



# **Reflections, Stories and Struggles against the violence of the Green Economy**

## **WRM Bulletin 264**

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### **The articles in this Bulletin are written by the following organizations and individuals:**

*The coordinator of the Network of Women from La Costa in Rebellion, from Chiapas, Mexico; nine WRM allies from different regions to discuss the harmful impacts of the REDD mechanism, including Acción Ecológica from Ecuador, CENSAT/Friends of the Earth from Colombia, the Agrarian Resources Center from Indonesia, Muyissi Environnement from Gabon, the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) from North America and the Corner House from the UK; the national coordinator of the women's advocacy network WORNAPI from Sierra Leona; and the WRM International Secretariat.*

## OUR VIEWPOINT

# Climate Conferences and Political Agendas

**What governments agree (or don't agree) on during the UN climate summits is not that relevant in the real world of carbon market expansion. Companies, governments, conservation NGOs, consultancies, brokers, banks and many other interested players are working hard to establish carbon market schemes as 'the only way forward'.**

The fossil fuels industry and its political and economic allies failed (once again) in their lobby offensive for governments to adopt rules for carbon trading during the last UN climate negotiations in November 2022 - despite their [ever-increasing number of lobbyists](#) present at climate summits.

And why are these actors so eager to have carbon trading as a climate policy? Because it allows the fossil fuels industry, and all the industries that depend on them, to continue expanding and possibly even profit from it. 'Carbon markets' are at the core of many concepts that are being promoted, including carbon offsets, 'net zero emissions', 'carbon-neutral' products, 'nature-based solutions', REDD+, 'zero net deforestation'.

Even though the actual role of carbon markets in the UN Paris Agreement continues to be contested and debated at the UN climate summits, some governments are moving ahead regardless with establishing national or sub-national carbon market schemes, bilateral agreements or private-public partnerships to set up new carbon market initiatives. All of these, in one way or another, create demand for more carbon trading and pave the way for an even stronger dependence on carbon market schemes as *the only way forward*.

The government of Switzerland, for example, has established bilateral treaties with Peru, Ghana, Senegal, Georgia, Vanuatu, Dominica, Thailand, Ukraine, Morocco, Chile and Uruguay, in order to reach its target of 'net zero' emissions by 2050. These agreements establish a legal basis for commercial contracts that guarantee the transfer of (cheap) emission reduction credits, potentially leaving those southern countries to finance more expensive emission reductions to reach their own targets. (1) A carbon consultancy firm explained how these agreements are "important laboratories for the future of market mechanisms." (2)

Moreover, US climate envoy, John Kerry, launched at the UN climate conference a voluntary carbon offset plan, with the support of Jeff Bezos' Earth Fund (from the giant retailer Amazon company), Microsoft, PepsiCo and the Bank of America. (3)

Fossil fuel and other polluting companies, too, keep signing agreements with southern governments for the purchase of vast amounts of carbon offsets. In November 2022, Guyana's President Irfaan Ali announced that the US-based oil company Hess Corporation would buy 2.5 million carbon offsets every year from 2016 to 2030. Hess Guyana Exploration holds 30 per cent

interest in the Stabroek oil and gas exploration block off the coast of Guyana. The carbon credits are generated from REDD projects in the forests of Guyana. (4) All major oil companies are buying carbon offsets.

What governments discuss and agree (or don't agree) on during the UN climate summits is not that relevant in the real world of carbon market expansion. Companies, governments, conservation NGOs, consultancy companies, brokers, banks and many other interested players are working hard to establish carbon market schemes as *the only way forward*.

That's even worse considering that carbon offsets, while intensifying the climate crisis, are serving as a façade for the expansion of a violent and racist grabbing of Indigenous Peoples and peasant communities' lands and forests.

An article in this Bulletin about four REDD projects in the municipality of Portel in Brazil, shows how community rights, in some cases even unbeknown to the community, are violated and communities' self-determination compromised by these projects.

Another article shares a discussion round organized by WRM to reflect together with nine allies from different regions on the many and diverse layers of harmful impacts that the REDD mechanism has caused over the last 15 years.

With a focus on the Amazon region in particular, another article explains how the 'solutions' that are being proposed - including carbon schemes, renewable energy, agrofuels, etc. - have become new underlying causes of deforestation. These 'green' projects are expanding side-by side with other destructive 'business-as-usual' projects.

Among those destructive projects are industrial monoculture plantations. This Bulletin includes two contributions highlighting the stories and resistances of women facing oil palm plantations on their territories: one is a podcast telling the story of women in Sierra Leone confronting Socfin company's plantations; and the second is an interview with a woman from *La Red de Mujeres de La Costa en Rebeldía* from Chiapas, Mexico, which emphasizes how they are confronting this monoculture facilitated by contracts that the men are signing with the companies.

And another article reflects on the ongoing plans of Indonesia's government to construct a new capital city with the argument of making it a 'green' and 'smart' city, which would help Indonesia achieve its 'net zero emissions' targets. The article draws parallels to the time when Brazilian rulers decided to construct a new capital city some 60 years ago in the middle of the country.

While Indigenous Peoples, peasant and other communities, in particular in the Global South, are confronting first hand the heavy impacts of the climate crisis, UN conferences and agreements have been flooded, since the beginning, with the interests of keeping the capitalist economy running.

## World Rainforest Movement

Let's turn our eyes and efforts toward strengthening our solidarity and strategizing with horizontal alliances among grassroots movements. (5) The discussions need to be there, with those that are truly defending life.

- (1) Swiss Confederation, Bilateral climate agreements on emission reductions and carbon storage abroad, <https://www.bafu.admin.ch/bafu/en/home/topics/climate/info-specialists/climate--international-affairs/staatsvertraege-umsetzung-klimauebereinkommen-von-paris-artikel6.html>
- (2) Argus, Swiss article 6 agreements 'set poor precedent', November 2021, <https://www.argusmedia.com/en/news/2269408-swiss-article-6-agreements-set-poor-precedent>
- (3) Reuters, U.S. climate envoy Kerry launches carbon offset plan, November 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/cop/us-climate-envoy-kerry-launches-carbon-offset-plan-2022-11-09/>
- (4) REDD-Monitor, Guyana is to sell US\$750 million carbon offsets to Hess Corporation, a US-based oil corporation that is extracting oil in Guyana. The saga of false solutions to the climate crisis continues, December 2022, <https://redd-monitor.org/2022/12/05/guyana-is-to-sell-us750-million-carbon-offsets-to-hess-corporation-a-us-based-oil-corporation-that-is-extracting-oil-in-guyana-the-saga-of-false-solutions-to-the-climate-crisis-continues/>
- (5) WRM briefing, A critical reflection on participation in international forest policy processes, 2022, <https://www.wrm.org.uy/publications/wrm-briefing-a-critical-reflection-on-participation-in-international-forest-policy-processes>

## Oil palm plantations in Chiapas, Mexico: Women fight against territorial control and violence

**Oil palm plantations are a central cause of deforestation in southeast Mexico. A network of women in Chiapas have organized to denounce the tactics of coercion and deception employed by the State and companies to get peasants to accept this monoculture on their lands. Their struggle is for the land, for their knowledge, and for their voices to be heard.**

Oil palm plantations have become one of the main drivers of deforestation in southeast Mexico. This monoculture is being imposed as a form of territorial control, disrupting and taking advantage of existing social organization, and causing violence—especially for women and the territories they defend (1).

According to data from 2019, the state of Chiapas in southern Mexico has more than 43 percent of the country's oil palm plantations (2). In the Coastal Region alone, in southern Chiapas, there are 27,500 hectares planted. These plantations connect northern Chiapas with a “corridor” of palm plantations, which includes territories in Guatemala and Honduras. This corridor was consolidated through the ‘Mesoamerican Integration and Development Project,’ which promotes the ‘Mesoamerican Biofuels Program.’ This program, in turn, seeks to reorganize the territory to benefit business interests and local elites. Meanwhile, the Coastal Region has become a large extractive area, with mining projects, dams, mega-infrastructure projects, gas pipelines and monoculture plantations; additionally there is greater military control in this area, due to migration to northern countries. It is no coincidence that the largest palm plantations are located here, given that it is the most water-rich region of Mexico.

There are eleven plants in Chiapas that process crude palm oil, which is later refined into vegetable oil in refineries located in Veracruz and Jalisco. Each of these plants encourages the expansion of palm planting. The oil palm plantations are also related to another megaproject in Palenque in northern Chiapas which supports further extraction: ‘The Mayan Train.’ This is the most visible component of the ‘South-Southeast Territorial Reorganization Project,’ which is also connected to the ‘Mesoamerican Integration and Development Project.’ The train will serve as an extractive route for basic raw materials, including oil palm.

Faced with this situation, women have been powerfully organizing in the region, and denouncing the tactics of coercion and deception used by the State and companies to get peasants to accept this monoculture on their land. They mention the following impacts: that the area they have for gardens and backyard farms is increasingly smaller and contaminated by agrochemicals; that the earth is eroding, making production hard; and that animals do not have water or grass. In order to feed their families, they increasingly depend on the purchase of industrialized and processed products, and even the purchase of basic grains such as corn and beans. For the women this has also meant the dispossession of their ancestral practices of caring for and preserving the

territories, as well as the loss of their knowledge, history, culture, and ways of organizing, working, celebrating and eating.

Most of the women are opposed to renting their land to grow this monoculture; but since they do not own the land, their interests are not taken into account. In this way, their struggle for land is also related to their struggle to be able to participate in and decide what happens in their communities—about what to plant, when and how. It is a struggle for their voices to be heard on equal terms as men's.

Meanwhile, under the guise of protection and controlling organized crime, the government has sent in the National Guard, thus militarizing these territories. As a result, the persecution, harassment, control, and the physical, sexual and emotional violence against women—including feminicides—have increased with total impunity. This is also exacerbated by organized crime rings, which seek to control the region.

