



The green scam: oppression, conflicts and resistance

WRM Bulletin 268

December 2023

[Access the bulletin on the WRM website](#)

SUBSCRIBE

Table of contents

OUR VIEWPOINT. Resisting the illusion of “green” extraction.....	2
The Industrial Park KIPI reveals the dirty and destructive face of Indonesia’s “green” transition.....	4
Expansion of tree plantations for carbon markets: more evidence of the offsetting fraud.....	12
Regarding carbon projects in the Amazon region: why contracts that last a generation?.....	15
New publication: “Certification schemes on ‘sustainability’: 30 years of deceit and violence”.....	19
Cameroon: Women determined to recover their lands occupied by Socapalm/Socfin oil palm company.....	22
Chile: Resistance to the forestry model in Wallmapu, Mapuche territory.....	24
History of a victory for the defense of life in Panama.....	28
RECOMMENDED.....	33
Systemic sexual abuse in a celebrated carbon ‘offset’ project in Kenya	
Statement in solidarity with the decolonial struggle of the Palestinian people	
Toolkit for fighting climate false solutions	
Pesticide Atlas	

OUR VIEWPOINT

Resisting the illusion of “green” extraction

Almost 30 years of UN climate negotiations have resulted in the establishment of policies and practices that facilitate the constant expansion of the fossil fuel-based economy (and its profits) while hiding its implacable negative impacts for the territories where it expands.

Almost 30 years of UN climate negotiations have resulted in the establishment of policies and practices that facilitate the constant expansion of the fossil fuel-based economy (and its profits) while hiding its implacable negative impacts for the territories where it expands. Particularly, the fantasy of carbon offsetting as a solution to the climate crisis is ever more present among the methods of corporate greenwashing for expanding their businesses, despite the mounting evidence of its complete failure to reduce emissions or deforestation - [as recently denounced by several organizations](#). However, the strategies adopted by corporations are unable to hide the oppressive and colonial essence of their advances in the Global South. Precisely for this reason, they keep encountering much resistance when they arrive in the territories of the Peoples and communities.

This issue of the WRM Bulletin shares articles that can be divided in two parts. The first part exposes four initiatives that dress themselves up as ‘green’ or ‘socially beneficial’ so as to ensure that extractive and production activities carry on unhindered. After all, these are the engine of the capitalist economy, which in turn is the main cause of the problems that such ‘green’ ventures claim they help solving. The second part highlights three experiences of resistance from the territories to such corporate assault.

The [first article](#) highlights the embedded contradictions of the so-called “energy transition” by exposing how “the largest green industrial area in the world”, in Kalimantan, Indonesia, will in fact lead to an increase in coal extraction in the region. At the same time, this multi-billion dollar project threatens to appropriate and destroy the livelihoods and interconnected spaces of life on land and sea from which grassroots communities depend upon. These communities are at the frontlines resisting this industrial park in order to defend life.

The next two articles show the different consequences of two kinds of projects that claim to be offsetting carbon and which largely depend on community territories. [One exposes the trend](#) to expand problematic tree plantations, above all in the Global South, with the argument that the trees will “offset” the pollution emitted somewhere else. This includes the whole gamut from large-scale monoculture plantations sponsored by the pulp industry to those nicely sounding plantations promoted by investment funds by means of abusive contracts with indigenous communities. The [other article](#) reflects on the abusive contracts for establishing REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) projects in the Brazilian Amazon region, specifically on how they compromise millennia-old indigenous practices and communities’ future generations.

The [fourth article](#) presents an overview of the perverse logic of certification schemes that over the last 30 years have given ‘sustainability’ and ‘responsibility’ seals to companies from different industries that cause destruction, such as the pulp and paper, palm oil and carbon offsets industries, among others. Such seals often completely ignore violations caused by corporations and legitimize their presence in community territories.

The following two articles also expose the greenwashing of industrial monoculture plantations through certification, yet, the focus is turned to highlight the experiences of people’s resistance and organization.

In Cameroon, women organized in the Afrise association [have shouted a fearless and determined “Enough!”](#) against oil palm plantation company Socapalm/Socfin, which is responsible for decades of “suffering, abuses, violations, theft, hunger, frustration and violations” of their bodies, rights and dignity. We express our full solidarity with these women who, with each others’ support, have declared that they will not tolerate the replanting of oil palm monoculture plantations in their territories.

The next article reflects in an [interview with Pablo Reyes Huenchumán](#), member of a Mapuche community in Chile, on the impacts of the violent forestry model imposed on the country which is based on large-scale monoculture plantations. But also, on the achievements and challenges of the Indigenous Mapuche to defend their communities and lives. Pablo explained how the Mapuche have been reclaiming their territories for over 20 years, showing that self-organization and resistance are key elements for Indigenous Peoples’ defense of their lands and autonomy.

Lastly, we highlight a [successful resistance process from Panama](#), where people mobilized and won a historic victory against a subsidiary of Canadian mining corporation First Quantum Minerals. After more than 25 years of resisting the impacts of gold and copper mining and facing renewed threats for the communities living in and around the mining areas, the mining operations have been canceled. Taking into consideration environmental, social and sovereignty-related demands made by protesters, Panama’s Supreme Court of Justice has declared unconstitutional the license granted to the company, hence ordering the closure of what is Central America’s largest open cast copper mine.

And, as usual, we republish an article from a past Bulletin that we consider is still relevant and timely. Now, in the context of the recent UN climate conference in Dubai, re-reading the article *Climatology / Ideology* helps us understand that the timid and more than belated mention of fossil fuels in the conference’s final text does not represent any form of hope, inasmuch as the preponderance of an extremely reductionist view of the climate problem in this space remains unchanged.

It is from the territories where people are organized that life will be defended and where the fossil fuels-dependent system will be resisted. Let’s join the struggle and tell the profit-seeking companies: you will not pass!

The Industrial Park KIPI reveals the dirty and destructive face of Indonesia's "green" transition

President Jokowi calls the Kalimantan Industrial Park Indonesia (KIPI) "the largest green industrial area in the world". But in reality, there is nothing green about the KIPI. It will lead to massive fossil fuel use, land and water grabbing, while threatening thousands of people in coastal communities with forced eviction. [Available in Indonesian](#)

Located along the coast of Bulungan regency, in the Southern part of the North Kalimantan province, the Kalimantan Industrial Park Indonesia (KIPI) has been projected by Indonesian President Jokowi as "the largest green industrial area in the world" (1). Construction officially started in December 2021.

The government claims KIPI will be efficient and effective in resource use, in promoting products and technology like the Electric Vehicle (EV) batteries and solar panels for the so-called 'green' and 'low-carbon' economy, and with a carbon footprint drastically lower than 'ordinary' industrial parks, because KIPI will rely on 'renewable' energy.

KIPI's preparations started back in 2015 when the North Kalimantan provincial government proposed that the central government create a Special Economic Zone, including an international port, in the area. The central government did so in 2016 while also declaring KIPI a Strategic National Project in 2017.

The total investment is estimated to amount to USD 132 billion. Chinese businesses have already invested large amounts of money in the project (2), enabling the construction work to progress at full speed.

Deciphering KIPI: nothing but lies

But the KIPI Project in fact contradicts the government's 'green' claims and propaganda. First, KIPI is about a massive land grab of 9,866 hectares just in its initial implementation phase (3). It means the eviction of at least 5,000 inhabitants of the Tanah Kuning and Mangkupadi communities, including Kampung Baru, a small village located at the Southern edge of the Project. Moreover, for the port infrastructure and related activities off-shore, KIPI will imply in another grabbing of 175,854 hectares of sea, representing a fivefold reduction in the communities' living space at sea. Overall, KIPI will basically destroy the vibrant and diverse livelihoods of communities strongly connected with the land and the sea, the mangroves, agricultural fields and forests.

In addition, the industries expected to operate at the KIPI (4) that the government claims will be 'efficient' in resource use, will in fact grab, according to the Environmental Impact Assessment, 39,450,560 m³ of water annually, in particular from the Pindada and Mangkupadi rivers. This is equivalent to 1.5 times the annual water consumption of the 700,000 inhabitants of the province of North Kalimantan. In return, 248,440 m³ of waste water, supposedly after 'treatment', will be discharged every four hours into the local rivers and the sea, the veins in the web of life of the communities' livelihoods.

The electricity consumption of the industries projected so far is estimated to be 11,404 GWh annually. To give an idea of this amount, at peak capacity, Tanjung Selor, North Kalimantan's capital city only consumes 14,3 Mwh - not even 1 percent of KIPI's energy demand (5). The government promise of 'renewable energy' will in reality turn into a 5 GW coal-fired power plant, planned to be built in the Bulungan Regency. One argument given for the preference to coal: while the coal power plant can be functioning within two years, the supposedly 'renewable energy' from hydropower needs much more time to be built (see below in this article).

KIPI's coal demand will be equivalent to the production level licensed for 37 of the biggest coal extraction operations in North Kalimantan. It is one more example of how the discourse of 'renewable energy' of large-scale 'green' developments heavily relies on fossil fuels. Besides, using coal power also is tied to vested interests in a region where coal is abundantly available.

