



Dirty tactics behind 'green' business

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OUR VIEWPOINT

Communities stand up against corporate land grabs and State violence

Across the global South, communities that oppose corporate control of their territories face not only corporate violence but also tear gas, batons and state repression. Challenging the expedient misinterpretation of “all land belongs to the State” that governments use to protect corporate interests, communities stand strong in the struggle to reclaim their ancestral lands “because it is a sacred place; it is a place that gives meaning to our existence.”

This editorial is about the courage and determination of communities who are mobilizing to denounce and resist corporate control over community lands. Often, they face not only corporate violence and control over their lands but also tear gas, batons and state repression unleashed by governments resorting to ‘a greedy misinterpretation of “all land belongs to the State”’ to protect corporate interests. (1)

This is what has been happening in the Litoral region of Cameroon, where the community of Apouh à Ngog is opposing the replanting of industrial oil palm plantations on their ancestral lands by Socapalm, a Cameroonian subsidiary of the notorious multinational Socfin. For nearly 50 years, the company operations have been making life miserable for the community of Apouh à Ngog, whose original village site was eradicated by the corporate oil palm plantations decades ago.

As Socapalm replaces sections of old oil palm plantations, it not only ignores community requests for retrocession of vital spaces immediately around the village; the new company plantings are creeping even closer to the village edge. “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 is what the Association of Women Neighbouring SOCAPALM Edéa (**AFRISE**) explains in a petition calling for an end to this occupation of the village’s vital life spaces by RSPO-certified Socapalm. (2)

In January 2025, the women of AFRISE planted banana saplings on some 35 hectares of disputed land being prepared for replanting by Socapalm. The company sprayed the young banana plants with chemicals shortly after and on 24 March, returned under the protection of dozens of armed military personnel to continue the replanting. Overcoming fear and facing tear gas and batons, the community stood in the way of the company’s bulldozers, blocking the corporate replanting for days. As the company forged on with its planting, over 60 organisations called for an immediate stop to the continued corporate encroachment on the community’s ancestral lands. They also urged the government of Cameroon to guarantee vital living space for the community of Apouh à Ngog - instead of sending in armed military forces to protect the corporate interest of Socfin, a company that like few others epitomizes the colonial pattern of exploitation of the region.

It is also what has been happening in the municipality of Aracruz, in the Brazilian state of Espírito Santo, where about 1000 women from the Rural Landless Workers' Movement (MST) took action to demand agrarian reform and against the multiple forms of violence perpetrated against women.

(3) Under the slogan, “Agribusiness means violence and environmental crimes. The struggle of women is against capital”, they occupied land controlled by Suzano, the world’s largest exporter of wood pulp. For years, the company has gone about its business with impunity, amassing large areas of fertile land and committing violations against Indigenous Peoples, quilombola and landless peasant communities. In a press release, the MST points out that “Multinationals are not worried about obtaining land in order to solve the problem of hunger in the country” and that it would be possible to settle more than 100,000 families on the 2.7 million hectares of fertile land in Brazil that are held by Suzano. In 2011, Suzano agreed to provide 22 areas occupied by the corporation for settlements of landless peasants, but the company has been failing to comply with its commitment.

Just as AFRISE in Apouh à Ngog, the women occupying the land in Aracruz vow to continue their struggle for land to grow food, as they, too, are confronted with a state siding with the company, not peasants. (4)

It is also what has been happening in Cote d’Ivoire, where 20 members of the indigenous Winnin community were arrested in December 2024. The Winnin have been voicing their opposition to the privatization of their ancestral lands at the Monogaga forest. (5) The Winnin have called these forests their home for more than six centuries. The Ivorian Ministry of Water and Forests, meanwhile, granted a concession to Roots Wild Foundation whose operations have already been causing conflict with the communities. The arrests and the threats to individuals of the Winnin prior to their detention highlight serious concerns about the criminalization of land defenders in the region.

It is also what is happening in Indonesia, in Papua, and across the Mekong region, as we read in two declarations we share in this edition of the bulletin. In Papua, the Solidaritas Merauke Movement came together to share stories of collective suffering and trauma caused by state-corporate crimes, especially in the name of what the government of Indonesia declared National Strategic Projects (PSN). The declaration, collectively prepared by the Solidaritas Merauke Movement, highlights community struggles against the dispossession of their living space by such state-corporate mega-projects that defile what communities hold sacred. In Thailand, communities from the Mekong region and Punan communities from North Kalimantan in Indonesia came together to exchange and learn about community struggles against mega-hydrodam projects. On the occasion of the International Day of Action Against Dams on 14 March, they reaffirm through a declaration the importance of standing together to show that “we are united and firm in the collective struggle to defend our rivers, forests and futures from false green solutions and corporate greed”.

In an interview with WRM in 2018, a leader of the Akroá-Gamela Peoples in Brazil explains why despite the fear of state repression and violence from greedy corporations, communities stand strong in the struggle to reclaim their ancestral lands: “because it is a sacred place; it is a place that gives meaning to our existence.” (6)

Because land gives meaning to their existence, communities are standing up against corporate violence and governments’ greedy misinterpretation of “all land belongs to the State”. In Apouh à Ngog, Aracruz and the many other places, communities are organizing to protect and reclaim the

lands of their ancestors - The struggle continues!

- (1) [WRM Bulletin 241. 2018. A Reflection from Africa: Conquer the Fear for Building Stronger Movements.](#)
- (2) [Petition. Cameroon: Testimony of women who reclaim their land back.](#)
- (3) [Against capital and patriarchy, MST women hold day of struggle and occupy Suzano-owned eucalyptus plantations in Brazil.](#)
- (4) Brasil de Fato. 2025. [Justiça determina despejo de ocupação de mulheres do MST em área da Suzano no ES.](#)
- (5) Mongabay. 2025. [Des leaders communautaires emprisonnés après s'être opposés à la privatisation controversée d'une forêt classée en Côte d'Ivoire.](#)
- (6) [WRM Bulletin 241. 2018. Brazil: I am Kum'tum, I am of the Akroá-Gamela People.](#)

NGOs at the service of plundering territories: the Earthworm Foundation case

Under the guise of 'conflict mediation' and community empowerment, the work of certain corporate NGOs results in communities continuing without access to and control over their lands, and in strengthening destructive production models. One example is the Earthworm Foundation's partnership with palm oil agribusiness in several countries. See the article and interview below.

For decades, agribusiness, mining and oil corporations have partnered NGOs and nonprofit organisations to try to greenwash their image in face of the pollution and destruction their activities cause. Promoting themselves as 'sustainable' on the basis of these partnerships is a strategy that helps companies meet consumers' demands, obtain tax benefits, access funding and abide by compensation measures demanded by regulatory agencies.

But beyond greenwashing corporate destruction, the organisations hired by extractive and agribusiness companies have also increasingly taken on a central role in so-called 'conflict mediation' with rural communities that are part of the territories coveted by these industries. One such organisation is the Earthworm Foundation, whose name has often appeared in reports received by WRM from communities facing conflicts with corporations in the territories they inhabit.

What is the Earthworm Foundation?

Founded in 1999 as the Tropical Forest Trust, Earthworm converted itself into a foundation in 2019. It is headquartered in Switzerland and has more than 300 members of staff in over 15 offices in various countries. (1)

According to the foundation, its mission is "to create a world where people and nature thrive in harmony" (2). One of its promotional videos says Earthworm "creates solutions with businesses to heal nature and people". (3) This almost lyrical tone is very far from expressing what Earthworm Foundation does and for whom it works. In practice, its work helps international corporations make sure that nothing gets in the way of the flow of commodities along their long supply chains, so that the corporations face no obstacles in extracting raw materials and increasing the sale of their production on globalised markets.

Corporations and the Earthworm Foundation

In its 2023 annual report, major corporations, mainly from the agribusiness, but also mining, consumer goods and large-scale retail sectors, are among the supporters of the Earthworm Foundation. (4) In previous years, the organisation also received funds from oil companies, like Shell.

Companies that support Earthworm (2023)	
Industry	
Agribusiness	Bunge, Cargill, Wilmar, Asia Pulp & Paper, Louis Dreyfus Foundation, Olam, Veracel (Suzano and Stora Enso) and Socfin, among others.
Consumer goods and retail giants	Pepsico, Nestlé, Danone, Mars, L'Oréal, Colgate-Palmolive, Mc Donald's, Wal-Mart Foundation and 3M, among others.
Mining	Alcoa

Between 2019 and 2023, the Earthworm Foundation's revenue grew by 59 percent, totalling almost 100 million dollars. Some 90 percent of this amount came from its more than 50 members and partners – mainly private companies. This contrasts with the roughly 4 percent that originate in grants from public authorities. The revenue growth is also reflected in the earnings of the eight members of the foundation's executive team, who took home 1.6 million US-dollars in 2023. (5)

In one of its promotional videos, Earthworm states that "if we don't work with companies, we are not changing the world". (6) The fact that several of these companies are members of the Foundation raises the question: where is the line between working with them and working for them?