But the women have not stopped fighting. They are organizing, sharing information and training together in networks and collectives, to strengthen their collective voice and struggle.

WRM spoke with **Guadalupe Núñez Salazar, coordinator of the Network of Women from La Costa in Rebellion**. This is a group of about 80 women—belonging to several communities in the coastal municipalities of Chiapas—who are defending their lands and territories.

*WRM: Could you tell us how you remember these lands before palm came to the region?*

Before the palm trees were planted, this territory was full of fruit trees. There were mighty rivers, and there was a great diversity of vegetation and animals. I remember this place before palm very well. The women had a variety of crops, and they could consume and produce different foods. We could calmly bathe in the rivers, and there were a lot of fish during high fishing season. The water was pure and you didn't have to boil it or add anything to it in order to drink it—like we have to do now. In those days, you could feel that people were closer to the land and its riches, and there was a lot to eat, including animals from the forest. A lot of birds would come during certain seasons. They were very wet lands—they always have been—but we knew how to manage that to take advantage of them.

*WRM: When and how did the plantations arrive in your territories?*

Oil palm arrived in the 1990s through the governments.

In 1998 there were big floods that caused huge losses for peasant families. A large part of the region had been severely flooded. It's important to remember that Hurricane Mitch also occurred that year, and several provinces were buried—taking with them crops, animals and trees that people had planted to survive.

It was then that the governor at the time insisted that oil palm should be grown to help dry out the land and prevent flooding.

In 2007 the government started in with stronger propaganda to get people to plant palm trees on their lands. Government representatives would approach the *ejidatarios* who had land—most of whom were men—to promote this monoculture as a way to do business. And they kept up the discourse that palm would help prevent floods like the ones that occurred in 1998.

The palm boom in the region was also boosted by the promotion of credits to implement plantations that lasted up to five years.

It is important to remember that, due to the style of land ownership in Mexico, it is not possible for the government or a company to buy large tracts of land. Land is communally owned, organized in *ejidos*, but every *ejidatario* has an individual plot and can make individual decisions about its use. So what they do is take over lands by claiming that the companies are going to buy the palm fruits. This is also related to the use and control of water, since the plantations (and by extension, the companies) end up using the water from peasant lands. So instead of buying the land and the water, the companies rent it, so to speak. And this is when the radical change in the vegetation and diversity in the territories of this region begins.

So, with their interests united, the companies and the government began to work together to promote palm. At first they gave away seedlings to people who accepted their contracts, but later the plants cost 30 or 50 pesos each, and the companies themselves sold them. They promised the peasants that their lives would improve, that they would have more income....they sold the idea that the peasants would no longer be poor.

But there is a falsehood here, right? It is always thought that people in the communities are poor, but we have always said that poverty isn't really about having 1000 pesos in your purse. Wealth is what the communities have. They have their land, their water, their vegetation—and that is great wealth! Sometimes we don't realize this and we sell this wealth to the government and the companies. They are taking it from us! People from the communities are used and deceived through the promise of a lot of money.

Now you see an excessive amount of oil palm in the territories, and the more palm there is, the lower the price of the fruit is.

Contracts in this region are mostly with two processing companies: PalmoSur (Palmeras Oleaginosas del Sur S.A.) and Uumbal. There is also a government-promoted cooperative to collect the fruit, which belongs to the small-scale palm producers themselves. Nonetheless, the cooperative has had to buy even the scales to weigh the fruits before they can take the fruits to the processors.

*WRM: How was the Women's Network created, and what has been its process of struggle?*



The Network of Women from La Costa in Rebellion was born out of an organization called the Autonomous Regional Council of the Coast, whose main fight is access to electricity—though always in relation to what was happening in the territories vis-à-vis the numerous environmental issues affecting the communities.

In 2016 we began to organize as women, so that those who were already part of the organization but who not very involved could become more aware of what was going on in the communities. It was important for us to raise awareness about how community lands with palm plantations were being severely affected, and how this affected not only those people with plantations but also the whole community—and in particular, women. This led us to reach out to and meet with women who had palm in their territories and were experiencing its impacts—so that we could learn more about what was happening.

Now we know that the earth is cracked, the water is yellow, the rivers are much slower, and some water wells smell like rust. We are seeing the loss of diverse and nutritious foods, and medicinal plants. About five years after palm has been planted, we can see how food is now contaminated with agrochemicals. For example, corn cobs used to be big, but now they are small and with very scattered kernels. The earth is eroded and hardened, making it extremely difficult to produce food...many plants dry up or do not bear fruit. The water situation is also worrisome; we can directly see the pollution and how the water is running out...there is no longer enough water. And when there is no water, it is women who suffer the most; it is women who have to figure out how to get it, no matter what. This sharing helped us to continue to organize and have an impact on the defense of our lands and territories.

We started as five women in 2016, and now there are around 80 of us from 16 communities. There are about 10-15 women from each community who are watchful and having an impact on the work.

The experience in the Autonomous Council—in which there were both men and women—made us realize that it was important to create a space just for women. We had to find a space where we could talk not only about the contamination and impacts on the land and water, but also about the violations of our rights as women. The Network became a necessary space for us to be together, hug each other, feel each other, reflect together and walk together. That feeling pushed us to strengthen this Women's Network.

One of our main challenges in the process of maintaining this space was to make ourselves heard, in order to gather strength. Because if we can't speak outside of our spaces, then who is going to hear us? Therefore, the space is critical to strengthening ourselves and being able to speak with conviction. It is important to understand that many women are violated in their homes; and so together, we learn to defend ourselves and understand our rights that have been violated. Also, working in organizational processes of resistance in many cases implies confronting our male

counterparts. As women together, we can see the ways to move forward, to keep fighting. Being able to hug one another and cry together helps us strengthen our collective voice.

Being a woman puts extractivism in perspective. What is being extracted? Well, our plants, our knowledge, our health. Women bear the burden of doing the marches, the blockades, the meals...and in this way, our burdens keep growing. The men go on the tours too (laughter).

Now we are trying to raise awareness so that those who have palm on their lands see how they can cut some palm trees every year in order to gradually replant our own crops.

*WRM: What is violence like in the territories, and what is the defense against it?*

Since the National Guard arrived, we see their presence in the communities. According to them, they are here to safeguard, but what we see is an increase in homicides, feminicides, criminal activity and disappeared persons....everything. Their presence makes it so that there is a lot of control; and we believe they are here to protect the interests of the government and the companies. Because we are against palm plantations, but we are also against the mining companies, the dams and the large wind farms that the government wants to install in the region. We are taking action to say that as women, we are the ones who see the main impacts, and we are standing up to defend our lands.

In addition to being mothers, daughters and wives, we are defenders of life. The National Guard is here to stay, but that is not going to keep us from organizing to defend what is ours—that which is so valuable that they want to take it away from us. We have observed that since there have been so many soldiers in our territory, more women have been murdered, more young women have been disappeared, and there is more prostitution. Furthermore, organized crime has increased, and that worries us a lot, because we never know if we may wake up dead one day.

As women, we are part of the territory and, therefore, we are the most harmed when men sign these contracts. We are the force that is defending our food, our water, our knowledge. Through these women's spaces, we have been able to raise awareness among more women and come together to defend our land.

As women, we must organize and defend our rights and our collective ways of life that we have had since the time of our ancestors. We must understand and deeply reflect together about what governments and companies do against the people, in order to take action. We must also raise awareness among men, so that they understand that women need defense, information and the ability to make decisions. They must understand that they cannot go to meetings without us, that they must not sign anything without us. It is still a long process for them to understand that women are not objects, but rather the subjects of our own lives.

## World Rainforest Movement

(1) The information in the introduction is based on research by the Mexican organization, Water and Life, which in 2022 launched the publication: Ramos, Guillen Claudia y Schenerock, Angélica, La Palma Aceitera desde la Palabra de las Mujeres. Diagnóstico de la palma aceitera y sus efectos en los territorios de Chiapas, <https://aguayvida.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Mujeres-y-Palma-Aceitera-Diagno%CC%81stico.pdf>

(2) Ramos, Guillén Claudia, La expansión de la Palma Aceitera en el Sureste Mexicano, 2019, <https://materiales.otrosmundoschiapas.org/expansion-de-los-monocultivos-en-elsureste-mexicano-la-palma-aceitera-enchiapas/>

## A Dialogue Reflecting on 15 years of REDD as a Forest Climate Policy

**In 2022, WRM, along with other allies, spoke with several authors from the publication, “15 Years of REDD: A Mechanism Rotten at the Core.” The aim was to reflect on the different layers of harmful impacts that REDD has caused over the last 15 years. Here is a summary of each contribution.**

In November 2022, WRM spoke with several authors from the publication, “15 Years of REDD: A Mechanism Rotten at the Core,” along with other allies. The aim was to reflect on the different layers of harmful impacts that REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) has caused over the last 15 years. We must recall that REDD was introduced in UN climate negotiations as the leading policy on forests. It was also at the UN where the logic of offsets was introduced—that is, the erroneous idea that one person’s contamination in one specific place can be offset in another place by another actor. REDD is based on this logic, which has allowed corporate and state criminals to continue with their business as usual and garner a “green” image.

A lot can be said about REDD’s failures and the impacts it has caused in territories. It is important to emphasize, though, how its proponents have continuously repeated that forest-dependent communities are to blame for deforestation, and that REDD is the salvation to reduce deforestation. This colonialist and racist discourse facilitates the imposition of restrictions and prohibitions on communities and Indigenous Peoples regarding whether they can access and use their forests and lands. Yet REDD does not impose restrictions or prohibitions on the oil industry, logging companies, mining companies, mega-infrastructure projects; nor does it restrict the tree plantation industry, which is in constant expansion.

