
Ghana: Eucalyptus plantations for producing energy

The Norwegian company African Plantations for Sustainable Development (APSD) is establishing industrial eucalyptus plantations in Ghana for biomass fuel, which is considered a "carbon neutral" fuel. The Youth Volunteers for the Environment in Ghana spoke with communities affected by these plantations. These are their stories.

The debates around producing so-called "carbon neutral" biomass energy, particularly in Africa, are increasing in the context of the climate discussions. However, it has been extensively documented that **for producing industrial scale biomass, large extensions of land are needed while, at the same time, the burning of biomass is highly polluting.** (1)

The Norwegian company African Plantations for Sustainable Development (APSD) is establishing industrial eucalyptus tree plantations in rural Ghana for burning the wood to produce electricity (biomass fuel). Since 2009, the company was able to **secure access to about 42,000 hectares of land with 50-year leases (with renewal possibilities)** near the Atebubu town, Brong Ahafo Province in Central Ghana, on the western side of Lake Volta, some 400 km north of the capital city of Accra.

In parallel, APSD is constructing a **60 megawatts biomass power** plant in the same area, to be operational in 2021. For the power plant to operate, **an annual supply of 600,000 m³ of logs is needed, which translates into 22,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations**, of which 9,000 hectares have already been planted. The company is also building access roads and transmission lines.

In a presentation done by the plantations company (2) the **long term plans of the project are shown: supply fuel for generating 600 megawatts. This would imply 180,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations.** The 60 megawatts power plant currently under construction, according to the presentation, is only the first phase of the project.

APSD is financed by the **African Development Bank's** initiative, **the Africa Renewable Energy Fund (AREF)**, which is managed by **Berkeley Energy**, a pan-African equity fund on renewable energy infrastructure. (3) This Fund has other investors, including **CDC**, the UK's development finance institution, and **BIO**, the Belgian investment company for developing countries. (4) Moreover, the project is also financed by **Erling Lorentzen, founder of the Brazilian pulp and paper company Aracruz Celulose**, which plantations nowadays are part of the giant pulp and paper company Suzano. The APSD presentation that was mentioned before says, "Having witnessed the employment and development benefits of large scale sustainably managed plantations in Brazil, Mr. Lorentzen wishes to transfer the benefits of his knowledge to Africa." (5) Both, Aracruz and Suzano however, hold a disastrous record of environmental destruction and communities' rights violations in Brazil. (6)

APSD is a member of the New Generation Plantation platform, created by the conservationist NGO WWF in order to greenwash the timber and pulp plantations companies images and facilitate their

expansion. (7)

The Stories from the Communities

On the websites of the company and its financiers, the project portrays to have good relations and no conflicts with the communities. In December 2019, members of the Youth Volunteers for the Environment (YVE) in Ghana went to the plantation areas to speak with people in three of the communities that have been directly affected by the plantations. These are their stories.

The communities affected by the installed plantations are: Laylay, Bantama, Byebye, Nframamu and Galadima. Each community has about one hundred and forty households. It is important to highlight that **the community members we spoke with, including the opinion leaders, have never seen the contract or any official document. They were only told that the lease of the land is for fifty years.**

Unanimously, all farmers that spoke with us **complained of not having access to enough land** like they used to have. Most of them are witnessing their sons and daughters migrate to the city, with all the consequences attached to this. In a nutshell, the reality is that the communities are angry about how **the project has become a threat to their lives and livelihoods.**

These communities are specialized in cultivating the tuber yam (in its varieties), banana plantain, cassava, pepper (in its varieties) and rice (in its varieties). However, two of the visited communities complained that now they can only produce one variety of most crops, which also directly impact their income related to their sales in the local market.

APSD has also constructed a road that crosses through one small dam, which served as drinking water for the community members while they are on their farms during the day. Some also use this water for household usage. Members of the Bantama community told us that, on several occasions, while fetching water from the dam, the manager from the company (“the white man”, as they call him in the community) was seen urinating in the water in order to stop people from fetching it.

Some community members, from the 3 communities we visited, were told not to come close to the APSD concession, which means that they cannot cross to their various farms, which are located behind the APSD plantations.

Moreover, community members seem to not be too aware about the dangers of agrottoxins, and testified that some kind of spraying was being done by APSD. This has seriously affected the pepper farms that are not far from the eucalyptus. They also complained bitterly about how the workers employed as sprayers, were given only mouth covers for protection.

Although most of the community members have been employed, the jobs are only temporary. Workers get between one to two dollars per day. At the end of each month, people complain that almost always there are some deductions made which they are not acquainted with.

Women are feeling very insecure and their daily tasks have increased. **Getting water is no longer possible from some of the water sources they used to use since it is prohibited to go through the company’s plantations.**

Only a few households have a well in their houses but most need to contract a young man with motorbike to get them water from far, which of course leads to increasing daily costs and economic

constrains.

Community members are also not allowed anymore to set fire for cooking on their land, because APSD is afraid this could generate fires in their plantations and destroy their business. We met women coming from harvesting their yam, so we asked them to see their roasted yam - as it is traditionally done in their culture. But they angrily replied “that is why we are coming home this early, because we were officially told never to set fire on our farm for cooking or for anything else”.

In this context, one woman from the Laylay community, who is a food vendor, is facing **a court hearing because APSD argues that she was seen using a dry eucalyptus stem for firewood and that would be forbidden under company rules.**

Community chiefs who initially supported the project, as well as the opinion leaders, the assembly man for the district (elected person per district that works under the parliamentarians) and the community members **are seriously willing to do whatever they can to claim back their lands.**

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- (1) Biofuel Watch, [Biofuel Basics](#)
- (2) APSD, [Forests for the Future, New Forests for Africa](#), March 2016
- (3) Berkeley energy, [Africa Renewable Energy Fund](#)
- (4) CDC, [Africa Renewable Energy Fund](#); BIO, [Africa Renewable Energy Fund](#)
- (5) Idem 2
- (6) [WRM, Suzano](#); [WRM, Aracruz](#)
- (7) [New Generation Plantation Platform, Participants](#)