What does the Earthworm Foundation do?

Earthworm enters the scene when conflict between a company and communities in some way threatens to affect corporate profits. The Foundation is then contracted to solve the problem with goodwill by all the parties involved in a process of mediation. However, what WRM has learned from decades of supporting struggles of communities is that land grabbing, violence, conflicts and destruction are inherent, inseparable parts of the business models of Earthworm's clients, and impossible to be solved through mediation and goodwill.

With that objective, Earthworm approaches affected communities, organises courses and other activities with communities, NGOs, governments, academics etc. However, to what extent can an organisation that proposes to mediate conflicts do so in a just way when most of its money comes from the corporations that cause the conflicts? Beyond the money issue, another question arises: can there be an honest intervention when the worldview of those who present themselves as mediators is much more closely aligned with that of the corporations than that of the affected communities? Questions like these have emerged in several places where Earthworm has intervened on behalf of corporations.

Earthworm 'mediating' conflicts between the palm oil industry and rural communities

Let us take one of the main products around which Earthworm's work gravitates: palm oil. The palm oil production system adopted by many companies that fund Earthworm is based on monoculture plantations, intensive use of agrottoxins, synthetic fertilizers, hyper-exploitation of workers and appropriation of community territories. (7) In West and Central Africa, in particular, the very process by means of which oil palm companies received land concessions is usually at the

heart of the disputes with communities. Multinational corporations like Socfin, Wilmar and Golden Veroleum continue to benefit from colonial era land tenure laws that disrespect the rights of communities over their traditional lands and hand over vast tracts of community territory to such corporations. (8)

Consequently, this model has inevitably been associated with loss of land, violence and undermining of traditional community governance. Communities affected by these corporate plantations start having to cope with contaminated water courses, loss of access to hunting grounds, food and medicinal plants. In short, the territories where they live are completely transformed by the production of commodities for export.

The incompatibility and shock between this model of production and the way of life of traditional communities has brought about serious conflicts in various regions of the Global South. The Earthworm Foundation has been hired by oil palm corporations to intervene in several of these conflicts, which has tended to increase rather than resolve problems faced by communities.

Earthworm and Socfin in Cameroon and Liberia

One example is the agribusiness giant Socfin, whose majority share owners are the Belgian Fabri family and French billionaire Vincent Bolloré. The corporation became a member of Earthworm in 2017, roughly at the same time it published its "responsible management policy". In this document, Socfin states its commitment, among others, to rural communities in the regions of its palm and rubber tree plantations.

Cameroon, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Cambodia are some of the countries in which Socfin subsidiaries operate, and where Earthworm has conducted investigations into conflicts that the presence of the company brings about. Since 2023, Earthworm has published seven reports about these conflicts. These reports follow a pattern that makes the organisation sound much more like a spokesperson for the Socfin group than an impartial entity that is investigating complaints against the company. (9) Below we highlight three recurring perceptions from these reports.

First, it is worth mentioning that Earthworm recognises that "Socfin continues to receive environmental and social grievances" – not doing so would be impossible –, adding that these complaints come "from international media and NGOs". Note that by complementing the sentence in this way right at the start of its reports, Earthworm situates the problem with media and NGOs – as if it were they rather than affected communities raising complaints about violations. Furthermore, in Earthworm's reports, this acknowledgement of violations by Socfin is always accompanied by a mention that the company has made "progress in implementing its responsible management commitments".

Second, among the damage and violations reported by communities – like land grabbing, sexual violence, pollution of water courses, destruction of grave sites and sacred places, threats and intimidation, among many others (10) – Earthworm recognizes only some in its reports. A number of incidents invariably end up being classified explicitly as "unfounded allegations", "partially founded", or "founded but not Socfin's responsibility". An example are the Earthworm reports on three locations in Cameroon (Edéa, Mbongo and Mbambou) where it has been determined that Socfin must give back thousands of hectares of land to decentralised local authorities. According

to Earthworm, this is an "ongoing" measure, initiated seven years ago with surveys to set the limits of the company's plantations. Because the process has been dragging on for years, communities began taking back certain areas, asserting their already established right to these lands. Rather than provide an impartial account of the context, Earthworm adopts the company's perspective on the controversy when it writes about "intrusion by third parties" and that "third parties (communities, workers etc) are encroaching Socapalm Land Titles". (11)

Another example comes from Liberia. After 7 years of partnership, Socfin and Earthworm's inability to solve the conflicts with communities led to the company selling one of its plantations in the country in 2024. (12) But why, if 'progress was being made'?

The third characteristic of the Earthworm Foundation's reports is precisely its positive emphasis, i.e., everything is in a "continuous improvement process". In one of the more recent investigations about Socfin's conflicts with communities (although the word conflict does not appear in these Earthworm reports about Socfin), Earthworm concluded that "despite the challenges encountered at the start of Socfin's operations in Cambodia, the organisation has taken significant steps to implement its sustainability commitments progressively".

Earthworm Foundation reports suggest that Socfin is progressing while the corporation continues with its business as usual. (13) At the same time, Earthworm shirks away from the fact that after nearly a decade of 'working with' Socfin, the problems faced and denounced by communities persist wherever Socfin operates, above all complaints relating to access to land and violations of communities' customary rights to their lands.

Earthworm and Agropalma in Brazil

Agropalma is one of Brazil's largest oil palm companies. Although it states that its relations with communities are "at the heart of its sustainability strategy", Agropalma stands accused of land grabbing and the use of violence to expel traditional communities. Because of accusations such as these, it had its RSPO (Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil) certification suspended in 2023.

In order to meet the demands of a customer, Agropalma hired the Earthworm Foundation in 2022. Earthworm set up an office in Quatro Bocas, in the municipality of Tomé-Açú, at the epicenter of the "oil palm war". It receives funding, among others, from Cargill and Belem Bioenergia Brasil (BBB), companies active in the same industry. In this region, Earthworm says it has "empowered communities" and reduced conflicts in "supply chains". (14)

On the one hand, this engagement with Earthworm has allowed Agropalma to reassure its customers. The report by Sime Darby Guthrie International (supplier of Nestlé, Unilever, P&G), for example, mentions the participation of a "third party to carry out an external assessment to investigate the alleged land rights issues", suggesting Earthworm's involvement is key to Agropalma's plan of action "to regain RSPO certification". (15) The positive tone in publications by consumer goods corporations, however, stands in stark contrast to reports from the region. The reality there is that for communities, activities of the Earthworm Foundation are promoting internal divisions, thus undermining resistance in indigenous and quilombola communities.

Voices from the territories

To better understand how the presence of the Earthworm Foundation affects communities, WRM facilitated an online exchange with activists from Cameroon and Brazil. Their groups are involved in the fight for social justice and for the rights of communities that have been affected not only by the corporate oil palm colonialism, but also by the intervention of this corporate organisation.

From Cameroon participated SYNAPARCAM, an organisation that defends the rights of communities affected by Socfin plantations. From Brazil participated Elielson Pereira da Silva. He was born and raised in the state of Pará and is currently researching the territorial and ethnic conflicts in his state, seeking to shed light on the communities' struggle. The participants of the virtual exchange told us about the Earthworm Foundation's work in their territories. Read a summary of the conversation below.

WRM: How did the Earthworm Foundation contact your organisation, and how would you describe their work?

ELIELSON (Pará, Brazil): Earthworm came to the Acará Valley in 2023, in the midst of heated conflicts with traditional peoples. Earthworm was contracted by Cargill, a company that buys palm oil from Agropalma. Faced with repercussions of the conflicts, Cargill was trying to "clean up the supply chain." So, Earthworm began seeking out indigenous and quilombola leaders to try to mediate the conflict – in an attempt to reach an agreement between community representatives and the palm oil company.

In 2023, in collaboration with Agropalma, Earthworm provoked an internal division among the indigenous populations. This proved to be extremely detrimental, leading to the creation of another indigenous association that sat down at the table with the company. Agropalma then promised that there would be no more conflicts, and that the communities would be given an area where they themselves could harvest oil palm to sell.