The construction of this 'green' industrial park, which will run on coal power and will lead to additional fossil fuel use (6), did not prevent Indonesia from receiving USD 610 million in loans from the Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) and Energy Transition Mechanism of the Asian Development Bank. These loans are in support of Indonesia's supposed policy to stop building new coal-fired power plants. Cleverly, by Presidential Decree (Nr. 112/2022), the government allows more coal power plants to be built if it is to supply industrial areas like KIPI.

Land grabbing packed with conflicts of interest, illegalities, irregularities and criminalization

Business elites and governmental officials have apparently associated and organized, not only to appropriate the land needed for KIPI but, in particular, to grab as much financial benefit as possible from the Project. A much deeper investigation into illegalities and irregularities related to the Project is urgently needed, not least because of the strong indications of corruption taking place.

A first important cluster of irregularities involves the process of reviewing the spatial planning in the Bulungan Regency. It started with the provincial government injecting money into the Bulungan Regency government to review its spatial land planning document and policy. This was quickly done in the midst of the Covid19 pandemic, without any public debate. A new spatial plan for 2021-2040, was created, imposing a projected industrial area of 16,400 hectares to accommodate KIPI. Yet another revision is foreseen to ensure President Jokowi's projection when he launched KIPI in 2021: that KIPI could become as big as 30,000 hectares. In 2021, KIPI was already declared a 'National Strategic Project (PSN). In tandem with the highly contested Omnibus

Law, the declaration of the project as a PSN facilitates illegalities, irregularities and violence against people and nature, such as forced evictions. (7)

One key person among the Indonesian business elites involved in KIPI is Garibaldi Thohir, nicknamed Boy. President Jokowi nominated Boy as Chair of the consortium of three companies that manage KIPI's construction works: PT Kalimantan Industrial Park Indonesia (PT KIPI), PT Indonesia Strategic Industry (8) and PT Kayan Patria Propertindo. (9) Boy is the oldest brother of Erwin Thohir, minister of State-Owned enterprises in Jokowi's government. Moreover, Boy is also one of the owners of PT Adaro Minerals Indonesia, the company that will manage PT KIPI and has a stake in one of KIPI's key industries: the aluminium smelting company PT Kalimantan Aluminum Industry. And Boy has many more connections. (10)

Through the Malaysian company TSH Logistics, Boy is also one of the owners of the oil palm company PT Bulungan Citra Agro Persada (BCAP) that holds a concession of over 9.500 hectares of land in Bulungan Regency, overlapping 100 percent with the area where KIPI is planned. Based on documents shown to JATAM and WRM, community people accuse PT KIPI and PT BCAP not only of unilaterally defining the land price, but also of offering to buy people's land using the category of concession for oil palm plantations called HGU - Hak Guna Usaha. The category that should apply for land used for an industrial zone is the HGB - Hak Guna Bangunan concession category, for which much higher land prices apply.

Villagers denounce that once Boy and other business and state elites have appropriated the land, they change the category from HGU to HGB and then sell the land for a much higher price to the KIPI consortium. Moreover, villagers also revealed to JATAM and WRM how companies illegally increase the size of lands. Meanwhile, local authorities are complicit. (11)

Communities resisting: “what we breathe is no longer the smell of drying fish but the smell of dust from large vehicles”

Samsu, a community leader from the Kampung Baru village, refuses land measurement. For him, that is where the land grabbing and thus the eviction starts. He rejects the 'relocation' plan offered by the companies: "(..) where will we be moved to? Is it worth the land area and position of the location compared with Kampung Baru that we previously occupied?" he asks. Since 2021, when he became a spokesperson against the eviction of Kampung Baru, he keeps suffering from criminalization and has been reported three times to different police departments.

Mr. Aris, another villager, was reported to the police and arrested when he filmed on his mobile phone how PT KIPI invaded his land with heavy vehicles and excavators on 16 December 2022. His son Imran points out: “we have rights to the land” and PT KIPI “wants to create a fear effect on the communities”, adding his father was treated like a terrorist criminal, just for defending the community territory.

Many other tactics are used to coerce and divide the communities, such as manipulating land acquisition letters; forcing residents to sign minutes without clear information; recruiting lobbyists to persuade their fellow villagers to relinquish land and help with measurements; using the term 'compensation' to trick people into releasing their land, etc.

On top of this, the government has stopped any new investments in the elementary school of Kampung Baru. Villagers mention that if new pupils enter the school, they need to bring their own chairs. In practice, the government is already erasing Kampung Baru from the map.

Even if the land price would be higher, the KIPI Project is only willing to pay for the small areas where people have their houses. It means that if people sell, they are also giving away the sea, mangroves, rivers, agricultural fields, forests, history, memories and all of what is part of their territory, culture and identity, and which attracts many tourists too. It is a vulnerable and delicate interrelated web of life on which the livelihoods of the people in Tanah Kuning, Mangkupadi, including Kampung Baru, depend upon.

Now, the villagers are already facing restrictions and impacts due to KIPI's construction works and have serious concerns about their future. The Tanjung Community, for example, already faces severe challenges to supply their water needs. They buy water during longer periods of drought, which can last for months. They fear their situation will become worse with the increasing air and water pollution that comes with KIPI.

The social and ecological frontiers of the territory of people in both Tanah Kuning and Mangkupadi include both land and sea, one interconnected territory of life. Although most people are fisherfolk, they also heavily depend on the forest to maintain their fisheries at sea. Timber is essential to build their boats and the about 200 'bagans, small wooden structures, built offshore in the sea, along the coast.

Kesi, a fisherwoman from Kampung Baru, is worried about the future: "If we are evicted where are we going to live? We want to stay here, stay in our village. Then, my husband is also prohibited from entering the forest to collect bagan wood. So, automatically we are also prohibited from building bagans, because bagans require heavy timber. If there are no fishermen and bagans, how will we work? My work of making salted fish, I can only do when my husband comes home from the bagan".

Women cut and process sea fish, turning it into salted fish. Wiwi, a fisherwoman from Kampung Baru says: "Now, there is no longer the smell of salted fish or anchovies, in the past when we walked from Kampung Baru to Pindada [another community in the area], the scenery was green. Now, all has been erased by the industries, what we breathe is no longer the smell of drying fish but the smell of dust from large vehicles."

Although women's lives heavily depend on fisheries and women play a fundamental role in the local economy, they have been excluded from so-called consultations with the communities about the installation of KIPI, showing how 'green capitalism' needs patriarchy to exist.

Coal transport over sea has intensified since around 2015, invading their fishing areas. With all the coal consumption that is foreseen for KIPI, the impacts will become more severe. Erni is a fisherman from Tanah Kuning who works with four other fisherfolk: "There is already an impact on fishermen, our income is less. Maybe because the coal falls in the sea, there is less fish, "(..), some [fishermen] have gone to the company". This is another tactic the KIPI promoters use to break people's resistance: employing villagers, under oppressive working conditions.

Coal extraction in South Kalimantan motivated Amiruddin several years ago to move to Tanah Kuning and become a shipbuilder there. He did so because the meranti and red meranti hardwood, used to build vessels, had become scarce in South Kalimantan, due to encroachment of coal mining into the forest. He predicts that along with the advance of KIPI, the timber in Tanah Kuning and the surrounding forests will also be hard to find: "Yes, my estimate is that within three years, it will decrease. Even now, it is already decreasing". Amiruddin's business is going down because the price of meranti wood has increased much. And fewer and fewer fisherfolk will go to sea when sea pollution will increasingly affect their fisheries.

REDD, hydrodams and climate chaos: the role of conservation NGOs

Not only business elites support KIPI, also big conservation companies such as WWF and the Indonesian subsidiary of The Nature Conservancy (TNC): Yayasan Konservasi Alam Nusantara (YKAN).

These NGOs should in fact be considered companies as their interests are closely linked to those of financial capital (12). In turn, the interests of financial capital are closely linked to extractive industries through projects such as KIPI. The conservation companies, just as the extractive industries and governments, support REDD+, which is an offset mechanism that allows extractive industries to continue business as usual, increasing their corporate profits. (13)

The conservation companies also helped create the so-called 30X30 Plan, discussed in international negotiations: it is a plan that aims to "protect" 30 percent of the world surface by 2030. This plan, however, is based on ideas of "fortress conservation" which excludes and marginalizes those who have guarded and coexisted with those territories for generations. The interest lies in accessing and getting hold of massive amounts of land for carbon and biodiversity offsetting, among others.

Given that North Kalimantan has more than 80 percent of forest cover, WWF and TNC/YKAN got involved. The provincial government expressed interest in implementing a jurisdictional REDD program, since it participates in the so-called Governor's Climate and Forests (GCF) Task Force. (14) TNC/YKAN and the provincial government signed an agreement in 2021. According to

TNC/YKAN's Executive Director, Herlina Hartanto: "We are honored for the trust from the provincial government to work together in realizing the great vision of North Kalimantan where development goes hand in hand with nature conservation". (15)

TNC/YKAN sees KIPI go hand in hand with hydropower dams, referred to as PLTA in Indonesia, that they consider 'renewable energy' and an essential part of that 'green' development. WWF and TNC/YKAN support (16) the building of PLTA Kayan, a 9,000 MW hydropower plant to be finalized in 2030, and PLTA Mentarang, with a total capacity of 1,375 MW.

