



# **When 'Green' only means Money: Violence and Lies of the 'Green' Economy**

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

*The National Platform of Actors for Climate Justice in Senegal; feminist Indonesian organization Solidaritas Perempuan; the organizations Women of the Chiapas Coast Against Oil Palm and Coastal Women in Rebellion from Chiapas, Mexico; the group Guardians of the Y'vera, from Corrientes, Argentina; and the WRM International Secretariat.*

## OUR VIEWPOINT

# The 'Green' Economy: Violence, Hypocrisy and Destruction of Life

**The 'green' economy sells the idea that it is possible to confront climate chaos without looking at the direct link between power structures and pollution. Its 'green' programs allow energy demand to continue to grow, and thereby the accumulation of profits and injustices as well. In this way, it is actually a 'green' facade for the same violent, patriarchal, colonial and racist system.**

The consequences of climate chaos are becoming more and more frequent and devastating, from heat waves and droughts, to extreme storms and floods. We all know this, but only some people are forced to live with these impacts—mainly communities in the Global South. And yet, in promoting the so-called 'green economy,' governments, the United Nations, corporations and all their allies continue to put economic interests above life.

The underlying problem with the 'green' economy is that it enables and legitimizes an economic system that relies on increasing consumption and production of fossil fuels. It has already been widely documented that, for the most part, the extraction, transportation, processing and production of fossil fuels has involved extremely violent and destructive activities throughout history—activities which we now know are the real cause of climate chaos. (1)

'Green' campaigns and policies that try to sell us the idea that it is possible to tackle climate chaos without recognizing the direct link between polluting emissions and power structures (based on capitalism, racism, colonialism and patriarchy) are seeking to distract us from the real causes and true perpetrators of this climate chaos and social injustice.

It is important to note that the increase in the use of 'renewable energies' has not translated into a decrease in the use of fossil fuels (2). This means that so-called 'renewable energies' are not replacing fossil fuels but, on the contrary, are contributing to a rise in global energy consumption. Furthermore, these renewable energies—including mega-dams, wind industries, and 'bioenergy' generated from wood pellets or palm oil, among others—exacerbate the appropriation and destruction of lands and engender violence against communities, mainly in the Global South, and mainly against women.

This bulletin shares six articles that aim to warn about the harmful aspects of the 'green economy.' The articles from Pará, Brazil, and the Saloum Delta, Senegal, show the threats of carbon offset mechanisms (REDD and 'blue carbon') to communities, and how these mechanisms serve the interests of the planet's most destructive corporations and their allied governments. Another article exposes the crucial and malicious role of companies that certify carbon credits. Additionally, women's groups from Kalimantan, Indonesia and Chiapas, Mexico tell us about the detrimental impacts of oil palm plantations and the importance of organized women's resistance.

And another article tells us how the sale of monoculture tree plantations in Corrientes, Argentina—which have already caused devastating impacts—could turn these plantations into carbon sinks and/or pellets to generate so-called ‘bioenergy.’

The ‘green’ economy maintains the economic logic of a constant increase in profits (and injustices) unchallenged. In June 2023, a study revealed that of the world's top 100 oil and gas companies, not one (zero!) has committed to stopping expansion of their fossil activities by 2030 (3). In 48 of 55 African countries, oil, gas and coal companies are exploring or exploiting *new* fossil reserves, building *new* infrastructure such as gas pipelines or liquid natural gas terminals, or developing *new* gas or and coal-fired power plants (4). Additionally, more than 6,500 institutional investors own bonds or shares in coal, oil and gas companies, totaling 3.07 trillion dollars (5).

We always hear in the news how climate chaos is causing more destruction, forced migration, famine, and loss of livelihoods, among many other appalling impacts. The ‘green’ economy, however, is expanding these impacts—not only because it worsens climate chaos and its serious and real consequences, but also because its mechanisms and projects allow more territories and community forests to be appropriated by economic interests. The ‘green’ economy is born of, and reinforces, the same violent, patriarchal, colonial and racist system as before.

(1) WRM, Is All Carbon the Same? Fossil Carbon, Violence and Power, <https://www.wrm.org.uy/15-years-of-redd-is-all-carbon-the-same>

(2) Our World in Data, Energy Mix, <https://ourworldindata.org/energy-mix#how-much-of-global-energy-comes-from-low-carbon-sources>

(3) World Benchmark Alliance, 2023 Oil and Gas Benchmark, <https://www.worldbenchmarkingalliance.org/publication/oil-and-gas/>

(4) Who is Financing Fossil Fuel Expansion in Africa?,

[https://reclaimfinance.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022.11.15\\_Urgewald\\_Who-is-Financing-Fossil-Fuels-in-Africa.pdf](https://reclaimfinance.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022.11.15_Urgewald_Who-is-Financing-Fossil-Fuels-in-Africa.pdf)

(5) Urgewald, Fossil Fuel Investment Report, <https://investinginclimatechaos.org/reports>

## **REDD and the Green Economy exacerbate oppression and deforestation in Pará, Brazil**

**In the 'green economy,' the interests of corporations, governments and the conservation industry intersect. All of these entities, in one way or another, profit from the destruction of forests and the dispossession of communities. In Pará, there are not only increasing REDD projects, but the state governor is seeking to implement jurisdictional REDD throughout the territory.**

The REDD mechanism (**R**educing **E**missions from **D**eforestation and Forest **D**egradation) is a key element of the Green Economy, despite the fact that it does not combat deforestation or growing climate chaos, as its name suggests. This is one of the lessons learned after more than 15 years of REDD (1).

Nonetheless, this mechanism is more alive than ever. REDD projects and programs are multiplying due to the growing demand for carbon credits—or rather, "pollution credits"—from polluting companies and States that are seeking to achieve so-called "carbon neutrality." In order to counter harsh criticism, REDD proponents are making new promises and inventing new initiatives and names, such as "nature-based solutions."

This is what is happening in Pará, the second largest state of the Brazilian Amazon. While private companies and some NGOs are pushing for REDD projects at breakneck speed, the state government is rapidly launching its jurisdictional REDD program, which will encompass the whole territory of the state. In 2025, Pará will host the United Nations Climate Change Conference, and the state government will try to show the world that deforestation in Pará will soon be a thing of the past.

Pará is one of the states that contributes most to deforestation in Brazil. Among the main culprits are logging, ranching, mining and soybean and corn agribusiness industries, as well as infrastructure projects like the construction of highways and hydro-electric power plants. If it were a country, Pará would rank second among the countries with the highest deforestation rates of tropical forests in recent decades—surpassing Indonesia and Democratic Republic of the Congo (2).

But, what can we expect from the new REDD initiatives and the green economy in Pará? Is there truly something new that is capable of curbing the high rate of deforestation in the state?

### **REDD Projects in Pará: The Case of Biofíllica-Ambipar**

Among companies that are implementing REDD projects in Pará, Biofíllica stands out for its ambition. In 2021, the multinational company, Ambipar, bought Biofíllica and gave it a new name: Biofíllica Ambipar Environment. At that time, the new company announced that it intended to

increase the number of carbon credits generated in the voluntary market tenfold, in order to become "the largest nature-based solutions company" in the world (3).

It is worth noting that Ambipar has ties with several companies and sectors that are directly or indirectly involved in deforestation in the Amazon (4). Biofíllica has also been doing the same thing for many years. In 2010, it partnered with one of the largest land grabbers and predators in the Pará rainforest: the Jari Group. Founded by an American, this group has taken over 1.6 million hectares of forest in the states of Pará and neighboring Amapá since 1967. Jari destroyed tens of thousands of hectares of forest to plant tree monocultures, such as eucalyptus, and it degraded thousands of hectares of forest to extract hardwoods (5).

However, the Jari Group also faced dozens of traditional communities who were already there, and who made their livelihoods from harvesting Brazil nuts and other riches that the forest provided. Unable to evict them, the company decided to besiege and oppress the communities, taking away their freedom and control over the forests that they had cared for and lived in harmony with.

Despite all of this, Jari was awarded the FSC "green" seal in 2004, and it became the company with the largest area of "sustainably managed forest" in Brazil. The FSC recognized Jari's land titles as "legitimate," and it supported the company when it attempted to regularize its titles with the state of Pará. The Jari Group pressured the communities to accept a small parcel of land, so that it could keep the lion's share (6).

In partnership with Biofíllica, the Jari Group launched REDD projects in Amapá starting in 2010, and in Pará starting in 2014. These REDD projects also received a "green" certification from VCS/VERRA for a period of 30 years (7). This was justified on the basis that, without the REDD projects, "invaders"—including the communities—would cause extensive deforestation. But in truth, these REDD projects further besieged and oppressed the communities, even though Jari claims that those projects benefitted the communities.

The Jari Foundation, the "social" arm of the company, is in charge of offering "benefits" to the communities. In one of the Foundation's activities, an engineer told the community that he was there to teach the families how to grow Brazil nuts. However, there were no more Brazil nut trees, because a few years earlier, the Jari Group had destroyed the Brazil nut grove—the community's main source of income—in order to plant eucalyptus trees. A villager told him: "If you have come to teach us how to plant Brazil nuts, go away because we already know how to do that. Now, if you really want to help us, ask the people in charge of the company to pull out the eucalyptus trees and replant the Brazil nut trees that they destroyed" (8).

Despite allegations about the Jari Group's participation in illegal logging and the illegal timber trade, and investigations by competent authorities into its use of false documents to forge titles and claim land tenure, Biofíllica sold a total of 2,997,953 "pollution credits" from the Jari Group's REDD projects in Pará and Amapá between 2013 and 2023 (9). At an underestimated value of US\$ 5 per credit, these sales represent at least US\$ 15 million, or R\$ 75 million (10).

Among the buyers of the "pollution credits" are companies that participate directly or indirectly in deforestation: banks, such as the Brazilian bank, Bradesco, which was denounced for being the bank that financed the most deforestation in the Amazon (11); the German company, Bayer, an agrochemical transnational company that promotes, sustains and benefits from the expansion of soybean and other monocultures (12); and Seara Brasil, owned by the Brazilian company, JPS, the largest meat processor in the world—whose livestock activity relies on the expansion of pastures, which is the largest direct cause of deforestation in the Amazon rainforest (13).