Over the last 40 years, Agropalma has created many barriers around its plantations: the rivers, the cemetery, the fruit orchards, or the gardens are no longer easily accessible for the communities. Their movements are subject to prohibitions imposed by the company. But at the negotiating table, Agropalma promised that everything would change, as long as the new co-opted organisation guaranteed that the actions of the other association (along with its demands for the recognition of territorial rights) would cease. This is how the internal division was created.

When the initial promises were not kept, and representatives of the NGO [Earthworm] disappeared – as did the company's management – indigenous peoples initiated an action to recover their territory, in order to draw attention and alert the media. During this process, an indigenous Turiwara man was shot dead in 2023 by security guards hired by the company. (16)

Now we have internal divisions, with two indigenous organisations. With Agropalma's backing, this NGO [Earthworm] caused this internal division, which has created many problems and made the process of social and political organisation very difficult for the indigenous peoples.

In view of the sale of Agropalma S.A. – a process which has been underway since mid-2022 – we suspect that Earthworm is involved in drafting a new agreement wherein the indigenous communities would renounce their territorial claims. The company interested in acquiring Agropalma S.A.'s shares is Belém Bioenergia Brasil (BBB), a joint venture of Galp Energia (Portugal) and Palma Tauá Brasil (a partnership between Banco Opportunity Agro and Dentauá S.A.).

SYNAPARCAM (Cameroon): In Cameroon, Earthworm (formerly TFT) has a Training Center in the capital. In 2011, some of us went there to give a course on communal defence of the land. The community had been suffering for decades from Socapalm's occupation of our ancestral lands. Earthworm invited us to present the problems we had with the company. At that time, we were beginning to form our organisation, Synaparcam.

When they changed their name [from TFT to Earthworm], they told us: 'We are a new organisation now, and we can help you solve the problem with Socapalm', of the Socfin group. And they presented themselves as mediators. But after two or three meetings, in which, in addition to the company, there were civil servants, traditional community leaders and local elites, Synaparcam decided to withdraw. Because we realised that it was all about Earthworm creating an external image that we were collaborating with them to resolve the conflict.

Between 2012 and 2020, Earthworm tried to position itself as a mediator several times. But we in the community realised that it did not make sense for us to meet with the company using Earthworm as an intermediary. In September 2020, Earthworm arranged one such meeting between the company and Synaparcam, claiming that it would be useful for us to join because it would get the company's management to listen to the communities. After the meeting, we realised that the Earthworm team had put together a good report, but that the resolutions presented therein were beyond what Earthworm could get Socapalm to accept. When we understood this, we realised that Earthworm was not playing fair.

That was our first experience with Earthworm, and that's why we originally had some faith that they would commit to what they had told us.

WRM: Earthworm is funded primarily by companies that hire it to "mediate" conflicts, among others. When Earthworm came to your organisation/community, did they explain to you what their relationship with the companies was and who was funding their work? How do you think Earthworm's source of funding has influenced these "conflict mediation" processes?

ELIELSON: Based on what the communities say, they present themselves as if they were an independent organisation; they do not mention their links [to the companies], even though they do say that they monitor the companies' supply chains. The words "independent organisation" are frequently mentioned in these dialogues. What we have seen are very harmful mediation experiences – of "coercive harmony," of fomenting internal division in order to weaken the peoples' struggle and their identity.

SYNAPARCAM: Earthworm's representative in Africa is Cameroonian, and yes, he informed us that Earthworm receives fees from Socfin. And he told us that if Socfin did not change its policies, Earthworm would refuse to continue with the mediation process, and that Earthworm's work with

the company would end. He told us: 'We will not allow the colonizers' companies to do the same as before' [referring to the fact that Socfin is controlled by French billionaire Vincent Bolloré].

But we realised that Earthworm prioritized these fees over the communities throughout the process. So, we are aware [of where their funds come from]; they are in the same line of work as big NGOs like WWF.

WRM: Synaparcam refused to conduct joint "field visits" with Earthworm in 2023. Could you explain a little more about the reasons for this decision and why Synaparcam decided to produce its own report?

SYNAPARCAM: In 2023, Synaparcam was already aware that Socapalm was not upholding the commitments it had previously made. By 2023, we were no longer collaborating with Earthworm. So, we looked for our own funding to prepare a good report (17), including with very skilled people from abroad, in parallel with Earthworm's report.

Synaparcam's study confirmed that there were seven points of conflict, whereas Earthworm identified a much smaller number. For example, Earthworm's report states that the company built several schools and that there was almost no contamination of the rivers. Earthworm's report was published before Synaparcam's report. Earthworm has not commented on several of the points identified in the Synaparcam report [and which were missing in the Earthworm report]. If you read these two reports, you would think they are talking about two different worlds.

The same thing happened with the RSPO. One of the reasons Socapalm hired Earthworm was because it wanted to obtain the RSPO certification.

WRM: On the subject of RSPO, moving back to the situation in Brazil, we know that Agropalma's RSPO certification was suspended in 2023 due to accusations of land-grabbing and violence. Elielson, do you believe that contracting Earthworm represents some kind of guarantee that Agropalma will respect the rights of communities?

ELIELSON: In no way does it represent any kind of guarantee. The company is in open conflict with the communities. All of this huge investment in advertising and communications, all of this talk of "corporate social responsibility," is just a big case of greenwashing. This "discursive arsenal" of [terms like] 'sustainable oil palm,' 'harmonious relations,' etc., is very different from the reality. Since 2022, there has been a resurgence of conflicts, due to the company blocking access to common areas, to ancestral cemeteries, and to river travel. The company even had trenches dug or set up barricades that block community movements.

There are large trenches, in some places five meters deep and two meters wide, which literally look like a battlefield. These trenches are very dangerous, and there have already been accidents. Some communities are surrounded, for example, by barbed wire, as if this were the border between Mexico and the United States, or Palestine and Israel.

WRM: And what does Earthworm have to say about this?

ELIELSON: We have never heard Earthworm make any public statement or declaration about these corporate acts of terror – the barricades, trenches, fences. And the communities even fear that these fences will be electrified. We are not aware of Earthworm ever condemning these practices by Agropalma.

WRM: If we take, for example, the Cameroonian villages of Dibombari and Mbonjo: Since Earthworm got involved, has anything actually changed for the better for the communities with respect to the problems caused by Socapalm?

SYNAPARCAM: The communities' main demands are concerning land, sacred sites, water pollution, and violence against women. So, this is a very important question, thank you. Women being raped, the failure to comply with the retrocession of lands, and the disregard for sacred sites are the three most serious problems for us.

When Socapalm and its oil palm plantations were privatized [more than 24 years ago], Socfin acquired Socapalm. After signing the lease in 2000, the company assessed the leased land and asked the State to sign an amendment to the lease, reducing the area from 78,000 hectares to 58,000 hectares. This reduction in area is clearly established in the amendment. But nothing happened. So, one of Synaparcam's actions was to plant food in one of these disputed areas, because we realised that the state authorities are not upholding their supervisory responsibilities, and the company is not respecting the contracts it signed with the State. We want to maintain those food plots, but we are facing pressure, intimidation, and arrests of leaders.

Another complication is that the RSPO has classified some of the lands previously accessed by the community as "areas of high biodiversity value" – which means that the community can no longer access them. There are signs put up and company guards monitoring the area. Meanwhile, Socapalm has drawn the perimeters to expand those blocks, and has taken over these swaths of community lands. The RSPO does not recognize all the areas claimed by the communities.

Regarding the presence of Earthworm, the situation has not improved; we find ourselves in the same place we were at the beginning.

WRM: Do you believe that these consequences are due to mistakes made by the Earthworm Foundation, or to the very nature of this organisation?

ELIELSON: There is a structural issue. What is the purpose of this company [Earthworm]? Why was it created? When we see that it has branches in every part of the world where oil palm companies are operating (Indonesia, Africa, Latin America), it is clear that Earthworm is a link in this chain, and a part of this power game. So, I think that it will always act in favour of the companies.

SYNAPARCAM: We see a lot of similar things. In terms of dividing communities...in our case, it seems like Earthworm giving advice on how to divide communities, and then the company takes up the recommendations. This is a very dangerous method as well, because on the one hand it approaches [the community], and on the other hand it advises companies on how to divide the community.

WRM: What message do you think is important to convey to a community which could be approached by an organisation like Earthworm – in the same way that they approached communities in your area?