The PLTA Kayan will impact an area as big as 184,270 hectares, erasing 6 communities, including ancient sites and sacred tombs. Besides KIPI, PLTA Kayan and PLTA Mentarang will supply with electricity also IKN, the new capital city of Indonesia (IKN), where destruction and a process of eviction of the Balik People is taking place. (17)

Besides the destruction and deforestation produced at the local level by the construction of these hydro infrastructure projects, they are also highly climate destructive. Philip Fearnside, a scientist who studies the impacts of hydrodams in the Brazilian Amazon explains (18) that these dams "emit both carbon dioxide and methane, and these emissions are much higher in the first few years after a reservoir is filled, making them especially damaging to global warming".

Final considerations

President Jokowi promotes KIPI as an example for the world: "This is the future of Indonesia. The future of Indonesia is here. If we can properly develop this, any industry related to green products will definitely look to this area". (19)

But the real example so far about KIPI is the harsh reality on the ground faced by women and men of Tanah Kuning, Mangkupati and Kampung Baru resisting and defending their bodies, lives and life spaces. They experience the destruction, deforestation, intimidation and violence that is not shown on the glossy images of electric cars and other 'green products'.

The experience of KIPI also reveals that creating protected areas and restricting access to forest-dependent people is another key aspect of the 'green' lie, as if they –rather than the industries–, were responsible for deforestation. While sending a message to investors that the forests in North Kalimantan will be protected, this message hides the ongoing destruction in Tanah Kuning, Mangkupati, and Kampung Baru. Their territories and forests will be opened and destroyed for hydrodams; for extracting the 7 million tons of limestone needed for KIPI; for offset projects; and for everything KIPI requires, including oil, coal, electricity, water, battery-related minerals, iron ore, bauxite, etc.

KIPI exposes that, in essence, the objective of 'green development' is creating just another huge opportunity for oligarchies, for political and business power interests to make profits. The urgent

message that the communities of Tanah Kuning, Mangkupadi and Kampung Baru transmit to us is that KIPI needs to immediately be stopped.

JATAM East Kalimantan and WRM

This article is mainly based on the report 'Green Lie: portrait of the Threat of Destruction, Oligarchy and People's well-being on the Site of the Green Industrial Estate Project in North Kalimantan'; 'Kebohongan Hijau: Potret Ancaman Daya Rusak, Oligarki dan Keselamatan Rakyat Pada Tapak Proyek Kawasan Industri Hijau di Kalimantan Utara', published in September 2023, and produced by Jaringan Advokasi Tambang (JATAM) East Kalimantan and NUGAL Institute for Social and Ecological Studies, as well as information obtained during a joint visit to the communities in the area in October 2023.

(1) [Kalimantan Industrial Park Can Be World's Largest Green Industrial Area, President Jokowi Says](#), February 2023.

(2) CELIOS, [Green Industrial Area Infected by Coal Power Plant: Economic Impacts, Conflicts of Interest, and Environmental Threats](#), 2023.

(3) The construction works already underway were licensed in 2021 by the provincial government after an environmental impact report (AMDAL) was carried out. With an addendum included in 2022, the AMDAL defines a total area of 9,866 hectares, including Tanah Kuning, Mangkupadi and Kampung Baru, to be developed for the first phase of implementation of the Project.

(4) According to the AMDAL, a petrochemical industry; an aluminium smelter to transform bauxite in aluminiumoxide and other subproducts for air planes and cars, as well as copper and nickel ore for electric vehicles batteries; a steel industry, to supply production of electric vehicles, armaments and infrastructure; and a policrystalline industry to produce solar panels.

(5) Konrankaltara, [PLN Tanjung Selor Surplus Daya 5,7MW](#)

(6) On top of its fossil fuelled electricity, KIPI will consume and burn even much more fossil fuels: the petrochemical industry planned with an annual demand of 490 million tons of different types of fossil oil, and 9.9 million tones of coal. The steel industry, as well, will demand coal, 14.9 million tons on an annual basis.

(7) Art. 121 of the Omnibus Law (Job Creation Law), concerning Amendments to Article 10 of Law Number 12 of 2012 concerning Land Acquisition for Development where the scope is development for the public interest expands with the addition of industrial parks, special economic zones, tourism, oil and gas industrial areas, and others. With these additions, PSN development, especially area-based projects or industrial parks for example, green industrial parks, will be intensified:

<https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/149750/uu-no-11-tahun-2020>

(8) PT ISI is a company active in the energy sector and responsible for the energy supply of KIPI. Its owner Tjandra Limanjaya, though the Celukan Bawang PLTU Project has been involved in a case of forgery and money laundering. Limanjaya is connected with politicians and is owner of PT Kayan Hydro Energi (KHE), which is the company to build the hydrodam.

(9) PT KPP, through an affiliated company connected with North Kalimantan's largest local political and business oligarch, Lauw Juanda Lesmana, involved, among others, with coal mining. He has a stake in the PT Kayan Hydropower Nusantara, together with a Malaysia company Sarawak Energy. PT KHN has a dam Project on the Mentawa river, it is a company that competes with the other hydrodam Project in the Kayan river to supply energy to KIPI

(10) Three other business people, Wito Krisnahadi, Christian Ariano Rachmat en Djoko Pangarso Budi Santoso, are indirectly connected with Boy for being commissioner and director of both KIPI and PT Adaro. One of PT Adaro's owners is Cita Mineral Investindo, a bauxite company owned by the 20st richest person

World Rainforest Movement

in Indonesia, and responsible for devastating livelihoods in Obi, north Moluccas, and Wawoni, Southeast Sulawesi

(11) On the contrary, the local government reduced the so-called Object Selling Value (NJOP) of land. While in 2020 the NJOP in the KIPI area was still 56 thousand rupiah per square metre, this amount suddenly dropped drastically to 6 thousand rupiah per square metre in 2022.

(12) African Arguments, [Revealed: Big conservation NGOs are majority governed by finance figures](#), August 2023.

(13) WRM, [15 Years of REDD: A Mechanism Rotten at the Core](#), 2022.

(14) [Penilaian kesiapan pelaksanaan pengurangan emisi dari deforestasi dan kerusakan hutan \(REDD+\) di provinsi Kalimantan Utara](#), Effendi, Wiwi et al, 2022.

(15) <https://www.ykan.or.id/id/publikasi/artikel/siaran-pers/kaltara-menuju-pembangunan-hijau/>

(16) [Berbagai Cerita dari Lapangan. Masyarakat Lokal dan Energi Terbarukan](#).

(17) JATAM Kaltim, Bersihkan Indonesia, PuSHPA, AMAN Kaltim. Nyapu: bagaimanapun perumpuan dan laki-laki Suku Balik mengalami kehilangan, derita dan kerusakan berlapis akibat megaproyk Ibu Kota Baru Indonesia, 2023.

(18) Instituto Humanitas Unisinos, [Como salvar a floresta amazônica?](#) Entrevista com Philip M. Fearnside, Agosto 2023.

(19) Id. (1)

Expansion of tree plantations for carbon markets: more evidence of the offsetting fraud

In the past two years, tree plantation initiatives aimed at generating carbon credits have doubled. Whether as large monocultures or as nicely sounding projects with grassroots communities, tree plantations for carbon offsetting are neither a solution to the climate chaos nor beneficial to rural communities in the Global South.

Destructive extractive industries are tapping into the public concern about climate chaos to promote misleading tree plantation projects as a solution for their increasing fossil fuel emissions. Plantation companies hope for new sources of revenue while fossil fuel-dependent industries seek an alibi to continue with their pollution. The result is the intense growth of tree plantation projects for carbon offsetting and a steady increase in the demand for carbon credits.

Several organisations already warned 23 years ago (1) that the capacity of trees to absorb and store carbon has been perversely used to boost the greenwashing lie that planting more trees can compensate the climate damage caused by fossil carbon emissions. What does not appear in the companies' "planted forests" adverts is the devastation their plantations cause.

Industrial timber plantations have taken over 130 million hectares of the planet at the cost of eviction of grassroots communities, land grab, water grab, increasing oppression on women, deforestation, biodiversity loss and often raging fires that not only release all the carbon back into the atmosphere, but also destroy livelihoods and cause deaths. To conceal the intrinsic violence of this production model, companies continue spreading lies and greenwashing their plantations. (2)

This trail of destruction and community conflicts has not stopped companies, investors and governments from presenting plantations for carbon offsetting as a solution to the climate crisis.

In the past two years, tree plantation initiatives aimed at carbon markets have doubled in terms of both the number of projects, as well as their average size. Considering the four major voluntary carbon registries in the world (3), the number of applications and projects increased from 167 to 367 from January 2021 to May 2023, with an average of estimated annual emission reductions from 135,000 to 213,000 tons of carbon dioxide per project. Almost 90 percent of the projects take place in the Global South.

Some of the largest plantation companies are among the profiteers. The giant pulp & paper company Suzano in Brazil argues that its 38,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantation project in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul would not have taken place without the extra income from the carbon credits – a blatant lie given that the company has been aggressively expanding its plantations to feed its new pulp plant under construction.