This article shares a summary of each of the contributions from the discussion. The complete event can be heard at this link: <https://youtu.be/NF0O1jbUZ20>

### **WRM with Jutta Kill, member of the WRM International Secretariat:**

*Why do you claim in your article that REDD has not been a total failure? And why is REDD still discussed in UN negotiations?*

Jutta Kill: Reducing deforestation was never the main reason or motivation behind introducing this mechanism. So what are the other motivations behind REDD? Identifying them will help us understand why REDD, and what are now called “Nature-Based Solutions” continue to be a big part of climate discussions—despite consistently high levels of deforestation.

If we only focus on how REDD has failed to reduce deforestation, we can’t see who has benefitted, and in what ways REDD *hasn’t* been a failure. Indeed, REDD has not been a failure for the oil

industry or for other industries responsible for the climate crisis. Mining and oil companies are some of the greatest beneficiaries of this mechanism. For them, REDD has served as a distraction to block discussion—both at the UN and in society in general—on what we should really be talking about: how to keep fossil fuels in the ground. Not paying attention to the carbon trapped under the earth's surface makes these companies happy, because it allows them to make billionaire profits from the extraction of oil, gas and coal. REDD's attention is instead placed on the carbon above the earth's surface—that is, in forests and soils. That is a trap.

REDD also didn't let the big conservation industry down. These NGOs have generated huge earnings by carrying out training workshops and introducing methods to measure carbon (with massive margins for error), among other things.

Another way in which REDD has not been a failure is in the huge amount of “carbon-neutral” programs that are available today. REDD has been crucial in making us believe that it is ok to keep buying products and services that in fact worsen the climate crisis.

In conclusion, there are many people generating astronomical profits through the fossil fuel industry, and they use REDD—and now also “Nature-Based Solutions” and the carbon market—to distract us from the need to stop extracting oil, coal and gas from the earth. Meanwhile, REDD has also helped increase land-grabbing and control over Indigenous Peoples' and peasant communities' use of their lands.

***WRM with Ivonne Yanez, member of Acción Ecológica in Ecuador and the Oilwatch Network in Latin America:***

*How can it be that the oil industry—the main driver of the climate crisis—is leading the demand for this so-called “solution” proposed by the UN?*

Ivonne Yanez: For almost 60 years, we have known that the emissions from extracting and consuming fossil fuels are the main cause of global warming. And the oil companies were the first to know this. There are videos from 50 years ago of scientists working for oil companies who talk about the problem of global warming. But we also know that capitalism—as we now know it—requires energy from fossil fuels, such as coal, oil and gas. And the very mechanisms we are talking about that use carbon offsets, such as REDD, have been falsely promoted as a solution to climate change—and promoted through the whole institutionality of the United Nations, the international financial system, and others. But in fact, these mechanisms were created precisely to continue the process of extraction and consumption of fossil fuels.

Now, when we talk about the oil industry we should not only be thinking about Shell, Texaco, Chevron or Eni, but also about fossil-fuel capitalism. We should be thinking about industrial agriculture that consumes high amounts of fossil fuels and emits other greenhouse gases; about the military industrial complex that consumes high amounts of fossil fuels; and also about the financial system which, of course, largely depends on the money that this whole military

industrial complex (tied to fossil fuels) moves. So capitalists created these offset mechanisms, because they wanted to say “we know what the problem is, but we don’t want to solve it.”

Likewise, we should avoid saying, “despite climate change negotiations,” or “despite these mechanisms,” the climate crisis has not been solved. We should always say, “due to this,” “due to these mechanisms,” or “due to the United Nations system and its whole infrastructure,” emissions have not stopped and have continued to increase.

***WRM with Tamra Gilbertson, who wrote her doctoral thesis on carbon offsets in Colombia:***

*What can we learn from the “carbon tax payment mechanism” from Colombia?*

Tamra Gilbertson: When people look for supposed “solutions” outside of the carbon market, they almost always argue that we have to establish a carbon tax. But when we take a deep look at carbon taxes and other similar schemes around the world, we find that countries that impose taxes on fossil fuels, emissions or other similar things have not managed to reduce extraction. Taxes do not keep fossil fuels in the ground. So a carbon tax is not going to stop climate change, nor will it keep polluters from polluting. On the other hand, we have seen that companies know perfectly well how to avoid paying taxes, which also affects consumers and workers’ wages.

These taxes, therefore, have not been created to stop capitalist accumulation, but on the contrary, to allow it to continue.

Another point is that these taxes end up being the first step for countries in establishing domestic carbon markets. In the case of Colombia, the tax program has ended up being an inventory of the country’s emissions. And it was created in such a way that only certain kinds of pollution produced within Colombia had to pay a certain percentage of taxes. Let us recall that the largest open-pit coal mines in the Western Hemisphere are in Colombia, which causes tremendous impacts for the Afro-Colombian population and Indigenous Peoples.

When the carbon tax is established, it is not established based on the coal that is actually being extracted—because 98 percent of that coal is exported, mainly to Europe. The tax is based on the emissions generated by the machinery used to extract the coal. And instead of paying that tax, the companies managed to use other mechanisms, including REDD. Large donor agencies, such as USAID and conservation NGOs, sat down at the table to write those laws. And what has happened is the coal industry has still not paid carbon taxes; meanwhile, it is causing a very major impact—including violence—in two places: in the territories of extraction and in the territories used for the alleged offsets.

***WRM with Diego Cardona, member of Censat/Friends of the Earth, Colombia:***

*What are the challenges now that the (leftist) president of Colombia has presented the Green Economy as his political agenda on the environment and climate change?*

Diego Cardona: To answer this question I'd like to share a 2019 press release from the environmental authority of the Colombian Amazon, Corpoamazonía, in which it warns Indigenous Peoples and local communities about NGOs, cooperatives or companies that are running carbon-trading or carbon-credit projects in the territories. In other words, REDD-like projects—and we know they've changed the name a lot after all the scandals. What the last line of the release states, in summary, is that: “we recommend rural communities avoid giving these organizations documents, money or other requested information...” And several years have gone by since then, and the warning remains the same. Communities are still being fooled.

The number of carbon projects in the country has grown enormously; hundreds of contracts for millions of hectares with projects of this kind are constantly being signed. And the strategies are the same: they co-opt some community leaders—always a man or a few men from the community, never a woman; they sign a contract with that person or people; division is created, and, crucially, deterritorialization. That is, people are forced to leave their territory, they are not allowed to use it, they are not allowed to practice agriculture, they cannot cut down a tree to build a house. In short, they cannot live there.

What are the specific risks in this political moment in the country? Fundamentally, that social movements' agendas and priorities could change. In other words, the government has a lot of social and political endorsement from these movements and from Afro-descendent and Indigenous Peoples and peasants that supported its candidature. But the government's proposal relies heavily on the sale of carbon credits—even more so than with the former government, which we strongly resisted. But it is more problematic now, because it is a seemingly progressive government that is proposing what we have been resisting for decades. This is compounded by the fact that there is little critical analysis, and that large NGOs are presenting this plan as a good thing.

***WRM with Tom Goldtooth, director of the Indigenous Environmental Network from North America (IEN):***

*How does the use of certain language—such as benefits-sharing programs, certification systems, safeguards, etc.—affect the unity of Indigenous Peoples, and how can we strengthen solidarity?*

Tom Goldtooth: This is a very important issue, especially because many allies and even conservation NGOs say they are confused. They are confused because when our Indigenous Environmental Network and other networks from the Global South make statements—for example at the UN—we reject carbon markets, geoengineering and other technical “solutions,” as well as climate finance mechanisms.

When they ask us why we are opposed to them, we answer that it is all part of a bogus system. The only strategies discussed in the halls of UN climate negotiations are based on adaptation, mitigation or the funding of false solutions. They have invested a lot in this. For example, we have

had to deal with the World Bank, which allocates millions of dollars to intermediary indigenous organizations in the Global South. This has made it very hard for us to inform grassroots forest-based communities, because they have already been convinced that participating in REDD+ (as well as the so-called “Nature-Based Solutions”) will bring them money; they believe it will strengthen their struggles because they are being promised title to their lands.

As a small indigenous organization facing these actors, what is our strategy to warn Indigenous Peoples and local communities about the truth behind these false solutions? We are at the UN in the middle of a big convention center, with many people who have been tasked with training our communities. And so it's a big challenge. The owner of Amazon, Jeff Bezos, created a gigantic fund in the United States and funneled millions of dollars to some of the biggest NGOs that are promoting REDD and “Nature-Based Solutions.” Communities are being pressured to sign 90-year contracts, which they are being told will bring benefits—all with this language of “benefit-sharing.” Meanwhile, we are fighting to tell the counter-narrative.

Those who promote REDD and the carbon market need Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent communities. They are now investing in order to attract people they call “knowledge holders.” These are tactics to co-opt our Indigenous Peoples and communities in order to create division. Some indigenous brothers are being promised thousands of dollars; and the same thing is happening in North America. When they talk about “safeguards,” we must understand that there is no guarantee and no legal consequence if a nation-state violates these safeguards.

And so how can we build solidarity? This is the central point. We have to be very careful with the language we use, because they are using it to create confusion among us. There are people I have known for many years in the struggle for Indigenous Peoples rights, who are the very ones dividing us. The strategies of the huge conservation NGOs, financial institutions, companies and governments are dividing us. They are not worried about us. The only thing they want is to implement their market schemes. They have even coopted our narrative. They talk about the reconnection of people with nature, of harmony with nature, of ecological and “holistic” development, of “*buen vivir*.” They are manipulating the language! And our non-indigenous allies are also being divided. We must be very alert. We must develop strategies of solidarity and maintain them.

***WRM with Izzudin Prawiranegara, from Agrarian Resources Center in Indonesia:***

*According to the experience of the community next to the REDD project area in Katingan, Indonesia, how does certification of a REDD project affect communities?*

Izzudin Prawiranegara: The REDD project area in Katingan is 300,000 hectares, which includes 20 communities in the central region of Katingan. The project's main goal is to control people, and even stop people who try to leave the area with forest products. This is evidently a major burden for the population.