SYNAPARCAM: Never accept such an offer, because nothing will change. It is important never to have an intermediary. If the company is interested in changing, it knows where to find the community. So, we recommend not to accept such a mediation proposal, because the mediation will not lead to any improvement.

ELIELSON: The first thing I would say to them is: "Be very careful!" You should also prevent entities like Earthworm from having one-on-one conversations with leaders. The old saying "divide and conquer" still applies. Companies are experts in creating ways to undermine community struggles.

It is important to understand [that these organisations] are part of a machinery. It is also important to know the history and experience of other communities that have already been subjected to similar situations. And be careful not to participate individually in their attempts to co-opt and persuade, so as not to make precipitous decisions before evaluating proposals among all members of the community.

WRM International Secretariat, Synaparcam and Elielson Pereira da Silva (18)

- (1) Information obtained on the website of the [Earthworm Foundation](#)
- (2) Earthworm Foundation Annual Report, 2023.
- (3) Video [available here](#).
- (4) Ditto (2).
- (5) Information summarized on the basis of Earthworm Foundation annual reports.
- (6) Quote obtained from an Earthworm institutional video [available here](#)
- (7) See also the booklet produced by the Informal Alliance Against Industrial Oil Palm Plantations in West and Central Africa, [available here](#)
- (8) For more information, see [WRM Bulletin 224](#), in [particular](#) and [the following article in Mongabay](#)
- (9) We refer more specifically to the seven reports published by Earthworm between 2023 and 2025, about conflicts between Socfin subsidiaries and local communities in the countries referenced. The reports can be [found here](#).
- (10) For more information about the impacts of Socfin plantations on communities, [check pdf](#), [Grain.org](#) and [this article](#).
- (11) Earthworm's three reports about the situation in Mbongo, Mbambou and Edéa, published in February 2025, acknowledge that Amendment No. 1 of the Lease Agreement provides the retrocession of land, totalling more than 8 thousand hectares. The reports are [available here](#)
- (12) See more [here](#)
- (13) Read more in the article: <https://www.earthsight.org.uk/news/idm/socfin-under-scrutiny-alleged-abuses-africa-rubber-palm-oil-plantations-despite-pldeges>
- (14) Information obtained at [earthworm](#)
- (15) Information obtained at SDGI Supplier Grievance Register, available at [SDGI-Supplier-Grievance-Register_13022025_AR.pdf](#)
- (16) See [here](#)
- (17) See Synaparcam's report [here \[in French\]](#)
- (18) Professor at the Federal Rural University of Amazonia and researcher at the New Social Cartography of Amazonia Project.

Dispossession by Plantation: Community Struggles in South Africa's Western Cape Province

In South Africa's Western Cape province, rural communities affected by historical land dispossession in many places also face the manifold impacts of living surrounded by industrial tree plantations. Seeking to strengthen their access to land, these communities have mobilised in a forum supported by civil society organizations, demanding participation in decision-making and other community rights.

Introduction

South Africa's historical legacy of 'race'-based land dispossession means indigenous African communities living in and around monoculture tree plantations have long faced economic marginalization and social disadvantage. Despite South Africa's transition to democracy and land reform programme, the legacy of land dispossession continues to shape rural poverty and economic inequality (1). Communities in the Western Cape province not only face this legacy but also uncertainty surrounding new afforestation initiatives. These communities affected by industrial tree plantations confront a web of interconnected impacts as a result of the unequal land distribution and the monocultures—poverty, land tenure insecurity, environmental issues, and governance failures. Yet, they also demonstrate resilience through collective responses and mobilization in the face of these difficulties.

Forestry communities: dispossession old and new

South Africa's legacy of land dispossession and displacement is particularly evident among communities living in areas of industrial tree plantations (referred to as forestry communities in South Africa). In the Western Cape, forestry communities experienced the effective privatization of state plantations from the early 2000s, followed by the state reversing course and proposing the replanting of timber plantations for pulp, paper and sawmilling. Their experiences illustrate some of the ecological, economic, and political dynamics of the industrial plantation model. While threats to community rights and livelihoods are common globally, evidence from the Western Cape shows how these issues manifest in distinct local ways and evolve over time.

Forestry plantations and the context of the Western Cape

South Africa is an ecologically diverse country, ranging from the subtropical eastern seaboard to the central plateau of the interior, and arid, desert-like landscapes in the west. Its temperate indigenous forests are species-rich but cover only a single-digit percentage of the country's land area. In South Africa, monocultural tree plantations are generally referred to as 'forests', which has long obscured the manifold negative impacts caused by monoculture tree plantations. These

tree plantations extend in a fragmented arc, from the northern part of the country along the eastern seaboard into the winter-rainfall Mediterranean-climate region of the Western Cape.

The Western Cape is climatically and historically distinct. Since the mid-1600s, descendants of European settlers have dominated commercial agriculture in the region. Like much of the country, the Western Cape experienced large-scale land dispossession during the colonial and apartheid eras, severely restricting access to land for indigenous and ‘mixed race’ people. Today, the region is known for its export-oriented wine and deciduous fruit industries, while its metropolitan center of Cape Town attracts global tourism.

The Western Capes’ mountainous areas include scattered commercial forestry plantations, primarily of non-native species such as pine, eucalyptus, and wattle (acacia). In more than a dozen of these plantations, historically disadvantaged communities live on state-owned land, previously leased to private timber companies, such as MTO (Mountain to Ocean). South Africa’s small pockets of indigenous forests are largely uninhabited. Instead, it is the communities living and working in monocultural plantations that are at the forefront of self-described ‘forestry’ struggles in the country.

Forestry communities’ vulnerability and marginalization

Communities living inside tree plantations in South Africa, particularly in the Western Cape, face precarious living conditions and insecure land tenure. These communities have limited economic opportunities and lack access to basic state services and infrastructure. The state and timber companies frequently deny communities access to surrounding plantations to obtain fuelwood, building materials, and medicinal plants. As a result, these rural communities are increasingly disconnected from traditional land-based livelihoods, including small-scale farming, grazing, and foraging, further inhibiting their ability to sustain themselves. Despite nearly three decades of land reform in South Africa, poverty and tenure insecurity remain widespread.

Additionally, communities inside these tree plantations face ongoing and emerging long-term consequences of living surrounded by plantations:

- **Environmental degradation**

Poverty and economic marginalization intersect with environmental threats. Monoculture plantations across South Africa contribute to soil depletion, water shortages, and biodiversity loss. In the Western Cape, tree plantations are particularly vulnerable to wildfires, which are exacerbated by the drought-prone climate and the unsustainable nature of monoculture tree planting, especially amid patterns of climate change. For instance, in 2017, a devastating fire ripped through the community of Hawequa outside the town of Paarl. The community evacuated their homes for a week, while the Pine plantation burned, destroying homes and gardens.

- **Weak governance and state coordination**

Efforts to improve the conditions of communities inside these tree plantations have been hindered by weak governance and poor coordination within the South African state. This has stalled efforts to formalize land tenure arrangements and provide essential services. As these settlements often

straddle the physical and jurisdictional boundaries of various government agencies, they are negatively impacted by poor coordination within the state.

Like many forestry communities globally, those in the Western Cape have frequently been excluded from decision-making processes related to land use, forest management, and plantation redevelopment. These issues are also strongly gendered, as the commercial forestry sector has historically been male-dominated, and women's traditional roles—such as gathering firewood and medicinal plants—are often undervalued by policymakers. Women, however, play a significant role within these communities by providing on issues in the community and on spiritual matters.

- **The emerging threat of afforestation**

In the Western Cape, the state withdrew from the forestry sector two decades ago, only to reverse this decision within a decade amidst subsequent shortages of timber for sawmilling. The state has proposed 'recommissioning' (i.e. re-establish) tree plantations through leases to private concession companies. However, forestry communities have been excluded from decision-making regarding this policy shift. Plans for new afforestation raise concerns about a new wave of dispossession, economic marginalization, and tenure insecurity. The replanting of monoculture tree plantations threatens to further displace local communities, undermine potential livelihoods, and foreclose opportunities for more socially and environmentally sustainable forms of agroforestry.

Community responses and mobilization

Civil society organizations like the Surplus People Project (SPP) have mobilized communities in the Western Cape. With SPP's support, these geographically dispersed communities formed the Forestry Community Forum (FCF) in 2011 to advocate for their collective interests. In late 2024, the FCF hosted a "Knowledge Fair" to share experiences, discuss their struggles, and plan advocacy efforts with the state and other stakeholders. This initiative highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing the legacy of marginalization.