Biofílica's REDD projects are not only a "solution" for these companies to present themselves as "carbon neutral" and as protectors of the Amazon; they are also useful for the Jari Group to create a smokescreen for its crimes (14). A news article published in 2023 posed the following question: "How can a carbon (...) program continue to operate several years after the State has registered most of its project area as public lands?" (15).

### **What are Biofílica-Ambipar's new "nature-based solutions?"**

One of the new "solutions" proposed by Biofílica-Ambipar is a partnership with the company, Agropalma, to implement a REDD project. In addition to being one of Brazil's leading palm oil producers, Agropalma is looking to expand its business in 2023 into another key sector of the green economy: "renewable" energies (16).

Agropalma and Biofílica's REDD project aims to conserve 50,159 hectares of forests in Pará, in the municipalities of Tailândia, Moju, Tomé-Açu and Acará. Just like Jari and its REDD projects, Agropalma claims that if the project is not implemented, the neighboring communities would destroy the forest—which in this case would be some 13,591 hectares over the course of 30 years. With this project they intend to promote "alternatives" to deforestation and environmental education activities, which, according to them, will improve the well-being of the communities (17).

Just as it did with the Jari Group, Biofílica is once again partnering with a company that has been implicated in the crime of falsifying land titles. This land grabbing is the reason behind the land conflicts between the companies and dozens of quilombola and indigenous communities that have been fighting for years to get their territories regularized (18). As a result, the communities are suffering threats, violence and persecution (19).

Biofílica-Ambipar and Agropalma's REDD project also legitimizes and further reinforces Agropalma's current strategy of persecuting communities by imposing restrictions and prohibitions on their use of forests; these measures are included in the project. While they blame communities for deforestation, the companies intend to obtain almost US\$ 7 million through the sale of "pollution credits" (20).

One of the primary buyers of Agropalma's palm oil is the US company, Cargill, one of the largest agribusiness companies in the world. As soybean cultivation is advancing in the Amazon, Cargill is closely tied to deforestation in Pará and Brazil. Cargill has a port in the capital city of Santarém, Pará, and it plans to build a second port in the municipality of Abaetetuba. Cargill was recently sued in a US court for not stopping deforestation and violations of human rights in its supply chain in Brazil (21).

Clearly, Biofílica Ambipar Environment's new "solutions," such as the partnership with Agropalma, are a continuation of its previous projects, such as the one with the Jari Group. Thus, could the Pará government's jurisdictional REDD program represent anything new that is capable of stopping massive deforestation?

### **The Pará State Government's Jurisdictional REDD Program: The Role of Large NGOs**

The jurisdictional REDD program is a newer version of REDD. It is, in part, a response to the failure of individual REDD projects that did not manage to reduce deforestation, and that generated conflicts with communities. Proponents argue that by covering a whole jurisdiction, such as a state or a country, these programs could overcome the failures of individual projects and effectively reduce deforestation.

However, the flagship model for jurisdictional REDD in Brazil, which was implemented in the state of Acre, was a failure. Starting in 2012, the government of Acre received tens of thousands of euros, particularly from the German government, as a reward for being the first state government to propose local legislation on the sale of "pollution credits." But as of 2018, after 11 years and millions of euros in remittances transferred to the Acre government, Acre began to register the same high deforestation rates as other Amazonian states that didn't have jurisdictional REDD programs. Meanwhile, the living conditions of forest-dependent communities worsened, especially for women. This occurred, for example, in the Chico Mendes Extractive Reserve (RESEX) (22). In recent years, the Chico Mendes Reserve, a symbol of the REDD program in Acre, has been destroyed; the rainforest is being turned into pastureland (23). The fact that not even this would result in the cancellation of REDD funding for Acre demonstrates, at the very least, how "flexible" and "manipulable" deforestation calculations are in this kind of program (24).

An important similarity between the jurisdictional REDD program in Acre and the same process in Pará is the protagonism of large international conservation NGOs in the design and definition of how REDD will work. Another similarity is the lack of participation by the population, especially forest-dependent communities, in shaping this definition. One of the first key steps for the jurisdictional REDD program in Pará was the development of the *Plan Estadual Amazônia Agora* (Amazon Now State Plan), a strategy that proposed "a development model based on the conservation and valorization of environmental assets." Not by chance, this plan was presented for the first time at an event held by the US-based NGO, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) that took place in Madrid, far away from Pará, during the 2019 UN Climate Conference (25).



TNC and other NGOs, such as Forest Trends and Environmental Defense Fund, act as "riot squads" that defend the interests of large corporations and international capital banks (26). That is, they institutionally establish a green economy that allows companies to maintain and expand their profits from the extraction of oil and other fossil fuels, while also opening new "green" markets to grow their businesses.

#### What is TNC?

While many small environmental NGOs suffer from a shortage of resources, that is not the case with TNC, which the Washington Post called "the world's richest environmental group," with US\$ 3 billion in available assets (27). TNC looks a lot more like a company than an NGO. For example, a former conservation director [of the organization] earned an annual salary of US\$ 1.168 million (approximately R\$ 5.5 million) (28). Furthermore, the organization's Global Council includes representatives of some of the largest international financial capital institutions, such as JP Morgan Chase and Goldman Sachs. A report that analyzed investments in fossil fuels after the Paris Agreement drew the "undeniable conclusion that JP Morgan Chase is clearly the world's worst bank when it comes to climate change." This only confirms how TNC is strongly tied to the interests of the oil extraction industry, which itself is one of the biggest investors in REDD projects (29).

TNC drafted the Bioeconomy Plan for the State of Pará (30) and won the bid to create the legal-institutional framework for the state's jurisdictional REDD program (31). In addition to TNC benefitting from the "consulting" fees, which constitute a significant amount of money in all REDD programs and projects, it is noteworthy that a US institution—with the aforementioned interests—is leading a whole political process on REDD in Pará, Brazil.

Moreover, in 2022, the governor of Pará signed a letter of intent with a coalition called LEAF, which in English stands for "Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest finance."

#### What is the LEAF Coalition?

The LEAF Coalition was created in 2021 and describes itself as the "largest public-private effort to ever come together to end tropical deforestation"; it has US\$ 1 billion in financing from private companies and from the governments of Germany, Norway and the United States (32). Its members include some of the key players implicated in the increase in deforestation in Brazil, such as Nestle, Unilever and Bayer. Its list of financiers also includes the US company, Blackrock, one of the largest investors in oil companies in the world—including in tar sands projects, one of the most destructive forms of extraction on the planet. In this context, Blackrock itself has stated that it wants to "see these [oil] companies succeed and prosper" (33). Ironically, Guyana, the first country to sign a contract with LEAF, is generating "pollution credits" for new offshore oil drilling. This shows that LEAF responds to the exact same logic as REDD, i.e. it grants polluters the "right to pollute" and it accelerates climate chaos.

Implementation of the Amazon Now State Plan in Pará will fall under the auspices of the State Environmental Secretariat—the very entity that should, in theory, combat deforestation and other activities that harm the environment. But the Secretariat continues to make vague commitments that don't reflect the reality of its actions, as a group of social organizations observe and denounce in an open letter: "Year after year, the state makes investments and approves projects whose socio-environmental impacts put the very survival of the Amazonian biome, its indigenous peoples and traditional communities at risk." The organizations mention the Volta Grande project, which aims to be the largest open-pit gold mine in the region. And this is a region that is experiencing socio-environmental collapse, due to, among other things, the impacts of the construction of the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam. Despite the huge resistance to this mining project, the state of Pará is pushing for it to happen quickly (34).

The government of Pará also seems to want the state to become a new oil frontier, like Guyana. Brazil's Petrobras is conducting studies to extract oil at the mouth of the Amazon River, in the coastal zones of Amapá and Pará. While dozens of environmental entities—except TNC and allied organizations—sent a letter expressing their opposition to the proposal (35), the governor of Pará, Helder Barbalho, declared that "impeding the search for Brazilian assets, whether in the environmental sector or through other activities, is a step backwards (...)" (36).

### **Change without changing anything**

To stop the process of deforestation, there must be political will. The magnitude of this will can be measured by the progress of new trade agreements related to the export of Brazilian raw materials, or by the government's recent celebration of the increase in GDP in 2023 due to the "exceptional results" from agribusiness. These "results" have to do with the expansion of soybean cultivation, mostly in pasture areas; that is, in areas where deforestation has occurred (37).

This article shows how REDD and the green economy in general are instrumental in not only maintaining and expanding oil extraction and combustion, but also in advancing deforestation. These proposals are conceived in the Global North and are neocolonial: they presuppose more appropriation and control of territories, and, consequently, more oppression. They are created so that companies like Cargill, Unilever, Bayer, Blackrock and others can profit even more. It's all about making changes that don't actually change anything. For these companies, the green economy means new business and markets.

Likewise, conservation NGOs, also from the Global North, are now helping put a "green" face on something that actually means more destruction of territories, forests and livelihoods—all while seeking to increase their own earnings and those of the main companies that finance them. Meanwhile, the government, companies and NGOs in Pará are vying for the money they can earn by participating in these new "green" markets and businesses. All of this demonstrates how the interests of corporations, states, and the "conservation industry" represented by large NGOs intersect in the "green economy." Even though they all claim to be fighting against deforestation

and its causes, all of them actually profit, in one way or another, from the destruction of forests and the eviction of communities from their territories.

And this process comes with new threats to communities who are fighting to control their territories. These include new digital markets based on blockchain technology, such as cryptocurrencies and non-fungible tokens, linked to "green" transactions; and new drone technologies to surveil forests and communities (38).

Another new feature of the LEAF program is the possibility for communities in its jurisdictional REDD programs to receive payments to protect forests that have never registered high levels of deforestation. This is supposed to recognize, albeit indirectly, the role of communities in forest conservation. However, this measure seems to actually be a form of co-optation—an old tactic of companies and States—to silence the numerous criticisms of the REDD mechanism over the last 18 years. They are throwing communities a few crumbs of what they have the most of—money. Once again, big capital is taking advantage of the real needs of many communities that have been marginalized and oppressed since colonial times. Colonial times!