Over the last decade in Indonesia, there has been a lot of investment in strengthening law enforcement agencies that are committing so-called environmental crimes—most of which occur in forest people’s territories. Peoples who grew rice, for example, and who for hundreds of years used different plots for their shifting cultivation, can no longer do so. Now if they open up an area for cultivation, they face the threat of a US \$100,000 fine and the possibility of going to jail for 20 years. That is why farmers increasingly depend on agrochemicals, for which they need more money. Consequently, many farmers are forced to leave their lands, and when the land is abandoned, fires appear much more readily. The increased costs of growing rice are forcing people to fish, or to move onto forest lands to try to get something out of them; but they expose themselves to fines.

And so we have seen how capitalists—through the REDD project—are controlling vast swaths of land and creating the conditions that are degrading the land. Now it is harder for people to grow rice in those areas. In other words, the REDD project has increasingly marginalized the people, since they have had to change their traditional ways of cultivation and increasingly use agrochemicals. The people are increasingly being identified as a threat, and even as a commodity.

The project introduced CCB certification, which calculates the aggregate benefits in terms of carbon—based on the REDD Project’s intervention in the livelihoods of the peoples who live in and around the project. That is, it calculates the carbon emissions avoided by changing local practices. According to the project, local people are a threat. It commodifies people by including their livelihoods in its carbon accounting, as part of the requirement to obtain the certification. And once they have the certification, the carbon credits can be sold for a lot more money.

***WRM with Ladislas Désiré Ndembet, member of the organization, Muyissi Environnement, in Gabon:***

*How are communities impacted by the Grande Mayumba project—a million-hectare protected area that also includes a logging concession?*

Ladislas Désiré Ndembet: In Gabon, the Gran Mayumba REDD project does not ever use the word REDD. Its promoters talk about tourism, forest exploitation, agroindustry, and “Nature-Based Solutions,” but the word REDD is never uttered. The Mayumba National Park, which, along with 13 other national parks in Gabon, was created in 1992, occupies 11 percent of the regional territory. Mayumba has 5,000 inhabitants, including Indigenous Peoples from neighboring countries in West Africa who trade in the area.

20 years after the Mayumba maritime park was created, communities are feeling absolutely disillusioned, because they are no longer able to enjoy the wealth of their lakes and the Atlantic Ocean. Peasants and fishermen are suffering from various restrictions, including a prohibition on fishing. This is a real attack on food sovereignty. I am from that community and grew up eating oysters all the time; today this is no longer possible due to the strong conservationist policy.

The land has been handed over to carbon promoters. And the national park, which claimed it would bring people out of underdevelopment through ecotourism, ended up plunging them into total precariousness. In Gabon, the land belongs to the State, and the State is mired in corruption; thus, this mechanism is used to illegally appropriate land, by increasing protected areas. As a result, communities are cordoned off through conservation policies. The government prioritizes public-private partnerships, which end up causing more dispossession for the people.

The Gabonese government vigorously defends these bogus solutions, in an attempt to get more funding for them. It is important to remember that Norway has promised the Gabonese government US \$150 million, and started giving it money since 2021 in the form of carbon credits. It is a very difficult situation. We must denounce these situations and multiple these dialogues. We have to expose these false solutions and make them go away.

***WRM with Larry Lohmann, member of the CornerHouse research group in the United Kingdom:***

*Why do you state in your article that “REDD works better when it is more colonialist,” and how has REDD managed to survive for so many years?*

Larry Lohmann: REDD has always been stalked by its own colonialism. I remember when, more than 20 years ago in UN negotiations, an African delegate was outraged at the idea that the land and forests of the Global South would have to absorb the industrialized North's pollution. Despite the many reforms made to it, REDD will never be able to overcome this colonial stigma. That is because the economic logic of REDD makes it so that doing business as usual is cheaper for large companies than changing anything.

The Global South will never make a lot of money with REDD, because that would go against its own purpose. But the colonialism of REDD goes a lot deeper than the appropriation of lands. Indeed, every time they try to reform REDD, it gets more colonialist. Why? Because to be able to continue burning fossil fuels, those who buy REDD credits have to claim that they are the ones saving forests with their money. They are the ones who should be able to get credit, literally, for creating the distinction between “forests” and “non-forests.” But this means that they must completely ensure that nobody else gets credit for saving that forested area. If the companies that do carbon accounting for REDD projects want to keep their jobs, they need to prove that without REDD projects, nobody else can save the forests—not forest-dependent communities, social movements, local governments or anyone else.

Those who do carbon accounting for REDD projects are obligated to ignore many good things that could be happening without REDD. This means that they must maintain a colonialist attitude: “Those people in the Global South can't do this, only I can do it.” This is a requirement in carbon accounting.

It gets worse. Those who do carbon accounting also have to show buyers exactly how many credits they are going to receive, because only in this way can they quantify how much fossil fuel they will

be able to burn after having bought those credits. Therefore, forest-dependent communities and other actors in the Global South not only must be shown to be incapable of taking constructive action without REDD money; they also have to be shown to be statistically predictable in terms of what they would do without REDD money. There can only be one “baseline” for a REDD project, and that “baseline” must be quantifiable.

Many who critique REDD think that its problem is that predictions about what would happen without a REDD project are not precise enough. But the only way to make them more precise is to try to make people in the Global South more predictable and passive; and the only way to achieve that is by repeatedly reinforcing the colonial myth that native populations are lower than animals: with no imitative, with no free will, with no future they can call their own, with no future that they can build themselves.

Therefore, REDD’s colonialism is not just the appropriation of land. Its colonialism is also the technical and mathematical carbon accounting. And the more precise they try to make this accounting, the more colonialist it will become. REDD has survived, in part, because its critics who demand more precise “baselines” do not realize that in so doing, they are also demanding more colonialism.

## Podcast: The Voices of Women Living around Socfin's Oil Palm Plantations in Sierra Leone

**Oil palm plantation company Socfin has meant violence and oppression for affected communities in several African countries. Sierra Leone is no exception. In collaboration with Aminata Finda Massaquoi, a journalist and the national coordinator of the women's advocacy network WORNAPI, WRM is releasing a podcast to highlight the voices of women living with the impacts of industrial plantations.**

The name Socfin has been synonymous for violence and oppression in several West and Central African countries where the company operates industrial oil palm plantations. Sierra Leone is no exception. In collaboration with Aminata Finda Massaquoi, a journalist and the national coordinator of the women's advocacy network WORNAPI, WRM is releasing a podcast to highlight the different layers of oppression women face once industrial plantations invade their territories.

Access and listen to the podcast in English here.

<https://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin-articles/podcast-the-voices-of-women-living-around-socfins-oil-palm-plantations-in-sierra-leone>

“They work the land and therefore they are land users”

Oil palms are a traditional crop for many communities in Sierra Leone and across West Africa. Aminata Finda Massaquoi explains how “Palm oil is a vital part of the foods we eat every day. It has deep cultural benefits and it is the mainstay of our traditional economy, which is driven mostly by rural women. While the men usually grow and harvest the fruit, the women provide most of the labour required to extract the oil. This gives them a great deal of social prestige and economic benefits.”

Aminata has been working with and advocating for the rights of rural women for many years: “I have listened to their complaints and seen the realities on the ground for most of them.” “They work the land and therefore they are land users,” she explains.

The Malen Chiefdom, in Pujehun district in southern Sierra Leone is one of the largest palm oil producing districts in the country. It is an area that was badly affected by the 1991 to 2002 civil war. Yet, the importance of this crop to women and the local economy is under threat. Why? It has to do with the multinational company Socfin, a subsidiary of the Luxembourg-based multinational, the Socfin Group. The arrival of the company meant that industrial monocultures have pushed traditional palm oil production to the margins, leaving behind a trail of destruction and devastation for communities living in and around these plantations, in particular for women and girls.

Aminata reminds us how, when companies arrive to the communities, their representatives engage with the men and exclude women from the negotiations. Even though, as she says, “In the end, it is the women and their children who suffer the most. Besides losing farmlands, women also lose their own small plantations-which guarantees them a regular source of income.”

With the aim to learn from women who are most affected by the company’s arrival in this area, Aminata travels to the Malen Chiefdom. She tells how the biodiverse landscape radically changes in this area, with hectares and hectares of oil palms on either side of the road. In 10 years, the forests and fertile land of the Malen Chiefdom were transformed into thousands of hectares of oil palm monocultures.

Aminata explains that in 2011, Socfin signed a 50-year land lease agreement with the government of Sierra Leone and the local Chiefdom authority, which handed more than 18,000 hectares of land over to the company –and that’s nearly 70 percent of the Chiefdom’s total area.

The deal has sparked over a decade of violence and division in Malen Chiefdom, with local residents saying that they were not properly consulted or compensated for their lands. And that Socfin has not lived up to its promises of building of schools, roads, hospitals and providing scholarships.

Mamie Sannoh is the first one Aminata speaks with. Sannoh is from the village of Jumbu Malen, a small community on the main road leading to Sahn Malen town. Sannoh has five children and five grandchildren to look after. She leased her land to Socfin in 2011, and says she received only a small amount of money in return. Mamie Sannoh says: “We used to grow peanuts and peppers, and process our own palm oil. But we have to buy all of these things now. When I had my land, I would just get palm fruits from my garden, process them, extract the palm oil and sell it. Now we don’t have land, and we don’t have money.” Worrying about not having enough food for her children, she says, “I regret it now. If I still had my land, I’d be able to grow a lot of things and survive, but now I cannot do that. How will I survive?”