The approach is multifaceted, addressing interconnected challenges:

- **Improved services and infrastructure**

Ensuring access to essential services and infrastructure is crucial. Marginalization often leads to inadequate service provision.

- **Strengthening access to land**

Improving access to land and tenure security is essential for empowering forestry communities to manage their land sustainably and invest in long-term agricultural and community-based agroforestry practices.

- **Skills development and economic opportunities**

Building skills and enhancing opportunities for sustainable livelihoods is key to breaking cycles of poverty.

- **Sustainable agroforestry practices**

Promoting agroforestry ensures the long-term health of both the land and the community, balancing ecological preservation with income generation.

- **Community participation in decision-making**

Increasing community involvement in governance allows forestry communities to influence policies on land use, environmental management, and resource allocation.

Overall, members of the FCF report that it has done well to bring together the relevant state and other role players to address the issues of the community.

This strategy addresses both immediate needs and long-term structural inequalities, empowering communities to take control of their development and challenge historical marginalization. The efforts of the FCF demonstrate the potential of bottom-up, community-driven initiatives to foster meaningful, sustainable change.

Surplus People Project

David Neves, Wade Parker

(1) See article published in the WRM bulletin in 2015 about the Forestry Community Forum, [here](#)

Degrading instead of recovering territories: Plantations for the carbon market in the Colombian Orinoquía

Several companies have been expanding their tree plantations in the Colombian Orinoquía, which is increasing longstanding conflicts and violence. “These are not reforestation companies, but deforestation companies, because they have introduced invasive tree species that are not native to the territory – like acacia, eucalyptus and pine trees. So they are driving out what naturally grows here” - Indigenous Sikuni Leader.

The Orinoquía refers to the territories encompassed by the immense Orinoco River Basin in Colombia and Venezuela. This area is comprised mostly of flat lands, which is why it is known as the plains region. It is one of the largest savannahs on the planet, along with the African savannah and the Brazilian Cerrado. In Colombia, the Orinoquía is mostly located in the departments of Arauca, Casanare, Meta and Vichada, covering some 310,000 Km². (1)

This vast area is home to Indigenous Peoples, peasants, settlers, Afro-descendants and an urban population. The latter has grown significantly in recent decades, in cities such as Villavicencio, the capital of Meta. Part of this urban growth is due to the arrival of people from the rest of the plains who have been displaced by the armed conflict that still affects the country.

The Orinoquía has undergone drastic territorial transformations since the time of the European occupation, when extensive cattle ranching was introduced. Then came extractivism, with the largest volume of oil in Colombia being exploited in this region. At the beginning of the 1960s, the State pushed thousands of families into the region through targeted colonization programs; many of the properties originally given to the families through these programmes later ended up in the hands of landowners; this led to the families being displaced once again.

By the 1980s, crops grown for illicit purposes (mainly coca) occupied vast areas, and the armed conflict intensified. The Orinoquía was one of the most affected regions (2). Subsequently, a new, "licit" economic activity was introduced, which transformed and impacted the territory and its inhabitants again: large-scale tree plantations.

Tree plantations for the carbon market

Tree plantations or monocultures have a variety of characteristics. This article seeks to delve into, and warn about, the characteristics and impacts of one specific kind: plantations earmarked for the carbon market.

This is nothing new. During the first decade of this century, these monocultures began to be implemented and promoted as carbon sinks. In the last three years, the number of applications to establish and register tree plantations as carbon projects has noticeably increased, both in terms of the number and the size of projects (3).

But where does the interest in these plantations come from? Basically, it comes from the opportunity – for logging and pulp companies – to do more business and make more money. Many companies that purchase “carbon credits,” or pollution credits, are also interested in greenwashing their image (4). They are taking advantage of the postulate that trees absorb carbon from the atmosphere and store it in their leaves, trunks and roots. So, those who install plantations and claim that they are only doing so for the carbon market can make money by selling carbon credits to companies that claim they cannot reduce their own pollution (5). However, it is usually not true that project developers only install plantations for the carbon market; they likely are going to install the plantations anyway, in order to continue selling timber and making money.

The carbon market and carbon projects have not done a good job of achieving their promise – that is, to solve the climate crisis. But they have worked out very well for companies that take advantage of this business by offering their services: in consulting, certification, creation of carbon standards, carbon credit trading, etc. Additionally, this market benefits the very companies that are the main culprits of the climate crisis. Rather than cutting or decreasing their emissions, these companies are maintaining or increasing them, whilst growing their profits.

A Friends of the Earth publication provides an extensive list of the misguided actions of, and impacts caused by, plantation projects related to carbon offsetting (6). These include:

- violating the laws in different countries regarding communities' access to land and their right to free, prior, informed consent;
- evicting farming families from their land;
- buying land at very low prices or conducting violent land grabs;
- in the case of projects where farmers sign contracts to plant the trees, obligations that exceed the time frame stipulated in the contracts – for example, to provide maintenance on trees for 50 or 100 years, when a contract only lasts seven years;
- negatively impacting food security and food sovereignty, since families must abandon their crops in order to focus on project activities;
- and causing accidental fires, in the case of some companies.

These facts give communities ample reason to be alarmed and concerned, especially in the Global South, where these kinds of plantations are growing the most. Of particular concern is what may happen in Colombia, which is one of the three countries with the highest number of tree plantation projects for the carbon market.

Plantations for the carbon market in Orinoquía

The Orinoquía has the largest area of tree plantations earmarked for the carbon market in Colombia. There are at least 28 projects covering approximately 178,000 hectares (7). This number is higher if we include projects that have not been registered yet. While other parts of the country

have a greater number of projects, such as the department of Antioquia, those plantations cover a much smaller area.

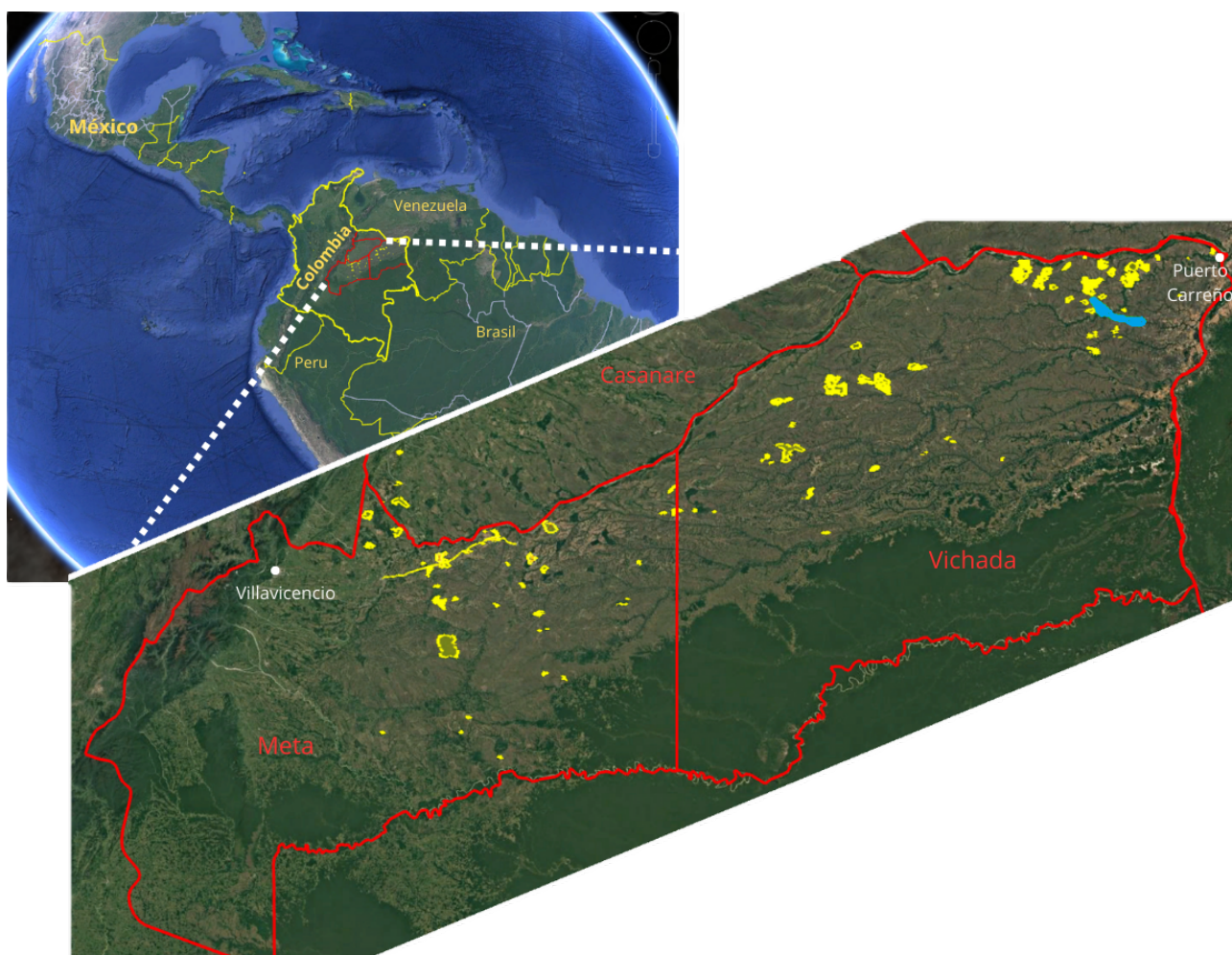


Figure 1: Map showing, in yellow, where most of the plantations for the carbon market are located in the Colombian Orinoquía

Because the Orinoquía, and in particular the departments of Meta and Vichada, has the largest area of plantations in Colombia, this is also the region with the greatest number of risks and impacts.