#### *WRM International Secretariat*

- (1) WRM International Secretariat, <https://www.wrm.org.uy/publications/15-years-of-redd>
- (2) OECO, Amazônia perdeu cerca de 44 milhões de hectares para agropecuária em 35 anos, <https://oeco.org.br/noticias/amazonia-perdeu-cerca-de-44-milhoes-de-hectares-para-agropecuaria-em-35-anos/#:~:text=Quando%20considerado%20o%20acumulado%20no,6%2C7%20milh%C3%B5es%20de%20hectares>; <https://www.bbc.com/news/59136545>; <https://www.internetgeography.net/topics/changing-rates-of-rainforest-deforestation/>
- (3) Carbon pulse, 2021. REDD developer Biofilica targets tenfold carbon credit growth following merger.
- (4) The Ambipar Group has a presence in dozens of countries and owns other companies. Ambito, for example, operates in Latin America and collaborates with companies that directly and/or indirectly increase deforestation—such as Suzano, Unilever and Klabin. (<https://ambito.com.br/es/la-ambito/>)
- (5) WRM, 2018. Are FSC and RSPO accomplices in crime? Jari Florestal and Agropalma's unresolved land question in the Brazilian Amazon, <https://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin-articles/are-fsc-and-rspo-accomplices-in-crime-jari-florestal-and-agropalmas-unresolved-land-question-in-the>
- (6) Ibid
- (7) Verra Registry, <https://registry.verra.org/app/projectDetail/VCS/1811>
- (8) Statement made during a visit to the region; for security, the names of the community and the person who reported the episode will remain confidential.
- (9) In 2017, denouncements led the FSC to suspend Jari, until Jari was finally expelled in 2019—something that rarely happens to a certified company. The FSC alleged that Jari was involved in the illegal logging and trade of timber, and that it had failed to recognize the existence of traditional communities in the area. However, the press release did not mention Jari Florestal's falsification of land titles or FSC's collaboration in trying to regularize ill-gotten lands. ([https://fsc.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/FSC%20disassociates%20from%20Jari\\_29-04-2019\\_Final\\_clean.pdf](https://fsc.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/FSC%20disassociates%20from%20Jari_29-04-2019_Final_clean.pdf))
- (10) Verra Registry, <https://registry.verra.org/app/projectDetail/VCS/1811>
- (11) Ver O Fato, Bancos deram R\$ 165 milhões para desmatadores da Amazônia, <https://ver-o-fato.com.br/bancos-deram-r-165-milhoes-para-desmatadores-da-amazonia/>
- (12) Brasil de Fato, Syngenta, Bayer e JBS se reuniram 216 vezes com alto escalão do governo Bolsonaro, <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2022/07/21/syngenta-bayer-e-jbs-se-reuniram-216-vezes-com-alto-escalao-do-governo-bolsonaro>
- (13) Reporter Brasil, JBS mantém compra de gado de desmatadores da Amazônia mesmo após multa de R\$ 25 milhões, <https://reporterbrasil.org.br/2019/07/jbs-mantem-compra-de-gado-de-desmatadores-da-amazonia-mesmo-apos-multa-de-r-25-mi/>
- (14) For example, Seara, owned by JBS, advertises the pollution credits that it bought from the Jari REDD project in the Jari Valley, where "the Jari Group's properties are located" [our emphasis], as if they were legitimate properties. Seara also claims that the group "promotes the well-being of communities, who become allies in the conservation of forest resources." This statement is a complete

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inversion of reality, as it presents Jari as the protector of forests and communities as a threat.

(<https://www.carbonfair.com.br/cliente/seara/seara-expoagas>)

(15) Economia UOL, INVESTIGAÇÃO-Na Amazônia brasileira, projeto de crédito de carbono em xeque alimenta receio de grilagem de terras, <https://economia.uol.com.br/noticias/reuters/2023/03/27/investigacao-na-amazonia-brasileira-projeto-de-credito-de-carbono-em-xeque-alimenta-receio-de-grilagem-de-terras.htm>

(16) Forbes, Agropalma retomará produção de biodiesel no Pará em 2023, <https://forbes.com.br/forbesagro/2022/08/agropalma-retomara-producao-de-biodiesel-no-para-em-2023/>

(17) Verra Registry, <https://registry.verra.org/app/projectDetail/VCS/4034>

(18) WRM, 2018. Are FSC and RSPO accomplices in crime? Jari Florestal and Agropalma's unresolved land question in the Brazilian Amazon, <https://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin-articles/are-fsc-and-rspo-accomplices-in-crime-jari-florestal-and-agropalmas-unresolved-land-question-in-the>

(19) Mongabay, Certificação de exportadora de óleo de palma suspensa após investigação da Mongabay, <https://brasil.mongabay.com/2023/03/certificacao-de-exportadora-de-oleo-de-palma-suspensa-apos-investigacao-da-mongabay/>; Agropalma also lost its certification in early 2023, in this case, the RSPO certification ("Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil"), following an investigation that revealed that over half of the lands it occupies have false and illegal titles.

(20) US\$ 6.7 million, based on a price of US\$ 10 for each of the 671,744 pollution credits that the project is supposed to generate. (<https://registry.verra.org/app/projectDetail/VCS/4034>)

(21) The Guardian, Grain trader Cargill faces legal challenge in US over Brazilian soya supply chain, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/may/04/cargill-faces-legal-challenge-us-over-brazilian-soya-supply-chain-deforestation>

(22) SOS Amazonia, Taxa de desmatamento no Acre em 2021 é a maior da última década, <https://sosamazonia.org.br/tpost/ycmtm2pds1-taxa-de-desmatamento-no-acre-em-2021-a-m>

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## Impacts of oil and gas extraction and carbon projects on communities in the Saloum Delta, Senegal

**Climate chaos is tangible in the Saloum Delta. Fishing-dependent communities face substantial impacts, which are accentuated by the fishing industry and the fossil fuel industry. A reforestation project of mangrove trees, funded by Shell, has now turned into a carbon project, which will exacerbate the climate impacts for communities. Among the profiteers from the fossil fuels' extraction in Senegal is BP and Shell.**

The Saloum Delta in Senegal is one of the largest wetlands of economic, ecological and social importance in West Africa. Covering more than 180 thousand hectares, classified on the list of Wetlands of World Importance and on the list of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, the Saloum Delta is home to Senegal's second largest national park (Parc national du Delta du Saloum), which covers almost 100 thousand hectares in the central area of the delta. The delta is home to around one million inhabitants of mainly Serers and Mandingos. The inhabitants of the Saloum Delta are economically dependent on its natural resources through fishing and the gathering of seafood, which is done by more than 5 thousand women. It is also a wetland of ecological importance thanks to its vast mangrove forests and very important biodiversity, concentrating 9 per cent of the plant species of the national territory. The animal biodiversity is seen in many species of birds, fish and land animals. A site rich in history due to its shell clusters.

The Saloum Delta has suffered the full burden of the climate change impacts, which has seriously affected the lives of communities that depend entirely on their environment and thus, accentuated the poverty of vulnerable communities. We observe the advance of the sea, coastal erosion, loss of beaches, desertification, reduction of mangroves and other spawning grounds, loss of arable land and other pastures, water salinization, and reduction or insufficient availability of water for irrigation and drinking as well as for other productive activities.

On top of this is the industrial overfishing, the aggressive growth of the fish industry, the fish freezing plants, and the toxic waste that results from these industries. These compete with artisanal fishing, which creates local jobs, empowers the population, especially women who constitute a very vulnerable group, contributes directly to the country's GDP and allows the economic survival of many families while ensuring their food security. The increased degradation and overexploitation of resources mean that today the communities of the delta, made up mainly of fisherfolk, are forced to practice rural exodus or to migrate, often illegally, to European countries. The scarcity of fishery resources means that today thousands of young people are swallowed up by the Mediterranean Sea, having preferred to take the risk of illegal emigration rather than continue to suffer the atrocious impacts of climate change and overexploitation of resources on their daily lives.

## **Reforestation and 'blue carbon' project in Saloum**

Many adaptation and mitigation strategies are being implemented around the world in the fight against climate change, and the Saloum Delta is no exception. We note that the initiatives of the Senegalese government in Saloum aim to strengthen the resilience of communities as well as NGOs, civil society organizations, and internal committees formed by the community. The latter are involved in the restoration of degraded ecosystems in Saloum, which can be divided in two parts: the preservation and the reparation of ecosystems.

To better carry out preservation activities, it is necessary to put in place concrete actions that can enable mangroves to maintain their capacity for renewal while continuing to meet the needs of dependent communities. In the Saloum Delta, awareness-raising activities are carried out to make people aware of the challenges of climate change and finally to avoid certain activities that degrade the resources and weaken the ecosystems. These include the prohibition of certain fishing practices, deforestation, extraction of beach sand and shell for commercial purposes, as well as water pollution from household waste.

Women in Saloum are guardians of their resources as they are responsible to bring these in their households (water, wood for cooking, food, etc.) Their main activity is the collection of seafood and forest fruits, which they transform and resell throughout Senegal. Some income-generating activities have been put in place to overcome the prohibitions, such as oyster farming on garlands, fish farming, beekeeping, or even the setting up of cooking structures that save wood (such as improved stoves or solar ovens).

For the restoration activities however, many more actors –and interests- are in play. The most important aspect is the large-scale planting of mangroves in 25 per cent of the total area. Several players are involved in such activities, such as the NGO Wetlands International, the French Development Agency through the marine protected areas policy project, the IUCN, the reforestation and carbon credit broker WeForest, among others. Reforestation activities are carried out by the population, who are paid either by the day or by the hectare. The supply of propagule is ensured by the community, more particularly by women, which allows them to generate considerable income during reforestation campaigns.

The large-scale mangrove reforestation programs are now turning into carbon projects, which is like committing suicide for Senegal, and Africa in general. These carbon projects are nothing but generating 'rights to pollute' to industries, knowing that studies have shown that among the 10 countries most vulnerable to the climate crises in the world, 8 are African. It is clear that carbon projects are put in place by polluters to continue their devastating activities and to restore their image.