Not everyone in this Chiefdom agreed to lease their lands to Socfin. But even the families that held on to their lands are suffering. Aminata spoke with Mariatu Kambo from Jumbu Malen in Kemoh section. Mariatu explains “I have a small plantation of palm oil here but I can’t process it because the company doesn’t allow us. I don’t have anything to do. Even when I harvest my oil palm fruit, I cannot process it. As soon as they see us here, security men come and accuse us of stealing the company’s palm fruit. Now, even getting hold of palm oil to cook with is difficult for us. There’s nothing we can do.”

Since the company's arrival, communities, and women in particular, have faced violent incidents, criminalization and harassment. Strong resistance also emerged, mostly led by women. A resistance speaking with one united voice: lands must be returned to the traditional care-takers.

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Aminata also spoke with Aminata Fabba, the Deputy Chairlady of the Malen Land Owners and Users Association (MALOA), who said “We are like tools in the hand of the company and the paramount chief. The paramount chief does to us what the company wants and they ignore our concerns.” Fabba says that the women in Malen want the land deal with Socfin to be renegotiated ...or the people must have their lands back.

# New Capital Cities, Deforestation and Social Apartheid: Parallels Between Brazil and Indonesia

[Available also in Bahasa Indonesia](#)

**Brazil and Indonesia share a particular similarity: at some point its rulers decided to build a new capital city. While rulers in Brazil built Brasilia some 60 years ago, construction of the new Indonesian capital is currently underway. Both projects reinforce a colonial State, in spite of their promoters claiming the opposite. Both stories however, also show the role of social struggles as a way to revert a history of colonialism.**

In spite of the 17 thousand kilometres separating Brazil and Indonesia, both countries have much in common, such as having some of the world's largest remaining tropical forests. They also share one particular similarity: at some point, during the post-colonial era, its rulers came up with the idea of building a new capital city. While rulers in Brazil put the idea in practice some 60 years ago by building the current capital, Brasilia, construction of the new Indonesian capital is currently underway. In 2019, the Indonesian national parliament started putting the idea into practice by approving its construction in Kalimantan. What parallels can be drawn between both projects and, most importantly, what lessons can be learnt for social struggles in Indonesia as well as in Brazil?

## **A New Capital: The Misleading Argument to Make a Break with Colonialism**

In Brazil, the idea to build a new capital city is as old as the country's independence from Portugal, in 1822. The post-colonial elites argued, among others, that Rio de Janeiro, which was the capital since 1763, was a symbol of the colonizers' influence and that a new capital city would mark a break from the colonial past. They also argued that establishing the capital in the centre of the country would strengthen national unity and bring progress and development to the whole of a nation where the majority of the population lived along the coast. As a result of disputes among the elites over where to build the new capital, Brasilia was only built in the 1950s under the presidency of Juscelino Kubitschek. (1)

Indonesia, in turn, became independent from the Netherlands in 1945. Since then, several Presidents expressed their wish to build a new capital city away from Jakarta. In 2019, under the presidency of Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin, the national parliament approved the State Capital Law project to build a new capital city (*Ibu Kota Nusantara* – IKN) in East Kalimantan. The infrastructure work has already started. The arguments used by Jokowi's

government show parallels with the discourse of the Brazilian rulers: Indonesia should have a new capital as part of its own new and independent history. And as it was argued with Brasilia, the idea of moving the capital to East Kalimantan, at the centre of the archipelago, would further develop the whole of the country, (2) since most of its population and economic activities are currently concentrated on the island of Java, where Jakarta is located.

### **Deforestation and Energy**

In the case of Brasilia, 73 per cent of the existing savannah – *cerrado* in Portuguese - was destroyed building the course of establishing the new capital: the government buildings; business, residential and shopping areas; the necessary transport infrastructure. The new capital city, however, triggered a far-reaching process of deforestation that continues to this day. The building of roads to connect Brasilia with the different states of the federation played a crucial role in this process. One of the first roads to be built was the Transbrasiliana highway which connects Brasilia with the Amazon city Belém, the capital of Pará state (3). In addition to destruction of a significant area of forest to build this 2,000 km road, its construction also opened up the Eastern part of the Amazon region, exposing communities, in particular Indigenous Peoples, and their territories to different forms of violence and destructive activities, including timber extraction, cattle breeding, soy and other monoculture plantations, mining activities and the construction of hydroelectric dams.

Those dams, responsible for flooding and thus destroying extensive forest areas, are the backbone of Brasilia's energy supply. The Itaipu dam, the world's second biggest dam in terms of electricity production, ensures 20 per cent of its supply, while the remaining 80 per cent is supplied by the FURNAS system, which is also based on large hydroelectric dams.

Indonesia is starting the project of its new capital city in a very different context than when Brasilia was built. Since then, extensive deforestation on all continents has significantly reduced (tropical) forests. Indonesian rulers, including its elites and international investors and financial institutions such as the World Bank, have actively encouraged forest destruction in the name of 'development', in particular in Kalimantan and Sumatera over the past decades. The climate crisis also creates more serious impacts on the territories every year. In the face of the climate crisis, global elites, corporations and financial institutions have essentially reinvented the fossil-fuel dependant capitalist economy, by presenting it as a so-called 'green' or 'low carbon' economy. But behind the shiny new image of the 'green' economy hides a logic of capitalist expansion and further exploitation of forests, its peoples and its territories with the aim of increasing corporate



profits and elites' benefits. Despite that fossil fuels are the main driver of the climate crises, it is under this capitalist framework that corporations and governments formulate most climate and forest-related policies and commitments.

This helps to explain why the Indonesian government is promoting its new capital city as a 'smart, green and forest' city. The government argues that the new capital city (IKN) is part of the solution to the global crisis and will help Indonesia achieve its target of 'net zero emissions', using renewable energy for its electricity demand and an electric, battery-based, transport system. (4)

However, the 256 thousand hectares allegedly needed to construct the new capital city, which is six times the size of the current capital Jakarta, include forest areas that will be destroyed. Besides, the 'renewable' electricity supply will come from the yet to be built largest hydroelectric power plant (PLTA, in Bahasa Indonesian) in Southeast Asia that is fed by five dams on the Kayan River, in Peso District, Bulungan Regency, in North Kalimantan. According to Indonesian activist NGO JATAM in East Kalimantan: "There are six villages that will become victims of this Kayan River hydropower project: Long Lejuh, Long Peso, Long Bia, and Long Pelban villages on the banks of the Kayan River as well as archaeological sites in Long Pelban Village, Muara Pangiang and Long Lian. There will be two villages that will be relocated or evicted: Long Pelban and Long Lejuh villages. There are important sites for the Bulungan indigenous community and sacred tombs (Salung) in Muara Pangean, Long Lejuh, Long Pelban, and Long Lian Villages which get the same threats. There is also a historical heritage of Bulungan 'Lahai Bara', a tomb or a sacred site in Long Pelban Village being threatened". (5)

Moreover, building the new capital city will further trigger the expansion of destructive extractive industries. Besides sand and karst, elephant stone is needed for the infrastructure of the new capital, increasing the destruction created by this type of mining in West and Central Sulawesi. Several islands and its peoples on the eastern side of the archipelago will also suffer from the devastation of nickel extraction, one of the main raw materials in the production of electric vehicle batteries. It is worth noting that these nickel smelters in Indonesia are run on coal-fired power plants (PLTU, in Bahasa Indonesian). (6)

### **Social apartheid**

When Kubitschek's government started to build Brasilia, it strongly pushed the argument that the new capital city represented a land of dreams and opportunities. It propagated the idea that all people, independent of the class they were born into, would share the

same space. Thus, accomplishing the dream of a new capital would also mean accomplishing the dream of a new, equal society.

Nothing could be further from the truth. To begin with, the construction of Brasilia destroyed and reduced territories and *cerrado* vegetation on which *quilombola* communities and Indigenous Peoples, who have occupied the overall region since immemorial times, depended upon for their survival. Nine years after the capital was inaugurated, about 79.000 people were living in 14.600 tents around Brasilia. In an attempt to halt the migration of more workers attracted by the supposed opportunities that Brasilia would offer them, the government started to remove people from these tent camps to a separate area that later became a new administrative unit called Ceilândia. This was a process comparable to the practices during the apartheid regime of racial segregation from South Africa.

Nowadays, compared with the other 26 Brazilian state capitals, Brasilia is the most unequal one. In 2018, habitants of 'Lago Sul', a posh neighbourhood full of mansions, tourist attractions and expensive restaurants, enjoyed an average income of R\$ 7,654.91 Brazilian reals. Meanwhile, in the neighbourhood of 'Estrutural', at only 15 km distance from 'Lago Sul', the average income was R\$ 485.97, which means 16 times less than in 'Lago Sul'. In contrast to 'Lago Sul', people in 'Estrutural' face a daily struggle to survive. With poor and expensive transport facilities to reach their work places, they face all sorts of problems to attend their basic needs, including affordable food, access to water, energy, sanitation, health services, etc. (7)

Although still in its initial phase, the building of Indonesia's new capital city in Kalimantan seems to be on a similar course. It is destroying and reducing the life spaces of the indigenous Balik people and other communities in the area, in particular those living in the so-called Ring 1, the most important area of the new capital, reserved for high-level governmental officials and other elites. Ring 2 and Ring 3 will be destined to commerce and industry respectively and to residential neighbourhoods. So far, in what will be Ring 1, indigenous Balik women whose lives and livelihoods are interwoven with the Sepaku River, have been particularly affected by the initial construction works. Fields, gardens and ancestral graves have been destroyed. Their ancestral knowledge of woven nipa roofs is doomed to disappear if the project of damming rivers to attend the future water supply of the capital city continues, due to the destruction of the areas where the nipa palm occurs. (8)

### **Who is paying the bill?**

The only official figure stating how much the construction of Brasilia cost, estimated in 1960 by the then Minister of Finance of Brazil, Eugênio Gudin, is US\$ 1.5 billion, equivalent to an amount of about US\$ 13 billion today, about R\$ 70 billion Brazilian reals.