Tree monocultures are not the only problem. Companies that specialize in profiteering from the polluting industries' interest in carbon offsets are signing up small-scale farmers and indigenous peoples for tree planting. In several of these smallholder schemes, the farmers are unaware that their names and lands will be used by faraway companies to make an extra profit and claim to be 'carbon neutral'. Through the Paris-based Livelihoods Fund, for example, companies like Danone, Michelin, Hermès, SAP, Mars, Chanel, and 'development' banks like Germany's KfW (through its subsidiary DEG Invest), and others are investing in plantations in Andhra Pradesh, India, where farmers say they are not aware of carbon credits, even though their land and labour has generated carbon credits that only benefit polluting industries. (4)

Oil companies have also been involved in land grabs to expand tree plantations for carbon offsetting. In the Republic of Congo, communities have nowhere to grow their food because oil giant Total is taking over the land to set up tree plantations, claiming its profiting from oil and gas extraction can continue without damaging the climate. (5)

At the national level, many governments and lawmakers have done their part to promote tree plantations for carbon offsetting. For example:

- In New Zealand, as a central piece of the government's path to emissions reduction, the state emissions trading scheme rewards those landowners who invest in pine monocultures. This government support has driven a sharp increase of such monocultures; this has dissolved communities and caused huge social and cultural losses. (6)
- In Paraguay, the Proeza project guides the State's institutional policy for forestry, and is based on eucalyptus plantations expansion to meet the country's National Determined Contributions (NDC). (7) Projects have been financed by the Green Climate Fund and carried out through the Arbaro Fund, whose plantations have been exposed for abuses and harm to communities in the South American and African countries where it operates. (8)
- In India, the parliament has recently approved the Forest Conservation (Amendment) Bill, which lowers the restrictions for establishing tree plantations on certain types of land. This could trigger a considerable expansion of afforestation and reforestation projects under the guise of planting trees to help the country to achieve its net-zero emissions target by 2070.

At the international level, corporate lobbies, intergovernmental organizations and big conservation NGOs push States to advance even further the legitimization of compensation mechanisms, including monoculture tree plantations. That's what stands out when looking at attempts to further integrate carbon offsetting in the UN Paris Agreement; the number of deals (9) signed between big project developers and national governments ahead of the UN-Climate COP 28 to scale up carbon projects covering millions of hectares; at the fact that corporations are closely monitoring the outcomes of the UN climate conference in terms of the market implications of its decision-making (10); and at events such as the Africa Climate Summit aimed at "driving green growth & climate finance solutions", in which tree plantations and carbon offsets received significant attention.

Meanwhile, the root of the problem remains untouched. Global extraction of oil, gas and even coal is expected to reach record levels by the end of 2023 – and so are greenhouse gas emissions. (11)

As large as they can be, no tree plantation or any other “nature-based solution” will ever be able to absorb the carbon continuously transferred from the underground to the atmosphere.

Whether as large monocultures or as nicely sounding projects with grassroots communities, tree plantations for carbon offsetting will never be a solution to the climate chaos and will never solve the problems of land- and forest-dependent communities in the Global South. On the contrary, the expansion of these plantations is further evidence of the scam of carbon offsetting, allowing the fossil fuel-dependent industry to keep business as usual and deepening colonial, capitalist, patriarchal and racist relations that oppress communities. For all these reasons, tree plantations for carbon offsetting must be confronted and stopped!

WRM International Secretariat

- (1) [The Mount Tamalpais Declaration](#), 2000.
- (2) See here the [most common misleading statements](#) currently used by plantation companies or here [what could be wrong about planting trees](#).
- (3) Verra-VCS, Gold Standard, Climate Action Reserve (CAR) and American Carbon Registry (ACR)
- (4) See more in the report [“Discredited: the voluntary carbon market in India”](#).
- (5) [“La compensation carbone au détriment des populations”](#).
- (6) [New Zealand falls out of love with sheep farming as lucrative pine forests spread](#).
- (7) [“The devil’s totality: Paraguay’s struggle against agribusiness and monoculture”](#).
- (8) [Arbaro Fund: a strategy to expand industrial tree plantations in the Global South](#).
- (9) For example [the agreement signed between UAE and Zimbabwe](#).
- (10) An example was the [“Global Carbon Markets Conference” in November 2023](#).
- (11) [Oil. Gas. Coal](#).

Regarding carbon projects in the Amazon region: why contracts that last a generation?

Carbon offsetting projects jeopardise small-scale farming, the felling of trees for subsistence, and other centuries-old practices of Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities in the Amazon region. Contracts promoted by companies undermine local care strategies and workers' creativity, undervaluing or even denying them completely.

*A "Composer of destinies
drum of all rhythms
time, time, time, time
I enter into an agreement with you
Time, time, time, time..."*

Oração ao Tempo [A Prayer to Time] – Caetano Veloso, Brazilian Popular Music singer-songwriter and important activist during the Brazilian military dictatorship of 1964-85.

During the hottest days in human history, the year 2023 left its mark on the Amazon region with one of its most severe droughts. Towns accessible only by river were isolated, with apocalyptic scenes of boats run aground where previously there was a river full of fish, ripples and dolphins that now agonize. With this in mind, I propose a discussion about climate and generational issues in the light of discussions on what has become known in these times as the carbon credit market.

The Brazilian Amazon region has been the setting of a growing number of forest conservation projects geared to generating carbon credits, also known as REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) projects. By supposedly avoiding the deforestation of enormous areas of Amazon rainforest, privately- or community-held, the owners of these projects theoretically reduce greenhouse gas emissions, thus acquiring the right to sell carbon credits to polluting companies on the international market.

An important aspect of the debates around the carbon credit trade is the proposal of long-term contracts between traditional communities and carbon intermediary companies. (1) These are contract proposals whose duration varies from 30 to 40 years, in a context of much uncertainty. Among positions that express doubts and advocate caution, I mention here the publication by lawyers Maria Victoria Hernandez Lerner and Juliana Miranda, who analysed the assessment of the National Indigenous People's Foundation (FUNAI) about carbon contracts presented to various indigenous peoples in Brazil. (2) The authors point out that the contracts: a) prevent indigenous peoples from carrying out their traditional practices such as farming and felling trees for subsistence purposes without the company's prior authorization; b) last more than a generation and do not contain severance clauses in case of losses for the indigenous community; c) are agreements signed by a small number of individuals, without the affected groups' due participation or their free, prior and informed consent; d) contain abusive clauses in general.

FUNAI's questioning provides clues for our own questions to emerge, allowing us to understand that the carbon credit contracts currently being put on communities' tables are an intergenerational question above all.

Firstly, we need to understand that farming patches of land, using wood for the structures of homes and thinning out excess plants to enhance the production of plants like the açai palm tree are practices of traditional communities dating back millennia and surviving among the new generations. Fire, for instance, has been used in a controlled fashion by numerous Indigenous Peoples and *quilombola* communities in order to clean small areas or cultivated plots, and to favor species considered useful, in much the same way as what we call (highly diversified) agro-forestry systems. (3) Hence, areas managed in this way are perhaps the mark of this legacy, spread out across Amazonian communities in vegetable patches planted in canoes, açai palm trees, paulato trees and rose-apple trees around people's homes, with annatto plants and chives here and there.

Considering this historical journey of the forest people, how do carbon projects treat the relationship between families and the use of fire? Is it an enemy? It is strange to read the news that one of the world's biggest oil companies, Shell, is investing heavily in carbon project intermediary companies in the Amazon region, (4) when many projects of this type have attributed the problem of deforestation to farmed plots of only 0.25 hectares, even though the emission of greenhouse gases by oil companies is incomparably greater. Is this not disproportionate treatment? Would it not make more sense for companies like Shell to be obliged to take concrete measures to reduce greenhouse gases emissions, which accelerate climate change and make the planet more hostile to living beings?

In my second argument against carbon credit contracts between communities and companies for 30+ years, I borrow the information from FUNAI, retrieved by Lerner and Miranda, (5) in which the involvement of more than one generation in the projects is questioned. I consider it extremely pertinent to question the concept of capitalism not as an economic system but as a "social order". (6) According to philosopher Nancy Fraser, this order (whose driving force is cumulative gain) seizes and feeds on the wealth expropriated from nature and subjugated peoples in order to function. It is an order that gradually undermines local care strategies and workers' creativity, undervaluing or even denying them completely. In thinking about the relationship between companies, communities and carbon projects, how can we not consider how dangerous the contracts, which will have affected an entire generation at the end of the first 30-year cycle, might be for traditional local customs – contracts whose power to influence and inform territories and families may be in the hands of intermediary companies and multinationals? When I imagine a child being born, growing up, becoming an adolescent and then an adult in a territory governed by the clauses (7) of a carbon credit contract, I am concerned for the living conditions of these future people. I have heard from sector entrepreneurs that investments in the implementation of the carbon credit system need to rely on the forest being there to cover the costs, but who is the rightful holder of the credits? Who should they belong to if not the communities? Why submit to 30 years of compliance with these clauses without guaranteeing the right to be listened for those who have not yet been born?