This is the first fight that these communities in the delta must fight. The simplest understanding of this carbon project is that the carbon dioxide absorbed by the trees of the mangrove will be able to 'compensate' for the pollution of the polluting companies. Worryingly, the involved companies and NGOs have never told the local people who is managing or benefiting from the carbon program. This is the case of the WeForest organization, which has not informed that the one financing their large-scale plantation project in Saloum and Casamance is in fact the oil giant Shell.

The time has come for the African continent, especially for the vulnerable countries, to oppose the many carbon projects that are constantly exploding and which only benefit polluters (sometimes called REDD+, Nature-based solutions, offset programs, 'blue carbon', among others).

If Africa wants to win this climate fight, it must start with the prohibition of carbon projects in the continent and focus on climate debt, climate justice, the fluidity of the Green Climate Fund, which is a fictitious amount for the African continent. Added to this is the urgency of leaving fossil fuels underground since these are the source of these troubles.

Although the restoration of mangrove forests is a priority in Saloum in order to increase the resilience of communities in a context of severe climate change impacts, unfortunately, these forests now also have to deal with the exploitation of oil and gas on Senegalese waters.

### **Negative impacts of oil exploitation on communities in the Saloum Delta today**

Senegal is on its way to becoming a major oil and gas producer in Africa, with three major oil and gas projects underway: (1) the gas project of British fossil-fuel-giant BP Grand Tortue Ahmeyim (GTA), (2) also operated by BP company, the Yakaar-Teranga gas project, intended for consumption, and (3) oil project at Sangomar, operated by the Australian company Woodside. The extraction of gas is planned for 2023, prompting BP to say that the project is "creating a new energy hub in Africa". Alongside these fossil fuel giants is Shell, which has secured a new block between Mauritania and Senegal (GTA).

The Sangomar oil well is located 70 km off the coast of Saloum Delta, and is expected to be exploited over a period of 30 years, near the Sangomar and Joal-Fadiouth Marine Protected Areas, an area rich in marine and ornithological biodiversity. Oil exploitation is a high dangerous activity and involves many different stages that will have an impact on biodiversity and the basic socio-economic activities of vulnerable communities. From the drilling, installation and operation phases to the dismantling of the rig, the consequences will include changes in the quality of seawater, disruption of reproductive cycles, immense losses of biodiversity, reduction of fishing areas, and an increase in poverty.

The Saloum Delta is a fishing area for communities and fishing is their primary source of income. Fish are already scarce nowadays due to the effects of climate change and the foreign ships that

continue to plunder our resources. Fisher families are forced to go as far as the border waters, where they are imprisoned or even killed.

Therefore, the current oil exploitation will further reduce the fishing areas and its encroaching of the environment will further accelerate the lack of fish for these vulnerable communities. The major concern of these communities is how they will be able to coexist with the exploitation of oil for the years to come, since the process of marine biodiversity loss is only accelerating over time.

It was with these concerns that the late Alimatou SARR left us. A guardian of the Saloum Delta's natural resources, who very early on alerted the community about the risks to come with the oil exploitation. An ongoing cry from the heart of the Saloum Islands' women is asking for the safety of their environments. According to them, since the drilling of the twenty-three oil wells off Sangomar, a rapid rise in sea level has been observed in the area, accentuating coastal erosion and threatening to disappear their basic socio-economic activities, which include oyster farming, mangrove beekeeping, seafood harvesting, fishing, salt production, fishery products processing, and ecological tourism.

The government of Senegal has always spoken positively about the exploitation of oil and gas by evoking the business profits and the positive impacts on the life of communities. The negative impacts on biodiversity and communities, according to the government's impact study and the speeches they held, are not significant. Sometimes it is mentioned the distance between the place of exploitation and the fishing areas, which are quite distant. But if distance would have a positive impact on environmental pollution, Africa would be lucky today, because we contribute less to pollution and suffer more from the negative impacts. There are no ecological boundaries.

It should be remembered that these fishing-dependent communities are vulnerable on two levels:

In terms of the climate, there is increasing scarcity of natural resources, poor soil, land salinization, famine, reduced rainfall, reduced catches, coastal erosion, loss of biodiversity, displacements, and illegal emigration. This accentuates poverty and desperation within vulnerable communities whose basic socio-economic activities come from the mangroves.

In terms of the government and companies' commitments, the new oil and gas legislation only takes a slight consideration of environmental protection, which is the legal limit. The commitment of companies is, as usual, on CSR (corporate social responsibility), with no binding text that directly links the company to the community in the event of loss or damage. Provisions at the national level for local communities are local content (LC). Local content means that operating companies can integrate local companies and labor into their production process at the country of execution.

With the future oil and gas exploitation, we can expect that the mangroves of Saloum will be affected as well as the neighboring mangroves of Gambia and Casamance. Also, that the basic socio-economic activities of the communities will be affected by the decline of the mangroves,



water pollution, considerable loss of biodiversity, drop in catches, the disappearance of certain habitats as well as of cultural and historical heritages of the Saloum Delta.

Vulnerable communities suffer the burden of the adverse effects of climate change, even though they are not being the cause. Added to this is the rush to exploit oil and gas without considering the social and ecological impacts on communities and the mangroves. Multinational oil and gas companies, which are causing climate change, will further exacerbate the hardships communities in the Saloum Delta face. Additionally, companies like Shell are selling a 'green' image by funding large-scale plantations of mangrove trees under a blue carbon program that gives them the right to continue their extractive activities.

*Aissatou Keita,*

*Member of the National Platform of Actors for Climate Justice in Senegal*

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# Dayak Women's Struggle to Protect the Forests in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia

[Available also in Bahasa Indonesia](#)

**This article tells the story of a women group in Kalimantan called "Hurung Hapakat", which means "Working Together". Collectively, and against serious repression, they have reclaimed some land from oil palm plantations in order to also reclaim their food sovereignty, dignity and wisdom. And they are not alone.**

The Dayak Indigenous Peoples perceive the universe as a nurturing mother who expresses her love and sustains human existence through her abundant resources. They follow a life philosophy called "*Sesukup Belumbah Adat*," which means: "where the Earth is stepped, the sky is upheld." This philosophy emphasizes their core value of respecting where they live. Consequently, the Dayak People prioritize the caring of their forests as a means of demonstrating respect for the universe and their ancestors. Regrettably, the greed of those in power has jeopardized the well-maintain equilibrium of the universe.

## Background

Since the New Order era (1) during ex-president Soeharto's regime (1966-1998), the lands of the Dayak Indigenous People in Kalimantan have been targeted for investment opportunities. The expansion of oil palm plantations in the region started from the early 1980s. During Soeharto's regime, state-owned plantations expanded and sourced labor through the transmigration program, which started during the Dutch colonial ruling mainly to ensure a workforce for plantations in less populated areas. The forest and land clearance permits granted by the Ministry of Forestry during the 1980s, led to approximately two million hectares of forests being destroyed for oil palm plantations and transmigration purposes. The government also awarded extensive concessions to domestic conglomerates involved in the logging industry. In 1984, authorities in Central Kalimantan, through the Plantation Development Master Plan (RIPP, for its Indonesian acronym), designated oil palm as a commodity to be massively cultivated.

When the economic crisis hit Indonesia in the 1990s, the expansion of oil palm plantations intensified. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) gave a package to the government to liberalize foreign investment in the palm oil sector. Under the pretext of recovering from the economic crisis, the government promoted the expansion of transnational oil palm plantations companies. These include: PT. Kalimantan Lestari Mandiri (KLM Ltd), located between the village of Mantangai Hulu to the village of Kalumpang, and PT. Usaha Handalan Perkasa (UHP Ltd) in the village of Mantangai Hulu.

KLM Ltd. is a subsidiary of a Chinese group called Tianjin Julong, which now operates at least 50 thousand hectares of oil palm plantations in the country, and has an additional 140 thousand

hectares of concessions still to be developed. It also has three mills, two river port storage facilities and one processing facility. (2)

For its part, UHP Ltd., which started operations in the country since 2010, covers an area of more than 15 thousand hectares of oil palm plantations, surrounding the districts of Kapuas Hulu Barat and Mantangai. People living in these districts lost their fertile lands without any explanation about the permit.

The enormous expansion of oil palm plantations however has not been enough.

Kalimantan has also emerged as the target of a large-scale Food Estate program. The stated objective of this program is to overcome the food crisis by maintaining national food stocks, notably rice. It is planned to be developed on land that used to be the ex-Peatland Development (PLG, for its acronym in Bahasa Indonesian) (3) as well as on private land belonging to residents in Central Kalimantan. The Food Estate has been included in the National Strategic Program (PSN) 2020-2024. However, it has no difference with previous policies that mostly aim to pave the way for land dispossession. According to a recent analysis, more than 1,500 hectares of forests, including peatlands, have been cleared for Food Estate program. (4)

On top of this, the government has started its plans to develop a new capital city in the forests of East Kalimantan, generating a new set of impacts for Indigenous communities. (5) At the same time, the rush for 'carbon concessions' to sell carbon credits to polluting companies and governments add pressures on Indigenous' land and has negative effects for its inhabitants. (6)

### **Resistance to Preserve Local Wisdom**

In every account of land dispossession, resistance and struggle inevitably emerge as a response.

Dijah is a Dayak Women who courageously took a leading role when her land was seized by UHP Ltd. In collaboration with women from Mantangai, she orchestrated a protest in August 2013 to remove oil palm seeds and replace them with rubber seeds. They repeated this action in December 2014. Moreover, in June 2020, they fearlessly impeded UHP's access to their land by installing a wooden gate and occupying the land for 12 days. Dijah remains committed to safeguard her ancestral lands, regardless of the threats she encounters. "I personally have no fear because it is my rightful inheritance from my ancestors," she expressed with conviction during a conversation in October 2022 with members of the feminist Indonesian organization Solidaritas Perempuan.

According to Dijah, the land grabbing process occurred abruptly. She explained how the company took advantage of her absence and swiftly cleared the land. "When we returned, the land had already been cleared, and our newly planted trees had been destroyed," she recounted. While Dijah acknowledges the serious consequences that exercising resistance has, Dayak women consider defending their land an imperative, regardless of the persistent intimidation they face.