This looks like a relatively small amount. However, in comparison to the gross national product (GNP) of 1960, building Brasilia consumed 10 per cent of the national budget. 10 per cent of the GNP today would represent about US\$ 140 billion or R\$ 750 billion, a far more significant amount. This amount, nonetheless, still does not give the full picture since a lot of the construction works took place after 1960.

With such a bill, another problem arose: the Brazilian government simply did not have enough money to pay for it. The 'solution' adopted was to create more money. This, in turn, contributed to one of the highest inflation rates in the country's history, leading to considerable price increases of food and other basic products. It also contributed to a period of political instability that was the precursor of the military coup in 1964, which installed a dictatorship that lasted until 1985. (9)

Indonesia is already a highly indebted country. Who will pay the bill for this mega-project, estimated to cost some US\$ 32.7 billion? (10) The government has promised that it will 'only' cover 20 per cent of the cost, while investors will pay for the rest. The government claims that many investors are interested. However, these will most likely invest under public-private partnerships, for which the government needs to play the role of a 'sales marketing manager', providing tax incentives and tax holidays to ensure investors' returns and profits. Ultimately, the cost will be borne by the people of Indonesia. (11)

### **Stop IKN, the new capital city to recolonize the country**

Until today, and for over 60 years, the quilombola community that was evicted for the construction of Brasilia continues to struggle to demarcate at least a tiny part of what used to be their territories. (12) Similarly, the Balik Indigenous People who are facing the construction of the new capital city in Indonesia continue to raise their voices.

Dahlia is a dancer from a Balik community in the area where the new capital is planned. She says: "I can't imagine what will happen when the project is ready to be implemented," (...), "No one wants to hear our voices. I want to cry and scream. I feel like being colonized even though we are in a free and independent country." (13)

A striking parallel between both stories of the new capital cities is how both projects only reinforce a colonial State, in spite of their promoters claiming the opposite. Both projects dominate and destroy the life spaces and territories of forest communities for economic

and political interests. And both new capital cities also promote policies of social apartheid.

Both stories however, also show the role of social struggles as a way to put a halt to and revert a history of colonialism and other structural oppressions that include racism, capitalism and patriarchy. Behind the discourses of the presidents and the false propaganda about the new capital cities, communities in both countries are the protagonists of the struggles to defend and reclaim their lands, rivers and forests on which their culture and identity depend.

When the military dictatorship in Brazil ‘opened up’ the country from 1964 onwards, to ensure profits for Brazilian and in particular international elites, their project was to ‘kill’ the culture and identity of Indigenous Peoples and other traditional communities by forcibly integrating them into the larger, so-called ‘modern’ society. But Indigenous Peoples continued resisting. In 1980, the first indigenous organisation was founded in the Amazon state of Acre, called UNI, and about 500 others followed in the years after. Together with other social movements, their resistance became so strong that it overthrew the military in power. A new Constitution laid the basis for repairing a small part of the historical debt towards indigenous and traditional communities. The fact that nowadays 26 per cent of the Amazon territory is controlled by Indigenous Peoples, however, is not just because of that new Constitution. It is a result, above all, of social struggles that keep putting pressure on a State structure that continues to rule for wealthy private interests and which maintains many colonial traces.

The government of Indonesia is still in the very initial stage of building its new capital city, and thus, there is still the chance to cancel the project. As the example of Brasília shows, building a new capital city has nothing to do with building an independent country and breaking with the colonial era. Indigenous Peoples hold the key to understanding what break with the colonial pasts entails. This includes a fundamental change in the State’s relation with the people living in the territories and with the territories themselves, one that needs to stop listening to the wealthy national and foreign investors. That could be a first real step towards decolonizing the country.

### *International Secretariat of WRM*

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## Carbon Illusions in the Brazilian Amazon

**In line with certain aspects of a recent WRM study, we show how four REDD projects in the municipality of Portel, in the state of Pará in the Brazilian Amazon, contribute to perpetuating certain fantasies inherent to the idea of carbon trading through the REDD mechanism.**

WRM recently published the study ‘Neocolonialism in the Amazon: REDD Projects in Portel, Brazil’, regarding four REDD projects in the municipality of Portel, in the state of Pará in the Brazilian Amazon. (1) In line with certain aspects of this study, we will attempt to demonstrate how projects currently underway contribute to perpetuating certain fantasies inherent to the idea of carbon trading through REDD projects.

The REDD project in Portel is led by investors from industrialized countries. It began in 2008 and is projected to last until 2055. The initiative comprises four projects covering a total area of over 7,000km<sup>2</sup>. The project’s proponents claim to carry out actions in this area that prevent the forest from being destroyed and bring benefits to the local population. In exchange, following verification of their projects by Verra, a private certification body, they are authorized to trade carbon credits from the supposedly avoided emissions. Even though it is still in its early stages, the enterprise has already made possible the sale of over 23 million carbon credits (2) ‘produced’ in Portel, which the study estimates are equivalent to over US\$120 million.

What is striking is not the figures themselves, but the degree of financialization of nature that carbon markets represent. For investors, it is an additional opportunity to profit from controlling land, but through an abstract commodity – carbon credits. With a REDD project, the forest can be appropriated by investors at a much lower cost and with greater discretion than, for example, through soybean monoculture, extensive cattle rearing or mining. Thus, the capacity to obtain considerable profit margins without needing to actually ‘produce’ a physical commodity seems to be the most obvious reason for the euphoric multiplication of investments in REDD.

Those behind the REDD projects in Portel claim that it is a win-win venture for everyone because:

- the project contributes to mitigating the climate crisis by reducing emissions;
- the local population benefits from social actions;
- the investors are financially rewarded for the environmental and social services provided.

We are in no doubt about the last statement – the proponents of the projects in Portel are indeed receiving huge returns on their investments. What we intend to highlight below are the fantasies regarding the first two assumptions.

### **Reducing emissions: a good story**

The four projects in Portel demonstrate a common characteristic of REDD projects, which is that a good story is a vital element for ‘producing’ and selling carbon credits. In the case of Portel, the

projects' proponents are aware that the destruction of the Amazon is a real and widely known phenomenon, so have seized the opportunity to exaggerate the deforestation forecast had it not been for the projects' implementation. In REDD projects, this forecast is precisely what determines the number of credits that can be traded by their proponents.

Portel is no different. The fictitious nature of the 'deforestation story' supposedly avoided by REDD projects is based on questionable 'technical' parameters. One of them, for example, concerns the area used to estimate the projected deforestation. By including the Transamazon Highway in this area, the projected deforestation is significantly greater than if it had not been included in the REDD project. Thus, the projection of carbon credits generated – and therefore the projects' potential profit – automatically becomes considerably greater. (3)

Residents of the project areas we spoke to during a visit to Portel in May 2022 believe that the projected deforestation presented by the developers if the projects are not executed does not match the reality of their territories. Similarly, they cannot understand how the results presented so far show that the projects have avoided so much deforestation to the point of generating so much revenue. After all, according to the residents, all they seem to have done is donate wood-burning stoves and food baskets to residents, fill out forms and collect signatures.

Project owners might claim that: all the calculations presented in the projects are based on scientific methodologies; the projections and results are verified by third-party consulting companies (that they themselves hire!); the scheme is accredited by Verra, the leading international institution in carbon credit certification. However, researchers from different universities have shown that these methodologies have regularly overestimated the capacity of projects (4) to avoid emissions. These and other flaws have called Verra's reliability into question (5), suggesting that the certification systems for REDD projects have been a key element in generating profits based on the argument of environmental impact mitigation.

REDD enthusiasts argue that these are 'technical' flaws that can be corrected, or that more efficient safeguards are needed. However, the 'technical' jargon and arguments mask their underlying political intentions and, most of all, distract from the REDD mechanism's fundamental problem. It is widely known that the main cause of global warming is the emissions caused by burning fossil fuels. If fossil fuels represent a continuous (and increasing!) release of carbon trapped underground into the atmosphere, believing that the natural cycles of the biosphere (including the mere non-destruction of forests) can 'compensate' for their emissions (6) is an illusion. This is a structural inconsistency that has gone hand in hand with the logic of carbon markets since their inception.

It is also worth mentioning that the stories often told in REDD project documentation consider local populations to be a threat to forests. In the case of Portel, the fact that the projects consider the activities of the *ribeirinhos* (7) to be partly responsible for the emissions lessens the burden of responsibility of agribusiness and predatory extractivism – which are actually highly destructive.

## **Benefits for the local population?**

From the social point of view, the REDD initiative in Portel has two peculiarities. The first is charity actions – basically the already mentioned donations of stoves and food baskets, as well as the formulation of the Rural Environmental Registry (CAR). The CAR is a self-declaration related to land use and required by the Brazilian legislation. These actions have been carried out by an organization called Amigos dos Ribeirinhos, which in the project's documentation is repeatedly presented as a nonprofit charity organization. However, according to available public records, it is a private company owned by a North American named Michael Greene, who, in turn, appears as the main project coordinator in Portel.

The second peculiarity is the listing of 1252 riverine families as proponents of one of the REDD projects, in conjunction with the abovementioned company owned by Michael Greene. According to the documentation, these families “duly signed confirming agreement with REDD Carbon Credit Project”, and supposedly are represented by the president of the Portel Rural Producers' Union. However, there is no document with the signatures or legal consent of the people listed to be found on the Verra database. It seems there was no legal authorization granted by the families to participate in the REDD project.

Dwellers we talked to in May 2022 were surprised to find out the land they live on is listed in the projects. They could never have imagined that their land has generated a commodity of which they are unaware, and whose sale has generated million-dollar revenues that they obviously do not know about either. And neither could they suppose that among the buyers of the carbon credits from the projects in Portel are some of the world's largest companies, like giants of aviation Boeing, Delta Airlines and Air France, Amazon (e-commerce), Samsung (technology) and Repsol (oil), among others.