Furthermore, the track record of existing plantations in the region is alarming. The Orinoquía is one of the regions that has been severely impacted by the armed conflict in Colombia. Thousands and thousands of people have been killed, displaced, disappeared or violated in the most atrocious ways in this conflict. Some of the suffering and impacts caused by this conflict are directly related to the installation of plantations. In turn, plantations are one of the causes of the transformation of the territory and landscape.

But why are plantations in Orinoquía so harmful?

Many of the projects that are planned or underway propose to restore and recover territories, which they call ecosystems, through reforestation or afforestation. This is where inconsistencies and objections become evident – first of all, because the reference to 'ecosystems' omits any

reference to the territory. The territory is what is really being impacted, and this includes not only the elements of an 'ecosystem' – primarily water, soil, vegetation and animals – but also human populations, relationships and cultures, among other elements.

Secondly, these projects claim, a priori, that they will restore lands degraded by extensive cattle ranching or agriculture. To this end, they promise to establish 'planted forests' on degraded savannahs – though the characterization of 'degraded' can be debated or contested. Most of these savannahs are located south of the Meta River, on the high plains. These savannahs are part of the territorial diversity of Planet Earth, and not all of them are covered with trees. The presence of soils covered by grasses does not mean that the lands are degraded.

"It is clear that the savannahs of the high plains have not been deforested recently. On the contrary, the savannahs of the Orinoquía have been predominantly grasslands for the last 18,000 years, or more," explains Sergio Estrada (8). Afforesting or reforesting the savannahs has multiple consequences, especially considering that most of these projects consist of monocultures of exotic species, such as pine, eucalyptus or acacia trees (9).

Ecological impacts of monoculture tree plantations on the high plains

At the end of the day, plantations are not forests. And these projects, whether focused on reforestation or afforestation, are leading to a loss in biodiversity – since native species are losing their habitats or being replaced by introduced species. When the savannah is transformed, large mammals like the anteater – which depends on termites and ants – flee in search of other places to feed. Multiple and unimaginable alterations to the habitat occur; for example, exotic tree species do not produce fleshy fruits that are able to feed the local fauna. Only some parrots consume the acacia fruits (*Acacia mangium*), which causes another imbalance, as it helps propagate this highly invasive tree far from where it was planted (10).

Meanwhile, several projects claim that they are recovering degraded lands, yet they have installed plantations in areas that are well-known for their good state of protection. Such is the case of the Bitá river basin, which still has almost 95% of its natural cover (11). Some of the plantations of the Green Compass project, owned by the Trafigura corporation (one of the world's largest fossil fuel traders), are located in the vicinity of this basin. The company has invested more than \$1 billion through one of its subsidiaries, Impala, to adapt infrastructure to transport oil along the Magdalena River in Colombia (12).

The Green Compass project, most of whose plantations are in the area highlighted in blue in Figure 1, is managed by Inverbosques. By 2024, Inverbosques had 10,000 hectares planted in Vichada, 90% of which were eucalyptus trees. The company's manager defends the decision to plant eucalyptus for economic reasons. She claims that this species allows for an accelerated capture of carbon credits to finance the project and "eventually" plant native species, which grow very slowly and are harder to produce efficiently in economic and financial terms (13).

A significant number of these plantations are being established, or will be established, on the most fertile soils of the high plains: the banks of the Meta river. This means that they receive water coming from the eastern mountain range that has a high nutrient content.

So, the proposal is to transform well-protected territories into monoculture tree plantations. But what is even more alarming than the effects described above are the impacts on communities and Indigenous Peoples.

Violence and dispossession caused by the installation of plantations in the Orinoquía

The Orinoquía already has a vast expanse of monoculture plantations, not only of trees, but also of oil palm, maize, soy and sugar cane, among other crops. There are also existing carbon plantations, such as the Gaviotas 2 project, which aims to plant 6.3 million hectares earmarked for agrofuels and to serve as carbon sinks (14).

Multiple sources have documented the systematic practice of dispossession and displacement of indigenous communities and peoples, whose territories are frequently used to establish plantations; this is especially true so far for the 21st century. The Colombian State has been involved and bears responsibility in different ways – whether through neglect, by promoting impunity, or through systematic practices, such as not responding to indigenous people's requests for territorial recognition. In some cases, the State has ignored the existence of these groups. Meanwhile, settlers and private individuals have been given titles to the territory, which they later sell to companies that install palm, timber species, or other kinds of monocultures (15).

Indigenous Peoples of the region have been decimated by practices that include even hunting them – through what are known as Guahibidas. There are reports of this occurring through 2005 on the outskirts of Puerto Gaitán (Meta) and Vichada (16). Thus, any intervention that displaces Indigenous Peoples or endangers their territory has a severe impact on their survival.

In the department of Vichada alone, the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC, by its Spanish acronym) and the Regional Indigenous Council of Vichada (CRIVI, by its Spanish acronym) identified 41 cases of communities at high risk of displacement and territorial expropriation in 2009. The ethnic groups affected were the Sikuani, Mayerri, Kuiva, Amorúa, Sáliva and Piapoco Peoples. At that time, seven cases involved violent displacement, including the burning of villages or the intention to do so in order to set up rubber or agrofuel plantations. Two companies are linked to these events: Hercaucho and Llano Caucho (17).

In short, the presence of plantations in the Orinoquía has been tied to practices of dispossession, violence and displacement, which lead to the loss of Indigenous Peoples' territories.

With the incentive of carbon markets, the establishment of new plantations tends to exacerbate the very serious situation of rights violations for local peoples and communities. The demand for land will also increase, leading to more conflicts. It is important to raise awareness about this situation, so that measures can be taken to avoid repeating patterns that have already been identified when plantations are established in the region.

All of this is occurring in a context in which both local populations and Indigenous Peoples have almost no knowledge of this new carbon business and its implications; therefore their capacity to organize and respond is low.

Meanwhile, plantations for the carbon market are growing in the Orinoquía, under the absurd claim of restoration. But the opposite is true: these plantations are causing a number of impacts on the region and its inhabitants. Therefore, they represent a continuation of an unjust system of land grabbing, perpetuated by violence and exploitation.

- (1) National University of Colombia - ODDR. 2013. Characterisation of the Orinoquía region. Bogotá D.C.
- (2) The final report of the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-repetition. This report was created in the framework of the peace agreement between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – FARC-EP (People's Army); in its chapter on Orinoquía, it provides [details on the situation of violence and rights violations in that region](#)
- (3) This WRM publication from 2024 shows where and how these kinds of plantations are expanding, who they benefit, and how they are impacting communities: "Tree Plantations for the Carbon Market. Why, how, and where are they expanding?". [Available here](#)
- (4) For more information about what carbon credits are and who benefits from trading them, see the article "[The carbon business, land and trees](#)"
- (5) This WRM publication from 2024 shows where and how these kinds of plantations are expanding, who they benefit, and how they are impacting communities: "Tree Plantations for the Carbon Market. Why, how, and where are they expanding?". [Available here](#)
- (6) Friends of the Earth International. 2023. Bank of evidence on false climate solutions: Their impacts on peoples and the planet. [Available here](#)
- (7) Data obtained in January 2025 from the certification companies, Verra Verified Carbon Standard, Cercarbono, Biocarbon and Gold Standard.
- (8) Estrada, V. S. 2024. Evitemos una tragedia ecológica en las sabanas del Vichada. Revista Nova et Vetera. Volume 10, Number 92.
- (9) To learn more information about the problems caused by industrial tree plantations, we recommend the publication "What could be wrong about planting trees? The new push for more industrial tree plantations in the Global South". [Available here](#)
- (10) Estrada, V. S. 2024. Evitemos una tragedia ecológica en las sabanas del Vichada. Revista Nova et Vetera. Volume 10, Number 92.
- (11) Mongabay. 2018. El río Bitá se convierte en el undécimo humedal Ramsar de Colombia. [Available at here](#).
- (12) Mongabay. 2024. Experts question benefits of Colombian reforestation project led by top oil trader. [Available here](#)
- (13) Idem.
- (14) Bohórquez, D. A; Garcés, A.D; Ayala, R. S. 2012. Análisis de conflictos de la región Orinoquía en relación con proyectos energéticos: 2000-2010. Research in progress, Number 27, pp 87-152.
- (15) ONIC. 2009. Introduction to the situation of human rights violations in Vichada.
- (16) Truth Commission. "Afectaciones históricas, continuum de violencias: Guahibíadas". [Available here](#).
- (17) ONIC. 2009. Territorial situation of indigenous peoples in Vichada.