The BRIMOB (The Mobile Brigade Corps), which is the special operations, paramilitary, and tactical unit of the Indonesian National Police, detained Dijah. Nonetheless, she remained fearless, even fortified by the support of her collective.

Since the land conflict, Dijah and other women in Mantangai have been active in organizing a collective group called “*Hurung Hapakat*”, which means “Working Together”. Founded in 2017, 25 women managed to reclaim half a hectare of land back from the control of UHP Ltd. On that reclaimed land, they have planted various kinds of vegetables to meet the family's food subsistence —such as beans, kale, eggplant, chilies, ginger, lemongrass, turmeric, cucumber, and galangal. Collectively, they maintain the plot. This initiative also thrives on planting local rice using traditional seeds and wisdom.

The company still threatens with bringing her to the police. “They exploit people's lack of familiarity with legal procedures as a tool of terror”, she explained. Despite all, Dijah finds her strength and empowerment in resisting as part of a collective. The safe space these women have established and maintained serves as a platform for discussions, including issues related to the threat of criminalization, providing her with a sense of support.

One of the concerns of the collective is the displacement of local rice seeds because of the mass use of hybrid seeds. This is a consequence of the mercantilization of this grain under capitalist production logic.

One crucial way to preserve the local seeds in indigenous Dayak wisdom is through the practice of shifting cultivation. However, many seeds are damaged and can no longer be planted. This is because land is now limited and soil conditions are different, coupled with the complexity of applying their ancestral practices in these circumstances and with the difficulty of understanding the changing nature.

Food Estates that ignore ancestral practices also exacerbate the situation. The rice seeds planted on those Estates are commodity seeds, such as Inpari 16. As a result, this project is incompatible with the characteristics of Kalimantan's dominant soil: the peatland. For Dayak women, Food Estates have the potential to damage their environments instead of creating prosperity, as the government claims. “After all our local crops have been removed, how can we be prosperous?”, affirmed Dijah.

To ensure the protection of their land, Dayak women have adopted a strategic approach to cultivating. Remi, another member of the *Hurung Hapakat* collective, firmly believes that cultivating the land serves as a tangible manifestation of defending it. “If we allow it to become overgrown, people will perceive it as idle land, making them feel entitled to seize it. However, by consistently cultivating it, they will no longer dare to do so,” she asserted with conviction in October 2022.

The ongoing process of reclaiming their land is closely intertwined with raising awareness through discussions and meetings, particularly concerning the continuity of the women's movement they have established. Sri, another member of *Hurung Hapakat*, explains: “It is crucial to have a women's movement because sometimes women are perceived as weak when acting alone, but when we come together as a group, our voices are more easily heard,” emphasizing the vital importance of creating and maintaining a women's movement.

### **Weaving The Rattan, Sewing The Hope**

Women organizing resistance together has not only happened in Mantangai. Another women collective was also created in the Kalumpang Village, Kapuas, in Central Kalimantan. Their resistance to large-scale land clearing has fostered a sense of solidarity among women in the village. When the authorities ignore their voices and demands, they find ways to strengthen one another.

The social construction regarding gender roles inside the village unfortunately makes the collective decision-making very biased, by identifying only men as the deciders. Due to this, many of the projects in the village are carried out without the women's knowledge or consent. This situation encouraged them to propose a Village Regulation that promotes and facilitates women's involvement in decision-making. The initiative has been met with a positive response from the village chief, who has showed willingness to embrace and support increased female participation in shaping of the village's decisions. For Rica, a woman from the Kalumpang village, “women's involvement in decision-making is prominent”.

Women from Kalumpang have also formed two groups for economic independence: a collective harvesting group and a rattan-weaving group. The former has 20 members aiming to grow vegetables for their daily needs while ensuring food sovereignty, while the latter has 8 members aiming to preserve their traditional knowledge of rattan weaving.

As the Dayak philosophy of life, Rica and the Kalumpang women continue to maintain the balance of their lives in the forests by preserving and respecting what is around them, including the rattan, which was burnt completely during the 2015 forest fires. “Since then, it [the rattan] has been hard to find, so we started planting it again, to make it still useful,” said Rica.

Through the rattan, women groups in Kalumpang have introduced various kinds of weaving items - from bags, accessories, mats, and various other forms of handicrafts. Weaving also makes their discussions much more enjoyable. Currently, many people know their products through their collective sales. Another advantage is that it can also help them to extend the continuity of the struggle. As long as they weave, that rattan will still be on the ground of Kalimantan. “By planting rattan or other trees—that's how we defend our land too,” she said enthusiastically.

A reflection about and with Dayak People will never be complete without a reflection on Kaharingan, the indigenous religion of the Dayak. Kaharingan means “to exist, to grow or to live”.

## World Rainforest Movement

It is symbolized as *Garing* or the tree of life, which means balance or harmony in the relationship among human beings, between humans and nature, and between humans and God. The Dayak people, especially the Benawan Dayak, uphold the value of respecting land, water and forests. For them, all of these contain life that must be continuously guarded. Therefore, the Dayak People are very wise in how they treat nature as well as in building their social life, in accordance with their ancestors' mandate, which is contained in the expression "*Haga Lewun Keton, Petak Danom, ela sampai tempun petak nana sare*". This mandate is internalized by the Dayak People to guard their villages and land.

***Annisa Nur Fadhilah,***  
***Solidaritas Perempuan – Indonesia***

(1) The New Order (Indonesian: *Orde Baru*, abbreviated *Orba*) is the term coined by the second Indonesian President Suharto to characterize his administration as he came to power in 1966 until his resignation in 1998.

(2) China Dialogue, From palm to Plate, <https://chinadialogue.net/en/food/from-palm-to-plate-tracing-sustainable-palm-oil-along-the-supply-chain/>

(3) President Soeharto issued a presidential decree in 1995 to develop one million hectares of Central Kalimantan's peatlands into rice fields. In 1999, president B.J. Habibie terminated the project, but enormous damage had already been done and vast communities affected. The degraded peatlands can no longer function as water storage or hydrological regulator, hence the dramatic fluctuation in groundwater levels, which leads to frequent flooding during the rainy season and fires during the dry season. There are currently dozens of oil palm concessions in this area. Fires are often found inside these concessions, but the companies who own them are rarely charged. See further: <https://jakartaglobe.id/opinion/food-estate-project-new-ecological-disaster-brewing-in-kalimantan>

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## Podcast: “Mexico: Women of the Chiapas coast facing oil palm”

**Women's organizations are resisting the advance of a monoculture crop that is invading their lands and bringing scarcity and water pollution. In this podcast, they explain their situation and their struggle. The podcast was produced by the groups Women of the Chiapas Coast against Oil Palm and Coastal Women in Rebellion, in collaboration with WRM.**

Women's organizations in the state of Chiapas, in southern Mexico, are leading a struggle to stop the advance of oil palm monocultures. These plantations invade fertile lands where communities grow food and raise animals. They also consume large quantities of water and pollute the environment, causing scarcity and disease.

The expansion of these plantations [began at the end of the 1990s](#), driven by companies in this sector in collusion with governments. Today, around 44 percent of all the oil palm grown in Mexico is in the state of Chiapas. One of the expansion techniques involves getting peasant families to sign contracts in which they agree to produce palm on their lands—which has brought many more problems than benefits to the communities.

In this podcast, produced by Women of the Chiapas Coast Against Oil Palm and Coastal Women in Rebellion, in collaboration with WRM, members of these organizations talk about the impacts of this monoculture crop and about their struggle. Their names are omitted for their safety.

We invite you to listen and share:

<https://youtu.be/wyzAmhGeBY8>

### **English transcription:**

**Host:** a production by Coastal Women in Rebellion, who are in a network to defend life and the territories. In collaboration with the World Rainforest Movement.

**Host:** We travel to Mexico, to the coast of Chiapas: a region with beaches and mangroves bathed by the waters of the Pacific, waters that coexist with the flora and fauna of fields and hills. A land where women build their reality and defend the land.

**Woman interviewed 1:** How did we start to fight? First, by understanding our problems and recognizing what we are experiencing and suffering from; and by sharing our experiences—what is happening in our communities, what is happening in our homes, what is happening in our territories, how we are fighting;—and by getting to know other spaces.

**Host:** The state of Chiapas, in southern Mexico, accounts for about 44 percent of the total area of oil palm in Mexico, with almost 50,000 planted hectares. Currently, in the coastal region of Soconusco alone, oil palm covers about 30,000 hectares, making Soconusco the largest growing area for this monoculture. We spoke with the Coastal Women in Rebellion, who explain the impacts of palm in their territory and tell us about their struggle.

**Woman interviewed 2:** Here on the coast, we women are now being invaded by oil palm, as they call it. We are realizing that it harms the earth, and not just the land but also the environment. Where they process the *coquillo* (manufacture of flour from the kernel of the palm's fruit), all of that ash that falls is harmful to our health.

**Host:** Oil palm monoculture began to expand in Chiapas at the end of the 1990s, with a strong push from the State and companies in the sector. Through the use of economic subsidies, free plants and promises that they would obtain great economic benefits, peasant families were encouraged to plant oil palm on their lands and sign contracts with the companies.

**Woman interviewed 3:** The African palm is harming us and taking away our water; it is jeopardizing our plots; the cattle are going thirsty. We can no longer grow any other kind of plant, it has to be strictly oil palm; there are no other fruits besides this. In the palm groves you can't find any plant other than palm, palm, palm, palm. The cattle are now in a place that's far away.

**Woman interviewed 1:** Well, what we have seen, in terms of impacts in the territories, is that most of the palm trees planted have been close to rivers. That river was a very powerful river five years ago. Currently that river is dry; it is contaminated; it has a lot of grease, a lot of "cream" as they call it (they don't call it grease), a cream with something oily like petroleum on top that travels through the earth's veins and the tributaries and reaches the wells of people's homes. And that cream grows in the wells and then we can't use the water even to wash our clothes, much less to drink.

**Woman interviewed 2:** We can no longer harvest the crops like we did before, because the soil has become very dry; that plant [palm] absorbs too much water.

