities have not shown the same enthusiasm in protecting the country's forests from illegal logging or combating corruption at the forest administration level (see WRM Bulletin 27).

Attractive as they may seem, these kinds of projects do not contribute to an effective solution to the global warming problem. Apart from the fact that it is very doubtful that tree plantations really absorb and store carbon (see article in the Plantations Campaign section), the carbon offset market is an idea which Northern countries -the real responsible over climate change- have put forward to avoid real changes to the current unsustainable social and economic model. Honduras, with its pressing needs, has been selected to act as a garbage dump for northern carbon dioxide ... for peanuts.

Source: Christian Science Monitor, 23/9/99;