Thailand: Big hydroelectric power plants are not clean energy! Communities in struggle against dams exchange experiences and issue joint declaration

A new wave of expansion in hydroelectric power plant projects is advancing throughout the Global South under the pretext of producing 'clean energy', speed up the 'energy transition' and promote a 'low carbon economy'. On March 14, a group of communities issued a joint declaration denouncing the trail of destruction that major dams have left in their wake worldwide, rejecting further dam construction and shouting out, loud and clear: big hydroelectric power plants are not clean energy!

Over the last 30 years, some 15 mega-dams have been built on the Mekong River, both upstream in Chinese territory, and downstream in Laos, causing death and destruction in one of the world's largest rivers, on which millions of people depend to survive. Eight new dams are currently being planned. One of the projects among those considered most destructive is the Phou Ngoy hydroelectric power plant, in Laos. Along the Mekong and Mun rivers, communities that are fighting against this plant warn that its conclusion, in tandem with other dam projects, will mean the death of the Mekong River once and for all.

For its part, the government of Indonesia intends to strongly stimulate the construction of mega-dams in the coming years under the guise of the 'green transition'. In northern Kalimantan island, on the Mentarang River, construction of a mega-dam — the largest in Indonesia — has already begun, directly affecting the survival of some 10 Punan indigenous communities, as well as 20 others that will be indirectly impacted. The electricity generated would supply two other 'green' megaprojects: an industrial park called KIPI located on the coast and the country's new 'green' capital, also with devastating impacts (1). Furthermore, in other islands of the archipelago, more destructive hydroelectric mega-projects are planned, for instance in Papua, with projects for major dams on the Mamberano, Warsamson and Muyu rivers.

The experience of struggle and resistance built up by the communities of the Mekong region motivated Punan communities from Indonesia to visit them in order to exchange experiences during four days in February, 2025. The exchanges with other activists were profound and filled with the certainty that despite many differences, there is no path other than advancing together as a collective in order to confront the new wave of hydroelectric power plants that has already begun in the region.

On the occasion of the International Day of Action Against Dams (March 14), the communities that came together issued the below declaration re-affirming the importance of the commitment to a joint struggle, thus showing that “we are united and firm in the collective struggle to defend our rivers, forests and futures from false green solutions and corporate greed”.

Read the declaration below and click [here](#) to sign it:

(1) For more information about KIPI and the devastating impacts of Indonesia's new capital, please consult WRM Bulletins 264 and 268, available [here](#).

Joint Statement
By Communities and People Resisting Large Hydropower Dams
Across Southeast Asia, Latin America and Worldwide

This statement is issued by community representatives from the Mekong River in Thailand, the Mentarang River in Indonesia, and from Latin America, who convened in Thailand in February 2025 to exchange experiences and strengthen their ongoing struggles against destructive dam projects. These struggles do not exist in isolation — they represent and stand alongside dozens of other struggles resisting large-scale dam projects and plans along the rivers of the Mekong region, from China to Vietnam; across Indonesia, from Papua to Sumatra; throughout Latin America; and in many other parts of the world.

On this International Day of Action Against Dams, we, Indigenous Peoples and grassroots communities whose survival depends on our rivers — stand united to reject the false claim that large hydropower dams are clean energy.

For decades, our lands, waters, and ways of life have been sacrificed under the banner of so-called development. The empty promises of jobs, prosperity, and clean energy have instead delivered flooded homes, destroyed livelihoods, collapsing fisheries, and irreversible environmental devastation.

As the climate crisis is weaponized to accelerate the global push for renewable energy, we reaffirm — with absolute clarity and conviction:

Large hydropower dams are not clean energy. They are engines of violence, displacement, and destruction.

Governments, corporations, and financial institutions continue to impose destructive dam projects across mainland Southeast Asia — from the Mekong to the Mentarang — as well as on other vital rivers in Latin America and around the world. These projects are fraudulently marketed as green energy, even as they ravage rivers, forests, and Indigenous communities. Behind these dams stand powerful, centralized power trade schemes such as the ASEAN Power Grid, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and Indonesia's National Strategic Projects — all advancing corporate profits at the direct expense of communities and ecosystems.

The threats extend far beyond hydropower dams. Across regions, other types of dams — including mine tailing dams driven by relentless mineral extraction for the so-called low-carbon economy — endanger nearby communities with grave risks, as tragically demonstrated by Brazil's Mariana and Brumadinho dam collapses. At the same time, irrigation dams built to serve large agribusiness projects are causing severe environmental and social harm, while further deepening the worsening water crisis.

We, communities united across Southeast Asia, Latin America, and around the world, demand:

1. An immediate end to the financing and purchase of power from destructive dams.
2. The rejection of all large-scale dam projects that devastate rivers, force community displacement, and accelerate the climate crisis.
3. A genuine, community-led energy transition — one rooted in the rights of communities and grounded in ecological restoration, not corporate mega-projects.

We stand together, resolute in our collective struggle to defend our rivers, forests, and futures from false green solutions and corporate greed.

14 March 2025

SIGN IN SOLIDARITY [HERE](#)

(deadline May 31)

Initial signatories:

1. Gerakan Selamatkan hutan, tanah dan Manusia Malmoi (Tolak Bendungan Warsamson) — Save Forest, land and Malmoi people movement (Against Warsamson River Dam), Indonesia
2. Hug Chaingkhan Community group, Thailand
3. Hug Mekong Association, Thailand
4. Komunitas Masyarakat Hukum Adat suku Muyu (Tolak Bendungan kali Muyu) — Indigenous People Muyu Tribe Community (Against Muyu River Dam), Indonesia
5. Living River Association, Thailand
6. MAB (Movement of People Affected by Dams in Brazil)
7. MAR (Movement of People Affected by Dams), Latin America
8. Northeastern Mekong River Protection Network, Thailand
9. Northeastern Network for Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand
10. People's Network to Protect the Mekong River, Thailand
11. Punan Sekalak Community, Mentarang-Tubu River, North Kalimantan, Indonesia
12. Thai Mekong People in 8 Provinces
13. Southern Peasants' Federation of Thailand (SPFT)
14. Tamui Community-Based School, Thailand
15. Lao Highlander Network
16. Mekong Community Institute Association (MCI), Thailand
17. Ubon Monitoring Group on Flood and Mekong Dams (UMFD)
18. Earthrights international. Mekong
19. ETOs Watch Coalition
20. Focus on the Global South (FOCUS)
21. Human Rights and Environment Association, Thailand
22. Just Energy Transition in Thailand (JET in Thailand)
23. Land Watch Thai
24. Laos Dam Investment Monitor (LDIM)
25. Mekong Energy and Ecology Network (MEENet)
26. Nature care, Thailand
27. NUGAL Institute for Social and Ecological Studies, Indonesia

28. Project SEVANA South-East Asia
29. School of Democratic Economics, Indonesia
30. The Association of Northeast Thailand Community Network in 7 Provinces along the Mekong Basin (ComNetMekong)
31. The Mekong Butterfly, Thailand
32. Towards Organic Asia (TOA)
33. World Rainforest Movement (WRM)

Solidaritas Declaration Merauke, an emergency call from Papua: stop the Merauke National Strategic Project

The "Deklarasi Solidaritas Merauke" (Merauke Solidarity Declaration, see below) has been collectively written by participants of the "Konsolidasi Solidaritas Merauke" (Merauke Solidarity Consolidation Meeting), a people's gathering that took place in the town of Merauke, South Papua Province in March, 2025. The declaration calls for an immediate halt of the National Strategic Project (PSN) Merauke.