**Host:** Since the first years of cultivation, this crop has contaminated the rivers, streams and springs close to the palm groves. This is due to the use of agrochemicals, which cause diseases that double and triple the caretaking work that women who live near these crops have to do. Additionally, it affects their access to water for domestic consumption, personal hygiene, food preparation and washing clothes.

In Mexico there is a commercial ban on the sale of agrochemicals such as glyphosate, atrazines, mancozeb, benomyl and paraquat, among others. The impacts these chemicals cause include sterility, lung damage, genetic deformities in fetuses, carcinogenic effects and chronic kidney disease; and they disproportionately affect women and their reproductive health.



**Woman interviewed 3:** Due to the chemicals, if we drink that water that has chemicals and everything in it, of course we get sick with cancer, we get skin sicknesses and other ailments in the body.

**Woman interviewed 1:** It brings a lot of diseases to our body, such as depression and high blood pressure. Our body feels it, doesn't it? And especially when there is so much contamination in the water—like plastic, trash, waste, run-off.

**Woman interviewed 3:** Because (some people) think that burning an African palm orchard is enough to kill it. Others don't think this; they've found out that they have to make a hole in the middle of the plant and pour chemicals on it. And when the chemical is poured on the plant, it goes directly to the roots so that it dies. And those roots...where are they? They are connected to the rivers, and many of us still drink water from the rivers, from the springs. And that's why I also think we are making ourselves really sick when we kill the palm plant—because it creates a very thick carpet, a super bushy carpet that does not allow the water to go through. That carpet is soaking up all the water; it is absorbing it.

**Host:** The effects on the availability and quality of water are related not only to the expansion of plantations but also to the processing of the crude oil. In Chiapas there are eleven processors of crude palm oil, which is later refined into vegetable oil at plants located in the states of Veracruz and Jalisco. Each one of those crude oil processing plants foments the planting and expansion of more palm trees.

**Woman interviewed 3:** We are traveling through many places where they still are planning to grow these palm trees, and we are providing videos [to communities] to show them how everything is, how it affects them. They thought they'd make a lot of money at first, and they are paying \$1,99 per kilo of fruits they take out...and it's a lot of work on top of that!

**Woman interviewed 1:** We are raising awareness so that people can see the negative aspects that these mega-projects bring in terms of health, contamination and the environment. But they have also told us that it is not enough for them to pull out the trees, because the roots are there and so deep below the earth that they are woven together like a very strong rucksack. They keep sucking water. And so we raise awareness among people to tell them that this is not the way to obtain economic resources...on the contrary. That money that they think they'll have will not be enough when they get a major disease caused by all the contamination that the palm plantations bring, right?

**Woman interviewed 2:** (Hearing the experience of) the person who already harvested and who finally realized, twenty years later, all the harm that palm causes helps us draw a comparison. And now we reaffirm and say NO, WE DO NOT ACCEPT PALM, we are against palm.

**Woman interviewed 1:** Well, I would just like to invite all the women to keep organizing. We must not give up. We believe that our fight is for life, and we have to keep going.

## World Rainforest Movement

**Host:** The organized women's struggle against the agro-extractive oil palm model stems not only from their effort to eradicate this monoculture crop, but also from their pursuit for equal participation in decision-making on their territories, lands, production, lives and bodies.

**Host:** This has been a production of Women of the Chiapas Coast Against Oil Palm and Coastal Women in Rebellion, who are in a network to defend life and the territories. In collaboration with the World Rainforest Movement.

## Carbon Certification: “The Emperor’s New Clothes”

**This article reflects on the instrumental role that the certification schemes of carbon credits play in the framework of the green economy, as well as on the interests and contradictions that are intrinsic to this certification process.**

“The emperor’s new clothes” is a remarkable tale by Hans Christian Andersen, in which the Emperor pays a lot of money for two charlatans posing as weavers that supposedly produce magnificent clothes for him that are invisible to the stupid or incompetent. At the end of the day, the emperor poses in his underwear in front of the people and, in spite of no one being able to see the new clothes, everyone pretends they are seeing it – the people, the emperor, and of course, the fake weavers.

The certification of carbon credits has a lot in common with this tale. After all, both are about a product that no one can see. Also, in both cases, the false narrative is sustained by alleged experts that technically certify if the product is real and if it does what they say it is supposed to do. The main difference is that in the case of carbon credits, the key buyers of the intangible commodity – corporations – are not silly and naïve as the emperor. On the contrary, corporations, in alliance with governments and conservation NGOs, reinforce the false narrative of ‘certifiable carbon offsets’, in order to maintain and expand their fossil fuel-dependent profits.

The purpose of this article is to reflect on the crucial role that the certification of this new asset (the carbon credit) plays in the framework of the green economy, as well as to point out to the interests and contradictions that are intrinsically linked to its creation.

### **Certification as a Key Element of Carbon Markets**

Most corporations have already endorsed some type of ‘net-zero emissions’ target or ‘climate neutral’ propaganda. On their websites, companies from the fossil fuels to the aviation industries sell stories about how they are ‘protecting forests’ and investing in ‘natural solutions’ and ‘clean’ energies. These stories however run in parallel to a reality of continued or even increased extraction and consumption of fossil fuels; expansion plans that run well beyond 2050. Carbon offsets are at the centre of this contradiction.

In a nutshell, each carbon credit allows the buyer to emit one ton of carbon dioxide or an equivalent greenhouse gas. Multinational corporations are the main buyers of these credits, although governments and even individuals can also buy them. Companies are therefore buying ‘permits to (keep on) polluting.’

But, how is a carbon credit actually produced?

Carbon credits can be generated from several types of offset projects, such as the substitution of fuels mainly by renewable energy generation, waste management, the establishment of large-scale tree plantations, the creation of protected areas for avoiding deforestation, etc. In general, any initiative that is capable to follow certain methodologies for removing or reducing carbon dioxide as well as for avoiding its liberation to the atmosphere, can 'apply' for generating carbon credits to be sold in the market.

The only precondition is that each project must have a document that shows a storyline explaining how those emissions would not have been removed, reduced or avoided in the absence of the carbon market project – the 'additionality' aspect, as it is referred to in the carbon jargon.

For example, when the project is related to 'protecting a forest area', the argument is that, without the project, that forest area would be destroyed or degraded, and in consequence, a large amount of carbon dioxide would be released to the atmosphere. Therefore, the carbon 'stored' in that area is considered 'additional', as it 'avoided emissions' that, according to the storyline of the project developers, would have been emitted without the offset project.

The difference between the two hypothetically predicted scenarios (with and without the offset project) calculates how many carbon credits will be generated. Therefore, the storyline presented by the project developers is a crucial piece for deciding if the project can actually be considered an offset (a compensation) as well as for defining how many credits the project will be producing. This storyline, along with the methodology and other technical aspects, is to be judged by a certification body.

When one thinks of certification, the image that comes to mind might be of products that have a label indicating that their ingredients or components were produced through 'sustainable practices' or something along those lines. For producers to be allowed to use these labels in their products, they usually need to hire a paid certification system, whose role is to audit their production process. There are many structural flaws and power imbalances in these certification labels, including the underlying message to consumers of 'keep buying', which enables the expansion of corporate control over peasant and indigenous lands and livelihoods. (1) The product to be sold however exists regardless of the label, as the role of the certification is to add extra value to the product and thus, profits to their producers.

Yet, in the case of carbon offsets, the certification has assumed a different, much more crucial role, in which the certification process itself is what generates the final product.

But who is responsible for the certification? And who are the actors engaged in the carbon markets?

## **Certifying a colonial story: How are carbon credits generated?**

To briefly illustrate how carbon credits can be generated, we will use a REDD+ project as an example, which is the type of project that leads the issuances of credits within the voluntary carbon market worldwide. (2)

The stated objective of a REDD project focused on ‘avoided deforestation’ is to protect a given area against deforestation and therefore avoid the emissions that *would* be released in case the project had not taken place. Every REDD project is based on such a story, which is a hypothetical prediction of what would have happened with that forest in the future if the project did not take place.

Most REDD project documents emphasize the message that communities living in and/or around those forests are to be blamed for deforestation. So never mind the corporate large-scale destruction that actually drives deforestation and forest degradation. This message is crucial for legitimizing the ‘need’ for outside intervention (and money) to stop or change community practices. And this message is therefore also colonial. It always portrays the future as something statistically predictable. As a result, Indigenous Peoples and peasant communities that depend on those areas are conceived as predictable beings, subjected to the racist prejudices of colonial minds. (3)

Besides, REDD projects always present the worst future scenarios of deforestation if the projects would not take place. Then, based on a given methodology, the project developer presents a calculation of how much deforestation (and thus carbon dioxide) will be avoided in the next 40, 50, or even 100 years.

After that, the project needs to be approved by a certifier, also known as *carbon standard* or *carbon registry*. Four major registries represent almost all of the world’s voluntary market offsets: Verra (VCS), American Carbon Registry (ACR), Climate Action Reserve (CAR), and Gold Standard. These standards are themselves organisations and, at least on paper, non-profit. They verify and issue carbon credits and hold registries with data from each project and credits that are issued. The serial number that is issued to each tonne of carbon dioxide traces each of the generated credits.

The largest certifier is Verra, a non-profit organisation that at the end of 2022 had issued 64 per cent of all carbon offsets worldwide, and more than 70 per cent if we consider forestry and land use projects only. (4) It operates pretty much like a company and it takes US\$ 0,20 for each credit issued. (5) The base salary of Verra’s founding CEO – who has recently quitted after scandals of Verra’s junk carbon credits – was almost as much as the US president. (6)

A certification system such as Verra includes a validation/verification body that is responsible for, first, validating the project hypothesis and its carbon calculations and second, verifying the project development. Afterwards, the certifier issues the carbon credits and the project developers are given the right to sell them to either carbon credit buyers directly or to brokers.