In my third argument, I add FUNAI's questioning of the agreements signed by a few individuals without due participation by the communities and which contain abusive clauses. Here, a problem experienced by many communities in the Amazon region when they organize is shown: perhaps the predominant model, imposed by established legislation, of a president, treasurer and secretary as the holders of the decision-making power of community associations is no longer up to today's challenges (8). I stress that I have seen and spent time with extraordinary community leaders who have contributed very much to their communities' organizational processes. These examples of historical leadership must not disintegrate. They must be respected. However, just as hegemonic power transmutes itself (9) in order to carry on with and expand its influence and gains, social organisations can also change and reinvent themselves.

For example, in 2019 and 2020, I was impressed by the social organization of the community councils of Concosta and Cajambre in the Colombian Pacific, where women and young people consistently participated in the decision-making that guided the work of the legal representative, the person elected to carry out bureaucratic tasks. There was also a treasurer and a secretary, but it seemed that they were in a permanent state of assembly, which significantly helps guide the legal representative and the association's administration. This participatory way of working is a determining factor for protecting leaders from harassment and intimidation by companies. I believe that the more a community listens to different generations and genders, the more it will be empowered not to accept risky proposals.

Building an autonomous organization takes time, patience and perseverance. Above all, it requires trust in the transformative power of new generations that understand their history and reality. It is an exercise in citizenship that we must practice from the outset, showing the various future scenarios resulting from possible decisions. In this regard, I honestly have no idea whether the contracts currently in force will strengthen or weaken communities' autonomy. What I do know is that choosing to co-manage territories for 30-40 years with capital from intermediary companies and multinationals moving millions of dollars in currency or cryptocurrency is not fair to those who are not yet in a position to have a say in their future and who, given the stage that has been set today and the players involved, will bear the brunt of this decision.

If the world in which we live and which is suffering from climate change is still at the tentative dawn of a non-patriarchal, non-racist, non-colonial, non-rentier (10) structure, how is it possible to allow community territories to be led by patriarchal, racist, colonial and rentier markets? If we live in a dominant system that uses nature for financial accumulation and dumps its waste on Mother Earth, how can we believe that its solutions will be of service to us?

** This article is based on the third of a series of letters by the author on the subject of carbon credits in the Amazon region.*

Carlos Augusto Ramos, pantojaramos@gmail.com

PhD candidate at the Amazon Institute of Family Farming of the Federal University of Pará (INEAF/UFGPA) with a master's degree in Forestry Science.

World Rainforest Movement

- (1) Participants in the public hearing held in Portel, in the state of Pará, Brazil, on January 24, 2023, and organized by the Public Prosecution Service of the State of Pará reported on an agreement signed between the president of a community association in Portel and a carbon company in force for 40 (forty) years (MPA, 2023). Hearing minutes available [here](#). Retrieved on April 20, 2023.
- (2) Technical information No. 21/2021/COPA/CGGAM/DPDS-FUNAI, according to LERNER & MIRANDA. Olhar para o céu com os pés fincados na terra: Áreas de uso coletivo e mercado voluntário de carbono na Amazônia brasileira: uma abordagem baseada em direitos. Technical Report. 2023. [Available here](#). Retrieved on September 22, 2023.
- (3) CLEMENT et al., 2010 cited by FURQUIM, L.; WATLING, J.; SHOCK, M.; NEVES, E. O testemunho da arqueologia sobre a biodiversidade, o manejo florestal e o uso do fogo nos últimos 14.000 anos de história indígena. In: Povos tradicionais e biodiversidade no Brasil [electronic resource]: contribuições dos povos indígenas, quilombolas e comunidades tradicionais para a biodiversidade, políticas e ameaças / Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, Sônia Barbosa Magalhães and Cristina Adams, organizers; Eduardo G. Neves, coordinator of section 6. – São Paulo: SBPC, 2021. 85 pages.
- (4) Information [available here](#).
- (5) Ditto note 2.
- (6) FRASER, Nancy. Capitalismo Caníbal. / Nancy Fraser. – 1st ed., Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2023. Libro Digital, EPUB.
- (7) It is interesting that the word clause derives from the Latin diminutive CLAUSUS, “closure, conclusion”, past participle of CLAUDERE, “to close, enclose”. So a person who is in prison, for example, is bound by a clause. [See here](#).
- (8) The banks of the rivers in the Amazon estuary are occupied by thousands of traditional communities that often formally set up small residents’ associations.
- (9) Just like the bushmaster snake in the Fábula Amarga [Bitter Fable] from the e-book Gosto de Fábulas, available at www.recantodasletras.com.br/e-livros/6907178
- (10) The term ‘rentier’ is used to describe economic practices or structures of earning income that are not based on labour or productive activities, but in the ownership of assets such as financial securities, land, natural resources, etc.

New publication: “Certification schemes on ‘sustainability’: 30 years of deceit and violence”

A compilation of articles from the WRM Bulletin aims to expose the damaging role played by companies and organizations involved in certification schemes. After three decades, what is clear is that the only “sustainability” that they guarantee is that of corporations’ business and that of certification industry itself.

The shelves in supermarkets and stores are full of certified products. The packaging displays different labels indicating products were made with “sustainable” paper or wood, food or cosmetic products made with “sustainable” palm oil, “responsible” soybeans and so on and so forth. Even when it comes to buying an airplane ticket, consumers can pay a little more to *ensure* that their carbon emissions are (supposedly) “neutralized”, so as to guarantee that much touted “sustainability”.

But why is there this need for so many labels and forms of certification? What is actually being certified? And who is benefitting from this? After 30 years of certification schemes with environmental and social bias, what is clear is that the only “sustainability” that they guarantee is that of corporations’ lucrative business and that of certification industry itself.

The first international label for forestry products and their production chain emerged in the early 90s, with the creation of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Although its origin is connected with civil society pressure on corporations, FSC has been fully incorporated into the production logic of logging companies operating in forests, of giant paper and pulp corporations using tree monoculture plantations, as well as of producers and distributors of consumer goods.

Over time, having shown that it did not constitute any threat – on the contrary: an opportunity – to the accumulation strategy of the corporations involved, other sectors started creating similar mechanisms. In this way, they could wash their image in the face of the environmental and social damage caused by their production chain. Hence, starting in the 2000s, initiatives and so-called roundtables for “sustainable” or “responsible” production of palm oil, soybeans, cocoa, sugarcane, among others, proliferated.

All these initiatives have various aspects in common:

- They are schemes that present themselves as non-profit associations including many apparently diverse actors and interests (companies, NGOs, governments etc.) However, in practice, the business sector participants and their allies, like the big conservationist NGOs, dominate these initiatives and impose their interests in a highly unequal power relation between the members. This is also evident in the focus given to technical and procedural aspects, which often leave real conflicts of affected communities outside the scope of certification.

- They are mechanisms that establish operational guidelines and directives for companies to adhere to on a voluntary bases, leaving no possibility of legal consequences when rules are broken – rules formulated and judged by the companies themselves, it should be noted.
- They are initiatives submitted to the logic of the market and its expansion, that is to say, certification labels have become important both to obtain funding for companies' expansion projects and to win over consumers, mainly urban consumers and those from the global North.
- They are mechanisms headquartered in countries of the North, and with management boards mainly composed of men and white people. Rural communities of the South that have to face the certified plantations play the role of mere receivers of determinations imposed from outside about the use of the space where they live. And if they want to question the actions of any of the certified companies, they must submit to the protocol created by the certification system itself on how to proceed.
- They are mechanisms used by companies as defence mechanisms whenever they are faced with criticism over the impacts of their activities: “Our products are certified...”, “The project has certification...”, as if this guaranteed that there is no cause for concern.

One way or another, such certification mechanisms have not stopped the destructive expansion of industrial tree plantations, oil palms, soy, etc. Also, they have not been able to resolve the conflicts generated with traditional communities and Indigenous Peoples. Nor do they have the potential to do so, since they are designed to allow the continuity and expansion of corporate accumulation patterns that are intrinsically dependent on a predatory dynamic. In fact, the main common denominator of such certification schemes is that they guarantee a green label to the companies involved, thus contributing to their primary objective, i.e., the maximization of profit.

In other words, these destructive corporations need certification labels to obtain some legitimacy in the eyes of consumers and investors, bearing in mind the vast number of reports, news and studies showing their harmful effects, such as: land grabbing; problematic or inexistent community consultation processes; contamination by agro-chemicals; soil degradation; precarious and humiliating jobs; sexual abuse and other forms of violence against women, among many other impacts related to extensive monoculture plantations. Certifiers have hence become a key element through which companies seek to legitimize their territorial and economic expansion in the global South, deceiving consumers with the “sustainability” discourse. This permits one to affirm without reservation that certification itself has become an underlying cause of deforestation.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that the idea of certification has been taking on new shapes. With the creation of offset mechanisms for carbon emissions and biodiversity loss, new commodities have emerged already linked to certification mechanisms. In this new market, *carbon credits* and *biodiversity credits* – issued by certification schemes – represent a supposed guarantee that greenhouse gas emissions or the destruction of biodiversity are being duly offset elsewhere. Differently from wood, paper, palm oil or soybeans, where the certification is “added”

to the product by means of a label, in the carbon and biodiversity markets it is the certification itself that makes it feasible for the (abstract) product to be consumed. In other words, the commodity in itself is supposedly a guarantee – though a virtual guarantee, obtained through dubious methodologies and permeated by openly suspect interests.