In 2023, the President at the time, President Jokowi designated Merauke in South Papua as the site for yet another National Strategic Project (PSN). The food and energy production programme covers 2 million hectares, focused on rice and sugar cane plantations, the latter with the objective to produce sugar and bio-ethanol. If fully implemented, it might become the biggest deforestation project worldwide, directly affecting an indigenous population of 40,000 people. (1)

The meeting brought together 256 participants who came not only from Merauke, but from villages throughout Papua as well as dozens of other islands including Maluku, Kalimantan, Nusa Tenggara, Sulawesi, and Sumatra. What unites them is opposition to the colonial and socially and ecologically harmful policy of the Central Government in Jakarta called National Strategic Project (PSN). At present, around 200 large-scale projects and programmes have received the status of PSN throughout the archipelago

Indonesia has ratified a number of human right protocols, including those designed to protect the Indigenous Peoples. Yet, each government decision to create yet another PSN has been made with zero public consultation and is thus starkly anti-democratic. Furthermore, once a PSN investment gets the central government's green light, communities within and surrounding a PSN site must comply with iron-fist security protocols. Whenever a community decides to reject a PSN, they are likely to face intimidation and criminalisation or worse.

Merauke was chosen as the location for the big people's gathering because of the peculiar manner by which the PSN Merauke is being carried out. From the beginning, the project has been conspicuously militaristic (2) and set up to benefit oligarchies. In 2024, the Army inaugurated the works to set up five new battalions in "conflict-prone" areas across Papua, two of which based in Merauke. Ironically, while number one priority of the new Prabowo government is providing free meals to all Indonesian school students, the Merauke PSN is currently destroying food sovereignty of thousands of Papuans.

The Merauke PSN has been preceded by a similar PSN, the "Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate" (MIFEE), launched in 2010. Lessons learned from this programme show it resulted in "land grabbing, land acquisition and land concentration in the hands of a few capital owners, labor exploitation, deforestation, recurring and widespread drought and ecological disasters, malnutrition and food shortages, corruption, violence and human rights violations, the victims of which are Indigenous People and villagers around the project". (3)

See below the full text of the declaration, also available [here](#).

Solidaritas Merauke Declaration

This declaration is the result of our collective work in the Solidaritas Merauke Movement. It is the result from the shared stories of our collective suffering and trauma caused by state-corporate crimes, especially in the name of National Strategic Projects (PSN), which occupy and dispossess our living space and defile what we hold sacred.

The destruction and extinction of our indigenous life, knowledge and spirituality continues to expand. We are losing our identity, our historical memory of who we are, our sacred places, our kinship with the land and nature. We are losing our sources of food, our sources of medicine, our sources of livelihood and independence of work. On top of that, we are subjected to discrimination, forced labour, physical violence, intimidation and criminalisation. This catastrophe should be called an emergency for the sake of the people.

It is clear that this ongoing suffering and catastrophe is a reflection of colonialism that is being sugar-coated through a patchwork of laws and regulations. It is ironic that in the face of the robbery of people's wealth, the coercion and use of the force of law, political, economic and military power, false promises of prosperity, the destruction of human bodies and the exploitation of humans over humans, people are to be comforted with 'free nutritious food' program.

We, Solidaritas Merauke, declare our total rejection of the ploy that grabs people's wealth through policy reform. We demand a total halt to the National Strategic Project (PSN) and other projects in the name of national interest that clearly victimise the people. The perpetrators of state-corporate crimes must return all the stolen prosperity of the people and immediately restore the health and living space of the people in all areas sacrificed in the name of national interests.

No island is too big or too small to have its landscape damaged. If these glaring signs of catastrophe are underestimated, there will surely be an unprecedented acceleration of social-ecological chaos of the islands from Papua to Sumatra.

Sata Kekuatan! Satu Perlawanan! Rawat Kehidupan! (One Power! One Struggle! Care for Life!)
Merauke, 14 March 2025

(1) Briefing Paper of Yayasan Pusaka Bentala Rakyat, updated on September 2024, "The National Strategic Project (PSN) of Food and Energy Development in Merauke Regency, South Papua Province: Violating Human Rights and Worsening Environmental Crisis", [available here](#)

(2) Short video by "The Gecko Project", from March 2025, "Militarised deforestation in Papua: how Indonesia is converting indigenous forest into farms", [available here](#)

(3) Idem 1.

FROM THE WRM BULLETIN ARCHIVES

Mega Pine Plantations in the Argentinian Patagonia: Territorial Invasion, Fires And Water Scarcity

In the first months of 2025, forest fires once again affected hundreds of families and burned tens of thousands of hectares in Argentine Patagonia. In this context, we are recalling an article from Aguayala published in WRM Bulletin 259, which explains how industrial pine plantations have been one of the main causes of not only deadly forest fires, but also land grab, deforestation, water depletion and violent conflicts with Mapuche communities. At the same time, such plantations have been falsely promoted as a solution to climate change. Access the article [here](#).

RECOMMENDED

“Worst conservation fund ever”

On the side-lines of the UN climate conference in 2023 in the United Arab Emirates, the government of Brazil introduced the “Tropical Forests Forever Facility” (TFFF). The fund, an idea initially thought up by the World Bank in 2018, is expected to be launched at the 2025 UN climate conference in the Amazon city of in Belem, in Brazil. Private sector and public investments and donations would provide the seed capital for financial managers to speculate on capital markets. If there is money left over from the financial gambles after payment of dividends to the TFFF investors, that money will be divided among countries in the global South to finance forest protection initiatives. In March 2025, the Bolivian Fundación Solon published a critique of the TFFF. It echoes major flaws identified by the thinktank Green Finance Observatory: (1) the investment is structured in favour of rich countries and investors; (2) conservation funding for tropical forests is made conditional on betting on stock markets; and (3) the TFFF could be used by rich countries to avoid conservation funding requests from the global South.

The Tropical Forests Forever Facility - “The worst conservation fund ever”, writes the online portal [REDD-Monitor](#).

Fundación Solón. [TFFF: Una falsa solución para los bosques tropicales](#).

Green Finance Observatory: [The many questions raised by the Tropical Forests Forever Facility](#).

Marudi Indigenous communities oppose logging company carbon project in Sarawak, Malaysia

Samling is a notoriously destructive Malaysian logging, plantations and construction company which has faced decades of opposition from indigenous peoples such as the Penan (see for example, WRM Bulletin 100) and the Kenyah for destroying their customary lands. (1) In December 2023, the Samling subsidiary SaraCarbon listed a carbon project in the Malaysian state of Sarawak in the registry of the carbon standard provider Verra. (2) The carbon project is based on the dubious claim that the company was going to destroy swamp forests to set up acacia plantations on more than 30,000 hectares. Residents, however, report that the land has been proven unsuitable for acacia plantations. SaraCarbon would thus be claiming carbon credits for protecting forests it had no plausible intention to destroy.

In February 2025, villagers holding banners protested that Samling's carbon project is abusing their Native Customary Land Rights (NCR). (3) "The community believes that this carbon credit project does not benefit the indigenous people, does not solve climate change issues, and is instead an encroachment on NCR land," Sarawak Report writes. (4).

(1) Mongabay. 2021. [Threat of legal action against Indigenous Borneans protesting timber company.](#)

(2) Verra carbon registry. [Marudi Forest Conservation and Restoration project.](#)

(3) REDD-Monitor. 2025. [Marudi Indigenous communities oppose Samling's carbon project in Sarawak, Malaysia.](#)

(4) Sarawak Report. 2025. [Marudi Villagers Protest Against Samling's 'SaraCarbon' Carbon Credit Project.](#)

Cameroon: The struggle for their ancestral lands continues!

Communities in the Apouh à Ngog region of Edéa, Cameroon, continue to resist the violence of the Socapalm company (a subsidiary of SOCFIN) and heavily armed soldiers who seek to prevent the community from recovering a portion of their ancestral lands for food crops, after years of occupation by industrial oil palm plantations. International and national opinion must be vigilant and keep an eye on this situation.

Therefore, we are sharing an article describing what is happening and including photos that exemplify the violence and impunity with which these companies operate.

We are vigilant; our solidarity with the Apouh à Ngog community!

Read the Mongabay article [here](#)

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This Bulletin is also available in French, Spanish and Portuguese

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