On top of a certification process that generates an abstract commodity, it is worth pointing out that carbon markets are also entering the sphere of the digital economy with mainly what is known as ‘cryptocurrencies’ and ‘tokenization’ of digital assets. (7) Crypto firms sell and buy things that materially do not exist. And that is what carbon markets do: trade credits that do not exist in reality. The ‘tokenization’ of carbon credits is technically possible given that these are by definition digital assets and that each one is linked (at least in theory) to a concrete offset initiative (e.g. a piece of forest supposedly protected by a REDD project), which makes them singular and unique.

This trend entices a whole new range of ‘digital players’ to the carbon markets, increasing the already high pressure over territories eligible for carbon projects and over the peoples that inhabit them. Furthermore, the deepening of the digitalization and massive centralization of data by corporations (on territories, fertile lands and forest-dependent populations) represents a massive threat. This digitalization of territories enable another layer of dispossession that further enforces mechanisms of surveillance and control of land, forests, soil, waters, mangroves, and even cultural practices.

### **Carbon Certification: A Contradiction in Terms**

There are many contradictions in the generation and use of carbon credits, with the certification labels only serving to legitimize a system that perpetuates the continuation of the fossil fuel-based economy. An unsolvable core incongruity in the logic of carbon offsetting is that while on the one hand, the emissions (to be offset) are materially real and impacting the real world, on the other hand, the compensation (credit) is always hypothetical. This section highlights some key contradictions.

#### Unverifiability

The first contradiction to highlight is the unverifiability of the story held by carbon projects’ developers. Despite the fact that few people are able to go through the certification documents, which camouflage highly political assumptions on the processes of deforestation behind intricate mathematical formulas and technical language, it is impossible to predict the future. The methodologies used for doing this ‘fortune teller’ type of storylines are always biased on the developers’ (and certifiers’) interests.

Certifiers in particular are highly interested in approving the projects with the highest and most unlikely achievable predictions. The more carbon credits they issue, the more they are paid by the project owners. The overall result of this unverifiability has been to overstate the emissions reduced, removed or avoided by offset projects.

#### Interests and overstatement

Certifiers are not in any sense neutral. A large part of the money from REDD projects, for example, stays with the certifiers, brokers and verifiers of the projects. In January 2023, a report

from the news portal Follow the Money exposed how certifier South Pole had made millions of dollars buying offsets from the Kariba REDD+ project in Zimbabwe for US\$ 0.45 and selling them for more than US\$ 18. (8)

In line with this, an in-depth investigation released in January 2023 by a consortium of a journalist group found that more than 90 per cent of Verra's carbon offsets related to tropical forests were worthless. (9) Moreover, a study from Cambridge University analysed 32 projects that altogether claim to cover forests the size of Italy, but in reality, it could only be assessed that an infinitely smaller area was in fact 'protected', about the size of the city of Venice. (10)

When questioned about the flaws that the study revealed, Verra's spokesman simply said "If something happens and a project is perceived as having been over-credited, that should be a market decision". However, this simply evidences how there is "simply nobody in the market who has a genuine interest to say when something goes wrong", as pointed out by the study! Indeed, who would do that? The developer gets money selling the supposedly avoided emissions, highly overestimated, while the certifiers and auditors get money attesting that the overestimation is supposedly correct.

### Renewed colonialism

This vicious and structural circle of unverifiability, interests and overstatements, along with other underlying contradictions, enables the certification of carbon projects to reinforce the continuous expansion of corporate control over territories and communities.

This is shown, for example, by the simplification and reduction of complex forest territories into the accounting of carbon dioxide molecules, which obscures and silences violent processes of historic dispossession and oppression of forest-dependent populations. The focus on carbon molecules also destroys the imaginations and diversities of Indigenous Peoples and peasant communities, as well as their relations and co-existences with and among their territories. Moreover, it also erases ancestral knowledges and practices of many other existing worlds.

Another expression of the intrinsic colonial nature of carbon certification is the often-violent consequences and crimes committed against forest-dependent people by projects that have been certified through carbon standards. Certifiers are accomplices in projects that have evicted communities and destructed houses and livelihoods or that have imposed changes on long-standing traditional systems of using and existing with their land. (11)

### Validating the fossil fuel-based economy expansion

A fossil fuel-based capitalist economy does not only refer to the powerful role of fossil fuel companies, but also to the agribusinesses that consume high amounts of fossil fuels; the aviation and transport industries; the digital industry; the military industry; the financial system, which

largely depends on the money tied to fossil fuels; among many others. Capitalism constantly requires energy from fossil fuels and offsetting is the mechanism that allows its expansion.

The companies that buy the carbon credits are very aware that certification is a key element for sustaining the misconception of carbon offsetting, on which many of them have strongly relied to greenwash their polluting activities. The exponential growth of carbon markets reflects the significant benefits that carbon credits have generated for these companies.

In line with this, the astonishing increase in the revenue of carbon certifiers or registries is great evidence that these have been well rewarded. (12) In the meantime, it becomes increasingly clear that the carbon certification schemes not only do *not* contribute to solving the climate chaos but on the contrary, they make it even worse, as they legitimate the expansion of the fossil fuel-based economy while increasing the power of corporations.

### **“The emperor is wearing nothing!”**

It is definitely time to expose certifiers for what they are. It is time to open the eyes and see that the emperor is wearing no clothes at all. People need to stick with the little child that, rather than taking part in the play, points the finger at the scene and says the obvious: “The emperor is wearing nothing at all!” – or, for the carbon credits version, “carbon credits are a complete farce!”

### *WRM International Secretariat*

(1) Read more about certification schemes here: <https://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/certification-schemes>

(2) REDD+ projects respond for 25% of the credits issuances worldwide in the voluntary carbon market, followed by wind energy projects (15%) and Improved Forest Management (11%). This rating considers the issuances of the four major registries of voluntary offset projects – American Carbon Registry (ACR), Climate Action Reserve (CAR), Gold Standard, and Verra (VCS) – which represent almost all of the world’s voluntary market offsets. <https://gspp.berkeley.edu/research-and-impact/centers/cepp/projects/berkeley-carbon-trading-project/offsets-database>

(3) Read more about impacts of REDD over territories and communities here: [www.wrm.org.uy/15-years-of-redd-ending-colonialism](http://www.wrm.org.uy/15-years-of-redd-ending-colonialism)

(4) Idem footnote number 2.

(5) Verra’s 2023 fees schedules are presented here: [verra.org/verra-publishes-updated-fee-schedules/](http://verra.org/verra-publishes-updated-fee-schedules/)

(6) In 2021, the compensation of Verra’s CEO was USD 345,272 against US president’s USD 400,000, according to the following sources: [projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/](http://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/) and the US Code (Chapter 3, Section 102).

(7) Read more about it in REDD-Monitor, [reddmonitor.substack.com/p/crypto-and-carbon-offsets-a-scam?utm\\_source=%2Fsearch%2Fcrypto&utm\\_medium=reader2](http://reddmonitor.substack.com/p/crypto-and-carbon-offsets-a-scam?utm_source=%2Fsearch%2Fcrypto&utm_medium=reader2)

(8) Approximate values in USD considering the original reference in EUR. Follow the Money, 2023, Showcase project by the world’s biggest carbon trader actually resulted in more carbon emissions, [www.ftm.eu/articles/south-pole-kariba-carbon-emission](http://www.ftm.eu/articles/south-pole-kariba-carbon-emission)

(9) Source Material, 2023, The Carbon Con, [www.source-material.org/vercompanies-carbon-offsetting-claims-inflated-methodologies-flawed/](http://www.source-material.org/vercompanies-carbon-offsetting-claims-inflated-methodologies-flawed/)

(10) Idem footnote number 9.

(11) Read some examples here: The Guardian, 2023, ‘Nowhere else to go’: forest communities of Alto Mayo, Peru, at centre of offsetting row, [www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/18/forest-communities-alto-mayo-peru-carbon-offsetting-aoe](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/18/forest-communities-alto-mayo-peru-carbon-offsetting-aoe); and Survival International, 2023, Anatomy of a Multi-Million Dollar Colonial Carbon Project in Kenya, [www.survivalinternational.org/articles/NRT-carbon-credits-Mbaria](http://www.survivalinternational.org/articles/NRT-carbon-credits-Mbaria).

(12) As an example, according to Verra’s annual reports, in 2019, 2020 and 2021 its total assets figures respectively added up to 14, 27, and 50 million USD.



## Monoculture Tree Plantations, Poverty and False Solutions: Harvard's Legacy in Argentina

**After 14 years of profiting from tree plantations—and at the cost of destroying wetlands and communities—the Harvard Management Company, one of the largest investment funds, sold 88,000 hectares in Corrientes to Argentina's largest electric power company, Central Puerto, which also wants to produce wood, biomass energy and carbon offsets.**

After 14 years in Argentina, one of the largest investment funds in the world, the Harvard Management Company, decided to sell its 88,000 hectares located in the province of Corrientes. This was not before making millions in profits from planting pine and eucalyptus trees—and at the cost of destroying wetlands and seriously affecting communities in the region. The Harvard Management Company is a non-profit affiliate of Harvard University, located in the United States.

Harvard managed the 88,000 hectares through the company, EVASA, which in turn manages the companies, Empresas Verdes Argentinas, Las Misiones and Estancia Celina. Around 50 percent of these hectares are located within the Y'vera Nature Reserve, an ecosystem of estuaries, wetlands, lagoons, palm groves and native forest. Millions of monoculture trees were planted, destroying fertile and diverse territories as well as the culture and livelihoods of many communities (1). All the promises of “progress” and “development” vanish in the face of the reality that Corrientes continues to be one of the provinces with the worst socioeconomic indices in Argentina.

In May 2023, Central Puerto, the largest electric power company in Argentina, announced its purchase of EVASA (2). With this acquisition of 160,000 planted hectares, Central Puerto became one of the largest tree plantation companies in the country. According to Central Puerto's manager, its strategy focuses on producing wood, biomass energy and carbon offsets. This strategy deepens the social and environmental devastation and impacts that Corrientes province has been experiencing, but is now being presented under the banner of the “green economy” and as a false solution to climate change.

### **Historical Context or “How did we get here?”**

Argentina has been an epicenter of investment in tree plantations since the late 1990s, when the Investments for Cultivated Forests Law N° 25.080 was passed during the government of Carlos Menem.