This compilation of articles from the WRM Bulletin aims to underscore the damaging role played by companies and organizations involved in certification schemes. WRM considers it important to highlight that after three decades with ever more environmental certification labels on the market, it is urgent to put an end to this greenwashing. Ultimately, instead of combating environmental devastation and the social ills linked to corporations' and other players' operations, these labels cover up and sustain their destructive logic.

[Read and download the publication here.](#)

Cameroon: Women determined to recover their lands occupied by Socapalm/Socfin oil palm company

The Afrise women's association launched an international petition to stop the replanting of oil palm monocultures around their homes and over the grave sites of their ancestors. They are denouncing decades of sexual abuse, land dispossession and misery. They are demanding that their territory be returned to them, so that they can lead a life of dignity.

A group of women are determined to stop the replanting of oil palm in the village of Apouh en Ngog, in the district of Edéa 1 (department of Sanaga-Maritime, Littoral region) in Cameroon. They are denouncing that the company, Socapalm, continues to set up monoculture plantations around the homes and ancestral graves of their community—which is causing severe impacts on their lives.

“If they do not stop these operations, the women who live close to Socapalm in Edéa will have to endure another 50 years of suffering, abuse, rape, theft, hunger, frustration and violation of our rights, our privacy and our dignity. This would corner our whole community into living in a fundamentally painful, unjust, miserable and unbearable way,” they denounced in an international petition launched on November 25th, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

In the petition, the women—organized in the Association of (Women) Neighbors of Socapalm in Edéa (Afrise, by its French acronym)—remarked: “The history of abuses committed by companies in the oil palm sector is not new in Cameroon, nor is it new in the region”. Here you can [listen to the testimony \(in French\)](#) of Ms. Ngou Bissou Félicite Hortenseof, president of Afrise.

Socapalm is a subsidiary of Socfin, a Luxembourg-based agribusiness group that operates oil palm and rubber tree plantations. Socfin, whose majority shareholders are French billionaire Vincent Bolloré and the Belgian Fabri family, operates in eight countries in Central and West Africa. Its beginnings in the region date back to colonial times, when, in collusion with the World Bank, it managed to appropriate thousands of hectares of land. (1)

Today, Socfin controls approximately 58,000 hectares in Cameroon that were granted to it in concession. (2) It is currently in the process of renewing its plantations, replacing the oldest and least productive palm trees with new ones in order to increase its profits—which in 2021 surpassed 80 million euros. (3)

In a show of contempt towards the communities that have been fighting to reclaim their lands for years, the company is planting trees mere meters away from people's homes, and even on the graves of their loved ones. (4) The communities have been trying to stop this barbarity. However, Socapalm has suspended dialogue with them and is moving forward with replanting. Women from

the community have written a letter to the president of Cameroon asking him to act. But there has been no response.

Additionally, in a classic tactic used by companies to silence those who oppose their activities, the traditional community leader was imprisoned — a fact that the women also denounce in their petition.

Industrial oil palm plantations are synonymous with land-grabbing, territorial destruction, slavery, multiple forms of violence against communities, sexual violations, economic fraud, and many other things. (5) Socfin is no exception; on the contrary, it is a clear example of all of the above. (6) Violence is intrinsic to the large-scale plantation model, which must homogenize the territory, destroy the collective, and destroy the diverse and rich forms of production and reproduction.

Oil palm companies also need to dismantle the resistance and, above all, the struggle of women to recover their lands and the collective control of their territories and lives. Therefore, physical and sexual violence is used as a daily corporate tactic to control, intimidate and silence women. Sexual abuse is commonplace for women and girls who have to walk through shadowy plantations every day to fetch water, or to go to school, their farms, or markets where they can sell their products — since their villages have become completely surrounded by monoculture plantations.

Fed up with this situation, the women of Afrise launched a petition demanding that the company and the president of Cameroon listen to them. In it, they describe a situation that urgently needs to end: “90% of us have given our bodies to the guards in order to access the plantation. Our children are not employed by the company and they end up taking drugs, engaging in illegal activities, or taking the illegal immigration route only to die at sea. We are left to our own devices in a system that is not immune to corruption.”

And they manifest: “We will not accept spending the next 50 years in this misery. We are determined to fight to free our lands and obtain living spaces for our children, who are the current and future generations.”

We express our total solidarity with these women, who—despite the suffering—are resisting, organizing and fighting to regain their dignity!

We invite you to [read the complete petition here](#), and to share it as widely as possible.

(1) WRM Bulletin 252, [The Enduring Legacy of a Little-Known World Bank Project to Secure African Plantations for European Billionaires](#), November 2020

(2) CorpWatch, [Palm Oil Giant SOCAPALM to Return Sacred Land Back to Mbonjo Villagers in Cameroon](#), mayo 2023.

(3) Watch Africa, [Socfin exploitation of rubber & palm oil linked to deforestation & human rights abuses in Ghana & Nigeria](#), October 2023.

(4) Rights of women living near agroindustries, ACCESS to land against famine. [Video in French](#).

(5) Mongabay, [Plantation giant Socfin accused of dodging taxes in Africa](#), October 2021.

(6) WRM Bulletin 233, [SOCFIN's Plantations in Africa: Many Places of Violence and Destruction](#), September 2017.

Chile: Resistance to the forestry model in Wallmapu, Mapuche territory

For decades, Mapuche communities have been resisting the impacts of a forestry model based on large-scale monoculture plantations. In this interview, Pablo Reyes Huenchumán, spokesperson for the Paillakawe community, explains how they organize, and what the main challenges are in the struggle to recover their territory and maintain their culture.

For decades, Mapuche communities have been resisting the impacts of the forestry model that a handful of companies, in collusion with governments, have imposed in Chile. This industry, based on large-scale monoculture plantations, has caused land invasions, forest destruction, environmental contamination, social disintegration and poverty. Against this backdrop, communities are organizing to recover lands and develop their ways of life in accordance with the culture and worldview of the Mapuche People.

To deepen our understanding of this struggle, we share excerpts from an interview with Pablo Reyes Huenchumán, a *werkén* (spokesperson) from the Paillakawe Lov (a Mapuche community). The interview was originally published [on the platform Undisciplined Environments](#), in the framework of the International Day of Struggle Against Monoculture Tree Plantations in September 2023. The *Paillakawe Lov* is in a process of territorial recovery in the Gulf of Arauco, in the Biobío region of Chile, which is part of Wallmapu (Mapuche ancestral territory).

What are the main impacts in your territory of the forestry model based on large-scale plantations?

The impacts have been going on for more than 50 years. This model was established during the Pinochet dictatorship, when the take-over of Mapuche territory in this area intensified. The plantation industry, and specifically the Arauco company of the Angelini Group, acquired large swaths of territory at the expense of the people, with the help of friends and families of the dictatorship. For example, one key person in this sector was [Julio Ponce](#), Pinochet's son-in-law, who enabled the transfer of many lands to the National Forestry Corporation where he worked (CONAF, by its Spanish acronym). He ended up selling these lands at ridiculously low prices, and they ended up in the hands of the Angelini Group. Currently, Arauco has almost two million hectares in its name.

This is how this model became established, with the displacement of peasants and Mapuche people. There are stories from our family, from our *lov* (Mapuche community), stories from people who still remember how their houses were burned, and how they were threatened by forest rangers who told them that they had to leave because this was forestry sector land. Many agricultural lands were converted to plantations, which degraded the soil. Since then, the plantation industry has had a huge impact, with social, environmental, political and territorial effects.

What factors contribute to the perpetuation of this forestry model?

Plantation companies, and capital, in general, are in a constant state of restructuring and greenwashing their image. On the one hand, they rely on tools like the FSC certification (Forest Stewardship Council)—which allow them to sell their product at a higher price—all while saying that they work in an orderly and environmental fashion, without conflicts with surrounding communities. That is a lie.

The plantation company now wants to bring wind energy here. In 2019, Arauco plantation company unveiled the M.A.P.A. Project, which seeks to expand the pulp mill that is already located in the Gulf of Arauco. In conjunction with this, a wind farm project called [Viento Sur](#) was planned. In April 2022, we were invited to the indigenous and citizen consultation process. We wanted to tell them that one of the towers for this wind energy project is planned to be built over a Rewe (Mapuche sacred altar). Just like there are churches and mosques in the wingka (non-Mapuche) world, we practice our spirituality through the Rewe. What this project is proposing is very violent; for us, it is inconceivable to let this happen. And even though we gave them all the information, none of our arguments were taken into account.

Furthermore, private capital is using communities that we call *yanakona* (Mapuche communities that betray their people). These are communities that are aligned with capital interests, communities that have negotiated, for example, for the expansion of the M.A.P.A. Project. The companies offer economic compensation to the communities, but so far we have not seen a single community get out of poverty with the crumbs that the company gives them. But this appears to be a strategy: these communities are bought through their leaders. This is how the Mapuche social fabric gets taken apart.