Reinforcing the argument of the previous section that the REDD mechanism does not reduce emissions, ventures like that in Portel end up underwriting the expansion plans of various corporations for which there will be no barriers to the increased emissions forecast. After all, now they can ‘offset’ or ‘neutralize’ these emissions by buying certified credits from Portel, thus advertising their alleged environmental and social responsibility. Therefore, in terms of ‘social benefits’, one is dealing with a perverse scheme where:

- people who live in the area of the projects lose autonomy over their territory, since the carbon absorbed belongs to the polluting corporations that buy it and no longer to them;
- people who live in the vicinity of operational sites of polluting corporations that buy the credits will continue to suffer their direct impacts, since the supposed offset in emissions permits them to continue and even to expand their emissions;
- those responsible for the climate crisis are free to continue to profit from the burning of fossil fuels and to intensify the climate crisis, whose impacts disproportionately affect communities of the South that depend on forests and small scale agriculture.



## Renewed colonialism

The peculiarities of the age aside, the REDD venture in Portel takes us back to the early days of European colonization in Brazil. The difference is that nowadays, instead of little mirrors and adornments, the foreign entrepreneurs that arrive in Portel seduce the population with stoves, food baskets and help to obtain the CAR – which actually is a document demanded by the Brazilian legislation, but, furthermore, is a fundamental document for the proponents to implement their REDD project and to appropriate the wealth produced in these lands. The valuable product to be extracted and sold in the global North is not Brazilwood, but carbon credits, an unimaginably more abstract commodity. The colonizers, in the past self-considered carriers and disseminators of civilization, now present themselves as saviors of the forest and bastions of climate crisis impact mitigation – a problem they themselves created.

## Efficacy and illusion

Lastly, the venture in Portel corroborates the fact that the REDD mechanism can be rather effective... for some: effective in the appropriation of forest lands by private interests; effective in ‘producing’ an invisible, high quality commodity; effective in guaranteeing profits for foreign investors; effective in ensuring that large scale corporations get greenwashed through the purchase of carbon credits. However, in terms of the capacity to tackle the climate crisis, the initiative in Portel does not reveal anything new: the REDD mechanism and carbon markets continue to be a major illusion that at the end of the day makes a contribution in the direction opposite to the objective that justified its creation. Meanwhile, communities that depend on forests carry on having their rights violated and their self-determination compromised – even if unwittingly.

*International Secretariat of the World Rainforest Movement (WRM)*

*The facts about the REDD initiative in Portel presented in this brief article, as well as other problems that permeate the case, may be looked up in greater detail in the WRM report [‘Neocolonialismo na Amazônia: Projetos REDD em Portel, Brasil’](#).*

(1) WRM, Neocolonialismo na Amazônia: Projetos REDD em Portel, Brasil (November 2022):

<https://www.wrm.org.uy/pt/publicacoes/neocolonialismo-na-amazonia-projects-redd-em-portel-brasil>.

(2) Equivalent to 23 million tons of carbon that supposedly would have been released into the atmosphere in the absence of the projects.

(3) In order to better understand how these forecasts are made, consult the WRM publication “10 alertas sobre REDD para comunidades”, available at: <https://www.wrm.org.uy/pt/publicacoes/10-alertas-sobre-redd-para-comunidades>

(4) PNAS, Overstated carbon emission reductions from voluntary REDD+ projects in the Brazilian Amazon, 2022: <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2004334117>.

(5) The Guardian, Carbon offsets used by major airlines based on flawed system, warn experts, 2021:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/04/carbon-offsets-used-by-major-airlines-based-on-flawed-system-warn-experts>.

## World Rainforest Movement

(6) WRM, Todo o carbono é igual? Carbono fóssil, violência e poder, 2022: <https://www.wrm.org.uy/15-years-of-redd-is-all-carbon-the-same>.

(7) The term *ribeirinho* relates to the traditional population that inhabits the region's river banks. Their main economic activities are fishing, the gathering of fruits and subsistence agriculture.

## South America: "Green" Destruction in the Amazon Rainforest

**Most of the causes of deforestation that were identified in a UN-led global analysis from 1999 continue to exist. Yet, the "solutions" proposed since then have become new underlying causes of deforestation. In this scenario, projects that destroy the forest and "green" projects depend on each other in order to be viable.**

For decades, Latin America and the Caribbean have suffered from the world's highest rate of tropical deforestation—higher than Africa or Asia. Much of the destruction in Latin America is concentrated in the Amazon region. In 2021, of the 10 countries with the highest loss of primary tropical forests in the world, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia ranked first, third, fifth and sixth, respectively.

To understand the process of deforestation, we must understand not only the most visible causes—such as timber extraction and the advance of agribusiness and mining—but also the underlying causes. These tend to be hidden, less discussed and poorly understood; they are closely linked to various forms of oppression under the capitalist-racist-patriarchal system, as well as to the region's colonial legacy. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand how projects recently touted as "solutions" to the climate crisis have, themselves, become new underlying causes of deforestation.

The first and only comprehensive UN-led analysis of these causes on a global scale was carried out in 1999, with significant participation from civil society organizations from major countries with forests. In re-reading the causes identified in 1999, what is most striking is that most of them are still extremely current (1):

- Large "development" or infrastructure projects, such as dams, roads, and mining and oil-extraction schemes, are perpetuated by corporate-state alliances;
- Agribusiness, arguably more destructive today than it was in 1999, continues to advance—as part of a larger process that includes logging, forest fires, speculation, and land grabbing;
- Investment patterns, indebtedness, macroeconomic policies, global commodity flows, and trade relations continue to be central to deforestation processes worldwide;
- Laws allow public land to be granted, for example, to large timber, mining, or tree plantation companies;
- Many "nature conservation" projects continue to harass and dispossess forest peoples in order to set up official protected areas;
- States, global corporations and conservation NGOs (and sometimes all three at once) continue to employ militarized methods to centralize control over forests;
- The territorial rights of indigenous peoples and traditional communities are still not adequately recognized, and discrimination persists. In recent years, the criminalization of communities and

peoples has increased; meanwhile, destructive activities are “decriminalized”, and sometimes openly encouraged;

- Attacks on the livelihoods and struggles of forest defenders continue to undermine forest protection.

### **The Same Old Causes of Deforestation**

There is more deforestation in Latin America and the Caribbean than in other regions, not only because the Amazon is the largest tropical forest in the world, but also because of the speed of growth and the scale of agribusiness, mining, fossil fuel extraction and infrastructure activities.

For example, due to the economic crisis in Venezuela, predatory extractivism has taken hold; and it is based not so much on oil as on other forms of mining. The largest project, financed by private international capital, is the Orinoco Mining Arc; it covers 12% of the entire country, part of which is in Venezuela's Amazon region. In 2016, the government created a Special Economic Zone—a geographic area with special laws that drastically relax environmental standards and the recognition of social rights, among other problems. Simultaneously, the government has made deals with participating companies, the details of which have not been publicly disclosed. The army has also been given special powers to suppress resistance and ensure the continuance of mining. (2)

Another example are infrastructure projects, erected under the guise of promoting "development" and "integration" in South America. However, these highways, railroads, waterways, ports, airports, and hydroelectric dams serve mainly to enable the exportation of a growing volume of raw materials and products from extractive activities. They do not meet the needs of local populations, and often leave nothing but devastating impacts.

The main plan for South America is the Initiative for the Integration of South American Regional Infrastructure, or IIRSA. The IIRSA Plan was launched in 2000 by 12 South American governments, and it envisaged more than 500 projects. Infrastructure investments have gradually become the newest form of financial capital expansion, and they have a potential for huge profits. These initiatives are mainly carried out through public-private partnerships, which are advantageous for the private sector, and leave national governments to shoulder the risks. Nowadays, we hear about "extreme infrastructure" projects. These are mega-corridors which, on an ever-increasing scale and speed, connect places where extraction is cheap with centers of manufacturing and consumption. (3)

One example of a mega-corridor project is the construction of a stretch of the “inter-oceanic highway” between the city of Cruzeiro do Sul in Brazil and Pucallpa in Peru, which would link northwestern Brazil to southwestern Peru. This construction project began more than 20 years ago. Indigenous peoples from both countries have opposed the project in an open letter, denouncing that “the construction of the highway is part of a predatory development model that includes mining, timber, oil and gas exploitation. In this region, which has the largest freshwater

basin in the world, there are indigenous lands that have not been demarcated, as well as peoples in voluntary isolation, who continue to be ignored and denied.” (4)

The already harmful impacts of highways are compounded by railroad projects in the Brazilian Amazon. The so-called “Ferrogrão” railway, for example, which will connect northern Mato Grosso state with the port of Miritituba on the Tapajós River in Pará state, will pass through Conservation Units and Indigenous Lands. This project further aggravates the impacts of highway BR-163, which cuts into the Amazon from the central western region—the country's largest grain-producing region. Historically, projects of this kind have been main drivers of increased deforestation, causing devastating impacts for forest peoples.

### **The “Greening” of Destruction: New Underlying Causes of Deforestation**

The fact that the underlying causes of deforestation identified in 1999 are still present does not mean that nothing has changed. Most of the “solutions” to deforestation—proposed since then by governments, banks, large conservation NGOs, and others—have become new underlying causes of deforestation.

The main cause is the REDD mechanism, which stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation. REDD came out of the 2005 UN climate conferences and promised to combat and reduce deforestation quickly, simply, and cheaply—and thereby also reduce carbon emissions and the impacts of climate change. The argument used was that it was more advantageous to “keep forests standing” than to cut them down.

To get a REDD project approved in a tropical forest, a company or NGO chooses an ostensibly threatened forest area and calculates how much of this area would be deforested within a span of 30 to 50 years. It then calculates how many hypothetical hectares would be conserved if the REDD project were to be implemented and, accordingly, the volume of carbon emissions that would be avoided. These calculations are then used to issue tradeable carbon credits, certified by consulting companies.