And this is not only happening in Chile, but all throughout Latin America. Latin American capitalism is mediocre; it is always content to sell its raw materials as quickly as possible. It does not seek to generate investment so that the people can also become owners of that resource. So, the State continues to be mediocre with its own people, creating development policies through the use of these large companies as “problem solvers.” For example, there is an idea that the plantation company should be the one to solve the unemployment problem. So, the State provides spaces for the company to inaugurate cultural centers and sports centers. In this way, the State allows and encourages the company to insert itself into the social fabric. Through the use of propaganda and the media, they have gained all this space.

How do you organize to face the impacts of this model and gain sovereignty?

As Mapuche People, we organize through the *Trawun*, which are community assemblies. In the *Trawun*, we decide what actions to take. It was in a *Trawun* that we agreed to pursue the process of territorial control, which involves occupying lands; we call them lands in recovery. This involves keeping the plantation company away, even if there is a possibility for persecution, imprisonment or even death. Currently, the *Paillakawe Lov* controls about a thousand hectares; when we take into account the territory controlled by other *lovs* and neighboring communities in the Gulf of Arauco,

this is an additional 7,000 to 8,000 hectares. For the last three years, the plantation company has not been able to enter the territories that we currently control, except for in a confrontation that took place in the *Vilo Lov* in the Huape sector; that was an action carried out by the militarized police trying to enter the recovered territory with small tanks.

These land recovery processes have been going on for more than 20 years in other territories further south in the province of Arauco. The Council of All Lands, and especially the Arauco Malleco Coordinating Committee, have framed these as territorial control processes. Territorial control involves staying in the territory, making a life and exercising sovereignty in the space. And that is what we are doing: growing potatoes, peas and beans; raising chickens and pigs. But there are consequences: the plantation company is using criminal measures against us for having entered a piece of land and remained there; they are targeting the leaders in particular with criminal charges of usurpation. We also suffer other forms of harassment, through drones, helicopters, persecution and even shootings by rangers. Everyone who participates in territorial recovery processes knows that we expose ourselves to this.

What are the main challenges in this struggle?

Militarization is a challenge, even with this government under (Gabriel) Boric. We fear that Wallmapu will be [militarized](#) for the four years of his administration. The Gulf of Arauco is not mentioned much in the press—although when we took to the streets, we were called violent, terrorists, or, more recently, drug traffickers. Here, the only violence is exercised by companies and forest rangers. Another challenge we have is dealing with the company's strategies that cause divisions and co-opt leaders. And also, colonialism is still very present.

What are concrete measures that the State and other institutions could take to prioritize the people's right to decide?

In *Paillakawe Lov*, we consider that the only measure that would really be effective would be for the Chilean State to expropriate lands from these large plantation companies. Even though there are mechanisms to restitute lands through CONADI (National Corporation for Indigenous Development), they are obsolete. Recent governments have raised the quota for land purchases, but the reality is that less and less land is being purchased, because the legal owners of these lands are raising their prices. So, the restituted lands can be as small as three hectares. The Mapuche People have always criticized this form of managing territory, because it is ridiculous: the *lov* is a form of community life, it is how we develop as families and as a people in the territory; the *lov* are big spaces. A *lov* is never going to be developed on three hectares, but in a territory with physical, natural and spiritual elements—which the Mapuche need for fulfillment. So, this form of restituting land in recent years is not something that we value as Mapuche. The most revolutionary thing would be for the State to expropriate forestry lands from large landowners, for community management.

Here is another measure that should be taken: consultations related to the ILO [Convention 169](#) (International Labor Organization) on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples should be binding—not only as it relates to Mapuche People but to all Indigenous Peoples.

How do you imagine or dream of a future with territorial sovereignty?

Most of the territory currently controlled by the *Paillakawe Lov* is high-elevation land, hills, and coastal mountains. There are about 200 hectares of native forest, which are rich in biodiversity, but the rest is — or was — tree monoculture. Despite being a mountainous space, in certain areas it is possible to develop subsistence or family agriculture in the *lov*, and *Trafkintu* (exchange) of products, as the Mapuche people did before the European invasion, and even before the Inkan invasion, with small-scale agricultural production of corn and different kinds of vegetables, favas and beans. So, we dream of having family-based and local agriculture, with products from the area produced without the use of agrochemicals. This can give us stability, so that we can watch our families grow without going hungry or being slaves to large landowners. And we can also contribute to the rest of the population; as Mapuche people we can contribute wheat and potatoes to soup kitchens. This is what we propose: a return to food sovereignty — both for ourselves and for the population as a whole, between peoples.

In the areas where it is very difficult to restore organic farming, monoculture would be acceptable. Not on the level of the plantation company here in the area, but on a very small scale — one or two hectares. This would be for the production of firewood for cooking, and for the construction of smaller wooden structures and improvements to the *ruka* (house). In this way, we could avoid felling native trees for these purposes, and also leave areas of native forest untouched — spaces where the *Ñuke Mapu* (Mother earth) has her own space, and spaces where we can practice our spirituality, for the Trawun celebration, for *Ngillatun* (Mapuche ceremony), and for *Palín* (a game that strengthens alliances between different *lov*). This is what we want to rebuild.

Marien González-Hidalgo

Research associate at the Rural Development Division of the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU).

History of a victory for the defense of life in Panama

2023 culminates with a victory for the popular struggle to defend life in Panama. This will influence every corner on earth where, in the face of environmental conflicts, people are resisting and defending their territory.

As a result of massive and continued mobilization of the Panamanian people against mining in an environmentally important and sensitive area of their territory, Contract Law 406 was declared unconstitutional. This law had authorized the operations of Cobre Panamá, a mining subsidiary of one of the largest copper mining companies on the planet, First Quantum Minerals FQM (based in Toronto, Canada). The declaration of unconstitutionality entails, among other things, the cessation of operations and the closure of the mine.

Without a doubt, this outcome sets a crucial precedent for thousands of territorial defense processes around the world, highlighting that victory is possible, even against global corporations that concentrate so much power.

Nonetheless, this is not just the result of actions and mobilizations that took place in October to November 2023. Rather, the history of this struggle dates back more than 25 years. Therefore, it is pertinent to analyze the process in retrospect.

What happened before?

Resistance to mining dates back to the beginning of the 1990s, when prospecting and studies for mining exploitation began. Communities and organizations were worried about the impacts they knew might occur as a result of the mining. In 1996, a concession was granted to the company Petaquilla for gold mining, which later was extended to copper mining. Petaquilla later ended up ceding the concession to Minera Panamá, a subsidiary of FQM.

Concerns about the mine centered on, among other things, its location in the middle of territories with high biological diversity. Mesoamerica joins two huge continental land masses that were separated in previous geological eras; the emergence of this territory meant the appearance of a bridge facilitating the connection and exchange of plant and animal populations. Panama is the narrowest point of this bridge, making it a kind of funnel where much of the subcontinent's biodiversity is concentrated. This landscape is also the territory of indigenous peoples and peasant and local communities. In other words, it is a highly diverse area, not only biologically, but also culturally.

As mining activities began, so did social organization. A committee was formed to shut down Petaquilla about 20 years ago. At that time, though, there was minimal community involvement in the resistance, because communities were hopeful about the mining company's promises of development, employment and welfare. Predictably — as tends to happen with extractive

companies — these promises were not fulfilled, which led to dissatisfaction, indignation and, ultimately, to the mobilization of recent weeks. In 2012, there was an attempt to pass a law, popularly known as the chorizo law, which sought to approve mining in Panamanian districts. This sparked more social mobilization. Following the Covid pandemic, the government imposed a discourse about energizing the mining sector for the country's economic recovery. This raised all the alerts, and in May 2021, the Panama is Worth More Without Mining Movement was formed. More than 40 organizations are involved in this movement, explains Damaris Sánchez, an environmental activist from Fundiccep Foundation. That same year, a proposal for a moratorium on metal mining was presented but not accepted, as the government remained committed to its project to push mining.

In spite of starting out in a small area, the project which was just stopped encompassed 12,955 hectares and was located in three protected areas: the Omar Torrijos National Park, the Santa Fe National Park, and the Donoso Multiple-Use Area. These protected areas are part of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor (MBC), created in the early 2000s to ensure ecosystem connectivity from the Darién in Panama to the Mayan forests in Mexico. The MBC links protected areas in order to reduce threats to biodiversity, and it seeks to generate economic and social opportunities for populations in these areas, even though it does not seem to be working as hoped.

Since 1997, the mine has been operating in the area, though not consistently; among other reasons, this is due to the multiple legal cases against it. It has nonetheless caused serious environmental impacts. Communities near the mine have filed complaints and petitions with Panama's Ministry of Environment regarding the changes in water bodies, for example. However, they have not managed to even get an inspection of the contamination. In 2021, a pipe ruptured, causing waste to spill into the Pifá River. (1)

In the framework of Earth Day 2022, the Panama is Worth More Without Mining Movement presented an analysis of several reports from the Ministry of Environment, in which the Ministry itself gives an account of the multiple impacts and legal violations of the Cobre Panamá project. (2) One of the findings is that the company dumps waste into water bodies — including possibly hazardous pollutants such as heavy metals — without a permit from the Ministry. At the time of the Movement's analysis, these legal violations were in addition to more than 200 others that had been identified in previous reports, and the company had outstanding fines adding up to more than US \$11 million in debt with the Ministry.

The impacts on the forest and vegetation are especially noteworthy. These include the felling of 876 hectares of forest in excess of the authorized logging—bringing the total area affected by the project to almost 3,000 hectares. On top of this, the company has failed to comply with reforestation commitments, which are part of the Environment Impacts Assessment (EIA). The assessment identifies failures in the reforestation of 1,300 hectares during the period of 2012 to 2015. (idem reference no. 2) It is important to stress that the reforestation mentioned was included as a measure to offset the destruction caused by the logging to set up the mine. In 2016, WRM visited to the area—before the current mining project had begun—to share experiences from elsewhere about offsets as a strategy to make mining viable in protected areas. (3) The company

claimed that it was following the International Finance Corporation's standards, on which they based their biodiversity offset plans. The company website states that they "are committed to maintaining a net positive impact on biodiversity and being a global leader in biodiversity management."

In 2017, the mining operation was ruled to be unconstitutional. The ruling was not published in the official state gazette, thereby rendering the ruling ineffective. When it was finally published in 2022, the current government's response was to begin a new negotiation process with the mining company in order to issue a new contract, as community leader and activist Rubén Bernal explains.

What happened during the mobilizations?

The social mobilization began in October 2023 and made international news due to its size and results — as well as because of the repression and criminalization that occurred.

The government and mining company had been trying to validate an unconstitutional contract, supposedly by correcting errors in the previous one. They were resorting to an aggressive advertising campaign, using various media outlets to show alleged benefits of the mining. However, the reasons for the project's unconstitutionality remained. In debates in the National Assembly, there were voices in favour and against the project. But a positive aspect that stood out in this process was that communities throughout the country were very aware of what was happening. As Damaris Sánchez explains, the process was halted, and private visits to the project area were organized, probably out of fear of this situation. When the debates resumed, the public was prohibited from entering the Assembly building, and in three days the whole process—which should have taken much longer—was completed, culminating in the approval of the Contract Law on October 20. This time, the government made sure to publish the results in the official gazette.

With great difficulty, social movements and organizations obtained and studied the text of the contract, and then presented the outrageous content therein to Panamanian society. This included a 60-year extension of the contract, a ban on air travel over the project area, a 5,000-hectare extension of the concession area, the possibility to extract not only copper, but also gold and other materials, and a prohibition on popular mobilization. As a result, the social movements declared the project a colonial enclave.

Meanwhile, youth in Panama City energized the resistance, playing an essential role in the eventual victory. Their actions included a blockade around the National Assembly headquarters to demand that people be heard. This was used as an excuse by the government to unleash repression. Due to actions on the part of State agents, one youth lost an eye. The incident increased the indignation of the population, who were already suffering from the high cost of living in the country. On October 23rd, people took to the streets, fields, highways, and even to the sea to oppose the passing of the Contract Law. They did not stop demonstrating and mobilizing until November 28th, when the Supreme Court issued the ruling that the Contract Law was unconstitutional.

The first week, until October 29th, was a critical time; in speeches, the President of the country threatened to prosecute protesters. He eventually proposed a referendum, to which the people answered that they were already in the streets, demonstrating their position and their decision. The popular response was to increase the resistance, which ended up paralyzing not only the capital, but all the main activities in the country. Even the Pan-American highway, the main highway in Panama, was blocked.

The forms of resistance were diverse: there were marches, vigils, and blockades; skippers in the port area where the mining company operated lined up their boats to prevent the company from taking out the minerals; doctors and teachers joined in; schools suspended classes. Residents of Colón, Donoso and Omar Torrijos districts, and part of Veraguas—people who previously had not participated in the resistance due to their hopes of work and welfare—joined the resistance. There are estimates that on some days more than 250,000 people mobilized. The whole country was shut down until the demand of the population was fulfilled.

Not even the severity of the repression or lawsuits could make a dent in the mobilization: four people were killed and more than 1,000 were arrested during the demonstrations.

The pressure on the Supreme Court was impressive. A camp was set up around its headquarters for 12 days, making it clear to the judges that they were being watched and that their decision was being awaited. The message was clear: if they ruled in favor of the company, validating an unconstitutional law, there was no telling what could happen in the streets, and the repercussions would be great.

On November 28th, the Court issued its ruling, confirming that the Cobre Panamá contract is unconstitutional. This legitimizes the people's struggle in the fields, seas and streets. 25 Articles in the contract went against provisions in the Constitution. The Court took into consideration complaints about environmental impacts, as well as the lack of citizen consultation and a public bidding process. The repercussions of the ruling have even led to orders to close the mine, an unprecedented decision in this Central American country.

Challenges and the future

Through Cobre Panamá, the mining company has stated that "transparency and compliance with the law have always been essential to the development of its operations, and it remains open to constructive dialogue to reach consensus." The next step in the company's version of "constructive dialogue:" First Quantum sued Panama in the International Court of Arbitration ICC. (4)

Community divisions—stoked by private sector actors—leave the challenge of rebuilding the social fabric in some places. Despite this fact, the people's evaluation of the situation is more than positive.

World Rainforest Movement

The victory of the Panamanian people sets an example for those who defend forests, territories and the dignity of the people who inhabit them. It is an inspiration for struggles and resistance movements underway all over the planet.

What occurred represents a turning point in the political history and participation in Panama. Indifference was defeated; those who had not participated before became involved in the mobilisations. And communication was popular in nature, marking independence from traditional and corporate media.

The struggle continues, so that in the future, mining will be prohibited in the country's Constitution.

WRM International Secretariat

- (1) Article [“Panama: a call for environmental justice and against metal mining”](#), at Hora Cero, by Krissia Girón.
- (2) [Declaration from the Movimiento Panamá Vale Más Sin Minería](#) (Movement Panama Is Worth More Without Mining).
- (3) Article [“Environmental offsets in Panama: A strategy that opens up protected areas to mining”](#), from the WRM Bulletin, by Teresa Pérez.
- (4) Article [“Panama Protestors Defeat First Quantum Minerals' Copper Mine”](#), at CorpWatch, by Paula Reisdorf.

RECOMMENDED

Systemic sexual abuse in a celebrated carbon 'offset' project in Kenya

In the wake of a year filled with scandals involving REDD-type projects, this report by SOMO released in November 2023 reveals that the North American company Wildlife Works is responsible for serious human rights violations in its Kasigau project, in Kenya. The report is based on dozens of testimonies from members of the local community who reported widespread sexual harassment and abuse by senior members of Wildlife Works staff and project guards. One is dealing here with yet more evidence of how, in the patriarchal society we live in, women are always the most impacted, in particular in initiatives and mechanisms in which they are relegated to passive roles. [Access the report here.](#)

Statement in solidarity with the decolonial struggle of the Palestinian people

During the Second Thematic Social Forum on Mining and Extractivism, held in Indonesia in October 2023, representatives of communities and organizations from all over the world that fight against mining and its impacts came together to share, learn and formulate strategies relating to the right to say 'no' to extractivism. At the end of the gathering, members of the Yes to Life, No to Mining network and other participants expressed their solidarity with the people of Palestine and its struggle for self-determination by means of a statement making the connection between colonialism, mining, militarization and war, as well as the fundamental need of unity of all who suffer their consequences and seek to defeat them. [The Statement is still open for signatures here.](#)

Toolkit for fighting climate false solutions

In November 2023, Friends of the Earth International made available a very useful tool for organizations and activists that oppose false climate solutions. The publication is divided into three parts: the first presents evidences of impacts of such false solutions around the world; the second brings together a list of links to reports, summaries, articles and news stories on the issue; and the third is a guide to understanding the different and complex mechanisms that drive – dangerously – the carbon markets. [Access the materials here.](#)

Pesticide Atlas

Agrochemicals are used all over the world in ever bigger quantities, and are advocated by agribusiness as if they were an inevitable component of food production. The most recent edition of the Heinrich Böll Foundation's Pesticide Atlas is the Brazilian edition, launched in December 2023, was adapted and launched in eight countries, in five languages. The material presents a broad overview of the theme, with data on use and impacts of agrotoxins on agriculture, health and the economy, among others. [Access the publication here.](#)

Articles of the Bulletin can be reproduced and disseminated using the following source:
Bulletin 268 of the World Rainforest Movement (WRM): "The green scam: oppression, conflicts and resistance" (<https://wrm.org.uy/>)

[Subscribe to the WRM Bulletin](#)

*The Bulletin aims to support and contribute to the struggle of Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities over their forests and territories.
Subscription is free.*

Did you miss the last issue of the WRM bulletin
"Resistance and solidarity against corporate assault on territories"
[You can access all the past issues of the WRM bulletin at this link](#)

Bulletin of the World Rainforest Movement

This Bulletin is also available in French, Spanish and Portuguese

Editor: Joanna Cabello

Editorial Assistants: Diego Cardona, Lucía Guadagno, Edmundo Hoppe Oderich, Jutta Kill, Winfridus Overbeek and Teresa Pérez

WRM International Secretariat

Av. Bolivia 1962 Bis, CP 11500 Montevideo, Uruguay

Phone/Fax: +598 26056943

wrm@wrm.org.uy / <http://www.wrm.org.uy>