These credits are then purchased, for example, by corporations—mostly in the global North—that are in the business of oil extraction, aviation, food commodities, or mining. These companies “offset” the pollution they generate by claiming to conserve faraway forests. By doing so, they “buy” the right to continue polluting the atmosphere with an amount of carbon supposedly equivalent to what has been “stored” in the forest area whose destruction has been “avoided”. “Offset” is the buzzword for the REDD mechanism.

Forest-dwelling communities are blamed for deforestation, and are prevented from using their own spaces to carry out activities that are fundamental to their livelihoods. REDD systems thus reinforce the mistaken premise that people and forests cannot coexist, causing problems for communities on both ends of the deal: first, in forest communities near the activities of these

companies from the Global North, which—thanks to REDD—can continue to pollute even more; and second, in forests where offset projects are located. (5)

Since the REDD mechanism was launched nearly two decades ago, deforestation has not been reduced, but rather has increased. Agribusiness, mining, monoculture tree plantations and other extractive activities have always been more profitable than keeping forests intact—which reveals the true intention behind projects like REDD: to perpetuate the right to pollute. Thus, REDD contributes to worsening the climate crisis instead of mitigating it.

Currently, 99 REDD projects have been certified or are in the process of certification in the four countries with the highest deforestation rates in the Amazon region (Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, and Colombia). In addition, there is an unknown number of other uncertified REDD initiatives.

There are also several programs proposed by national governments in the Amazon region. In Colombia, for example, a 2017 decree allows companies not to pay “polluter pays” taxes, and instead purchase “offsets,” including through REDD projects.

There are also state government REDD programs, such as in the states of Acre and Mato Grosso in Brazil, which are financed by the governments of Germany, Norway, and the United Kingdom. Payments in this case do not come from the sale of carbon credits, but rather are based on purported “results” related to deforestation rates over a period of time agreed upon by the parties. Depending on the agreed-upon deforestation rate and the baseline year used to establish the comparison, the result can be opposed to the established goal; governments can receive payments even when deforestation is on the rise, as has been the case in Mato Grosso. (6) Furthermore, while this kind of REDD program is not funded by the carbon market, one of its main objectives is to prepare these states to enter the carbon market as soon as possible.

### **The New REDD: Nature-Based Solutions (NBS)**

REDD's failure to reduce deforestation might suggest that the idea should be dropped, but that has not been the case. For some, REDD has not been a failure. Major conservation NGOs, carbon market companies, consultants who design and validate projects, national and state governments, certifiers, and others have collectively pocketed billions of dollars from REDD projects over the past 15 years. Nor has REDD been a failure for big corporations like oil companies, which have been able to expand their polluting activities by claiming to “offset” their emissions.

They did, however, decide to change the name. REDD is now increasingly known as Nature-Based Solutions (NBS). NBS initiatives have become even more hazardous for forest-dependent peoples, because they are linked to another proposal—the so-called “30x30” plan, which aims to conserve 30% of the world’s natural areas by 2030.

The magic phrase for all sectors of global industry right now is to achieve “carbon-neutral” emissions. This has led to a veritable forest-land rush by companies and NGOs. Many

communities are being bullied into signing contracts with “carbon” companies that are anxious to sell pollution credits to overseas industries, NGOs, and, increasingly, to companies and national governments. This new trend has not yet led to new NBS projects in the Amazon. But when it does, these projects are expected to follow the logic of the REDD mechanism—as we see that some REDD projects are being renamed as NBS initiatives.

Brazilian agribusiness is one of the sectors that has stood out the most in promoting NBS activities at the global level; for example, through expanding its monoculture eucalyptus plantations and so-called “low-carbon agriculture” initiatives. These plans include adding additives to animal feed, and introducing agroforestry and soil management practices. These are nothing more than a deceive, when we bear in mind the industry’s mega-expansion plans, which also include the fires and the deforestation necessary to carry them out. Additionally, there is the use of petroleum-based products throughout the entire chain of production, including chemical fertilizers and pesticides. All of this explains why the agribusiness food commodities chain is already responsible for up to 37% of all global greenhouse gas emissions.

### **The "Low-Carbon" or "Green" Economy**

Big finance and industrial capitalists are not only greenwashing themselves through “carbon-neutral” projects; they are also claiming to have set in motion the transition of society's energy base. Yet, instead of actually moving towards a more climatically and socially just economy, they simply want to use the so-called “low-carbon” or “green” economy to maintain and strengthen their own hegemony and power.

It is a mistake to think that this new energy matrix, based on wind energy, mega-dams, biomass, solar, and other sources, will reduce deforestation and/or extractive activities. On the contrary, these projects will also demand large amounts of land. The symbol of the “low-carbon economy” is the electric car, which, in addition to requiring the usual metals and minerals—such as iron and aluminum—also requires several new minerals and metals whose extraction will imply even more destruction and deforestation.

Ecuador is an example of how the new "low-carbon economy" is already impacting the forest and its people. In recent years there has been a rush to extract balsa trees, which is an ideal wood for the growing wind turbine industry. Ecuador has already become the world’s largest exporter of this wood, mainly to China. Ironically, as China announces its goals of “carbon neutrality” through the installation of more wind farms, the destruction of forests to obtain balsa trees is escalating in Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru. This also leads to other impacts, including problems caused by mobile sawmills in communities—such as the pollution of rivers; forests thrown out of balance due to uncontrolled extraction; and social impacts, such as labor exploitation, conflicts, and divisions within communities. (7)

### **Final Considerations**

The discourse of the “low-carbon” economy is extremely convenient for companies that are actually destroying forests on a large scale, as well as for those who benefit from the implementation of these projects—including conservation NGOs, certifiers of “offset” projects, and financial investors, etc.

This discourse includes perverse proposals and mechanisms like REDD and NBS. They are perverse because their central goal is to throw a lifeline to polluting industries—and their profits—while destabilizing the global climate in a short period of time. These proposals lead to an unchecked race for communities’ lands. There is, therefore, increased pressure on territories, both due to the usual destructive activities as well as to new “green” attacks.

This scenario underlines the importance of strengthening resistance in territories affected by the imposition of such destructive and/or “green” projects, as well as networking, unity, and mutual solidarity among impacted communities. This is especially important because in this scenario, projects that destroy forests and “green” projects depend on each other to be viable: they are both part of a single, nefarious logic that must be exposed and opposed.

*International Secretariat of the World Rainforest Movement (WRM)*

\* This is the summary of an article published in the dossier “Agribusiness’ Global Trail of Fire”. You may access the [full article in Portuguese](#); and you may access the dossier in Spanish, Portuguese and English [here](#).

(1) WRM, How forest policies and agencies promote sustainable destruction, 2022,

<https://www.wrm.org.uy/publications/how-forest-policies-and-agencies-promote-sustainable-destruction>

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(7) Acción Ecológica, The green paradoxes of an Amazonian country, 2021,

<https://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin-articles/the-green-paradoxes-of-an-amazonian-country>



## RECOMMENDED

### **Oil palm production exploits black and indigenous populations in Brazil**

The news portal Metr opoles travelled 5,700 km to denounce how the palm oil production chain affects quilombola communities and Indigenous Peoples in the state of Par , Brazil—namely through expropriation of traditional communities, environmental impacts, and a labor history analogous to slavery. Quilombola and indigenous communities denounce the invasion of their territories by large companies, mainly Agropalma and Brasil BioFuels, which block residents from entering the regions. These companies are accused of having ties to gunmen who threaten community leaders and devastate centuries-old cultures and territories. The report draws an interesting parallel between these monocultures and how oil palm is cultivated and used in Bah a —where the crop is planted by the population for their own benefit, is processed and used locally, and forms part of the identity and culture of the people.

Read and watch the video in Portuguese here

<https://www.metropoles.com/materias-especiais/ouro-liquido-producao-de-dende-explora-populacoes-negras-e-indigenas-no-brasil-2>

### **Palm Oil Company, Police and Military Conduct Massive, Violent Rampage Against Villagers in the DR Congo**

In September 2022, two large contingents of national police and military were dispatched to oil palm plantation concession areas of the Plantations et Huileries du Congo (PHC) in Lokutu and Boteka. According to PHC, these heavily armed contingents were sent pursuant to a request filed by PHC to the DRC government, ostensibly for support in preventing the theft of palm nuts from its plantations by villagers living within and around the company's concessions. Read a summary of what transpired, based on information collected by RIAO-RDC through its local members, interviews with affected villagers and an on-site fact finding mission to Boteka by two members of RIAO-RDC's national office in October 2022. The summary can be accessed in English here:

<https://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/31235-palm-oil-company-police-and-military-conduct-massive-violent-rampage-against-villagers-in-the-dr-congo>

And in French here: <https://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/31234-une-societe-d-huile-de-palme-des-policiers-et-des-militaires-se-livrent-a-un-dechainement-massif-et-violent-contre-des-villageois-en-rd-congo>

### **Families in Republic of Congo dispossessed of their land to make way for oil giant Total's offsetting project**

An investigation by SourceMaterial and Unearthed exposed some of the impacts of a major tree-planting carbon offsetting project in the Republic of Congo from oil giant TotalEnergies, which was announced at the end of 2021. To gain access to the land, Total partnered with Forest Neutral Congo (FNC) to plant trees in the Lefini reserve, part of the Bat k  Plateaux. FNC, which has leased the land from the Congolese government, is a subsidiary of For t Ressources Management (FRM), a French consultancy firm. But the project has come at a cost for families on the Bat k  plateaux who have lived off of this land for generations. Read the full report in English here:

<https://unearthed.greenpeace.org/2022/12/12/total-congo-offsetting-land-dispossessed/>

And watch a video of the investigation in French here:

<https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/ecologie/121222/derriere-le-greenwashing-de-totalenergies-l-expropriation-de-paysans-au-congo>

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