This law promotes the expansion of plantations by making the business more profitable. Among other benefits, it grants fiscal stability for up to 50 years, which means investors are not liable to tax increases in that whole period. It also provides exemptions, tax rebates and non-refundable economic support, which can be up to 80 percent of the implementation costs (3).

In light of such advantages, investors and capital—first national and later foreign—poured into the plantation business, and within a short time there was an exponential increase in the area planted with exotic tree species like pine and eucalyptus. Thus, the business continued to grow, despite the innumerable social and environmental consequences.

With almost 450,000 hectares of plantations, Corrientes is the province with the largest area of monoculture tree plantations in the country (4). Among the main impacts of these monocultures are the displacement of peasant families who are left without work, the contamination of water and soils, the destruction of biodiversity, and health problems due to the use of agrochemicals. Another serious consequence is increasing fires, which in recent years have been aggravated by the drought and wreaked havoc in the region. Year-to-date (through April 2023), more than 100,000 hectares, 91 percent of which are estuaries, have burned. Massive fires have been recorded in Corrientes since 2020, with a record of more than one million burned hectares in 2022 (5).

When asked about the recent news of Harvard's sale, Lucas Yacuzzi—who was born and raised in Chavarría, one of the towns that was chosen for EVASA's growth—says: *“The first change we saw with the arrival of the pine trees was the local, gaucho culture; the typical culture of Corrientes began to disappear. A significant proportion of the population were not used to forestry work and left for other areas in search of work that they were used to doing. For that reason, this project did not help much economically, because just a few people got rich. The people who worked for the company managed to improve their situation. But the vast majority of the salaried employees or people working under the table continue to be in the same position as before, unable to make ends meet. Additionally, the rural roads are always in bad shape or destroyed, not to mention our landscapes. We used to see the forest and pastures on the outskirts of town, but now all we see are pine and eucalyptus trees.”*

In 2012, Lucas and dozens of neighbors, many of whom were young people and mothers, blocked the EVASA truck route in protest. They were tired of trucks passing through town at all hours—especially while people were sleeping—carrying pine logs and raising dust in their path. Their protests succeeded in banning trucks from driving through town, and forced them to take an alternative route, which is still in effect today. Nonetheless, the trucks continue to carry pine logs at all hours of the day and raise dust, just on a different road.

### **The Auction of a Sacrificial Basin**

During Argentina's socioeconomic crisis in the late 1990s and early 2000s, in the midst of the instability that the country was beginning to experience, several large capitalists sold off their assets in order to safeguard their investments.

In this context, in New York in 2002, Pecom Energía—owned by business group Perez Companc—auctioned 80,000 hectares located in the Y'vera estuaries in Corrientes. For Pecom Energía, the plantations had also become a business to obtain carbon credits and offset the emissions of its fossil fuel-related businesses (6).

The buyer in New York was businessman Douglas Tompkins, a millionaire who landed in Argentina and fixed his sights on the area. It would turn out to be a strategic purchase, given that the Y'vera estuaries have excellent conditions for timber production and are one of the largest wetlands in the Americas. Tompkins was a known altruistic philanthropist and conservationist who promoted the erroneous dichotomy between human beings and nature—as if excluding communities from their ancestral environment could solve the problems caused by capitalism. Additionally, he promoted elite tourism in supposedly conserved areas. In 2003, Tompkins founded EVASA to manage the pine plantations in the acquired area, and in 2007, he sold it to Global Emerging Markets Forestry Fund LP, a joint venture between the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and US-based International Forestry Investment Advisors LLC (7).

With the Investments for Cultivated Forests law still in force, the plantation business continued to boom, with a 20 percent expansion in 2007. In addition to EVASA, the main players in this business include companies such as Alto Paraná (of the Chilean Arauco group), Forestal Bosques del Plata (owned by CMPC, also Chilean), Forestal Argentina, Pomera and Tapebicuá. These companies account for a large percentage of national production, besides small- and medium-sized producers.

In 2007, the Harvard Investment Fund owned at least 50 percent of Global Emerging Markets Forestry Fund, making it a majority owner of EVASA and Las Misiones. With the recession of 2008 and 2009, the fund lost almost 30 percent of its investments. Harvard then changed course and, in 2010, sold its shares of Global Emerging Markets Forestry Fund and bought EVASA and Las Misiones outright. This allowed Harvard to cut out intermediaries and maintain its assets (8). Since then, excellent and therefore elite education has been financed by the destruction of ecosystems, such as the wetlands of Argentina.

### **Harvard in Corrientes: The green that goes and the green that stays**

Harvard Investment Fund, one of the world's largest investment funds, had a presence in Corrientes for fourteen years. In its own words, it was “developing a sustainable investment and respecting the highest quality standards.”

The educational entity exploited thousands of hectares in order to produce and sell timber to finance the activities of its educational institution. The land was attractive due to the trees' high growth rates, which are some of the highest in the world. In this area, trees grow approximately ten times faster than in the Northern Hemisphere.

But besides the huge sums of money and business, what did Harvard's stint mean for Corrientes and for the towns that had plantations as neighbors for over a decade?

Adrian Obregon is an inhabitant of the Montaña area in San Miguel, where people live alongside the Las Misiones company (another tree plantation company that Harvard managed). Obregon tells us: “*The truth is that Harvard left no economic benefits in the territory...far from it. The only thing it*

*left was an environmental disaster—the destruction of the Y'vera ecosystem—and a 4-meter-deep, 350-meter-long, and 150-meter-wide pit, from which they extracted red earth to fill an embankment that they built on their field. That pit is Harvard's gift to us in Paraje Montaña. I should clarify that I know the dimensions of the pit because when they started the excavation work, I went to the ICAA (Corrientes Institute for Water and the Environment) to file a complaint; but the ICAA never came to look at the problem.”*

Adrian, together with the 'Guardians of Y'vera' (a socio-environmental organization in Corrientes that defends wetlands in local territories) and the Harvard coalition for responsible investments (made up of university students, alumni, professors and workers who want to “change the way Harvard invests its money”), traveled to the United States in 2013. The goal of the trip was to present Drew Faust, then Harvard University president, with a petition signed by peasant communities asking for resolution of three simple points:

- 1- That plantation expansion cease until the appropriate environmental impacts study be carried out with community participation,
- 2- That the plantation frontier be moved to at least 2,000 meters away from community settlements, and
- 3- That the labor situation of the employees, which was currently precarious, be regularized.

The only point that could hardly be said to have improved was the last one—but only in certain establishments and for a few employees. What was guaranteed for years was environmental destruction of the estuaries, and the pit. But Harvard walked away with millions of dollars.

### **New owners, the same greenwashed future**

In May 2023, Central Puerto—a player with exponential growth in the tree plantation sector—managed to negotiate the purchase of Harvard's lands at a price that the company has still not confirmed, but which was rumored to be close to US\$70 million. Central Puerto is also the largest producer of electricity in the country.

Two months earlier in March 2023, Central Puerto had acquired the Central Costanera power generator upon the exit of Italian energy company Enel. This positioned Central Puerto as the largest producer of electricity in the country, with an installed capacity of 7100 MW.

Central Puerto's wide-ranging operations are supported by its 14 generation plants with various technologies. And with the hectares of tree plantations acquired from EVASA, Central Puerto is one of the country's leading companies in the monoculture industry, owning 160,000 planted hectares.

After the company's purchase of Harvard's lands, the company's general manager, Fernando Bonnet, told the Argentine press: "This sector can be a source of future business opportunities linked to wood processing and industrialization, carbon credits and biomass energy generation."

Central Puerto's website already lists electricity generation from "biofuels" as one of the company's current and recent offerings. It also states that one of the company's strategies is to "insert renewable energies in the power generation matrix" (9).

Every time some representative of capitalism makes declarations related to the "green economy," people in the territories know that their lands and lives are at stake. They have known this for more than thirty years. And of course, the representatives of capitalism do not budge an inch when it comes to their interests or their production, financial or consumption systems. Plantations in Corrientes are now also promoted as providing "clean energy" from biomass or "carbon capture." They have essentially been reconfigured as a laboratory to deepen plunder in the name of capital accumulation—which is now erroneously called "green."

Biomass is sold as "clean energy" but is another false solution to the climate crisis. This is not only because carbon is released when the trees are burned, but also because the demand for both charcoal for industrial uses and wood chips and pellets for heating or electricity production are fueling the expansion of tree monocultures; this, in turn, causes intensified deforestation, soil erosion, water contamination, displacement of communities, and many other impacts.

Masisa Forestal Argentina, Central Puerto's plantation and timber production unit, boasts a commitment to preserving biodiversity through the creation of nature reserves; but this only represents a tiny portion of the lands it has under cultivation. Furthermore, these "reserves" impede local communities' connection to and relationship with forests (10).

Biomass energy generation, carbon credits, and even investment in conservation areas are simply more ways to expand capitalism—at the expense of hundreds of thousands of destroyed hectares. These activities are presented as false solutions to the climate crisis, which is ironic given that the monoculture industry is an underlying cause of climate change.

### **A "sustainable" model for doing more business**

To respond to the initial question about what Harvard has left us after fifteen years in Argentina: In addition to the large-scale destruction of biodiversity and cultures, and the deepening of poverty and job and social insecurity, it has left us with a huge and rapidly growing pit, which is a trap hidden in plain sight. This is one of the many faces of the green economy.

But it also leaves us with the huge challenge of being prepared for what is to come—which now is not "only" the establishment of massive tree plantations with no diversity, or the onslaught of the industrial monoculture business. We must also be prepared for the new strategies of this "green" capitalism. This expansion strategy utilizes a very deceptive narrative and forces us to strengthen what has essentially been the only bastion of resistance: community organization and solidarity. We must emphasize the intrinsic value of the territory where we live, that value (or values) which cannot be quantified using economic parameters. It is the lifeblood of the peoples and cannot be a bargaining chip.

## World Rainforest Movement

It is up to us—the people, the community, the inhabitants of the territories—to halt the spread of deception from other hemispheres, from entities that lack identity and roots in the territories. Let us stay strong and rooted in our shared identity and our love for the commons, which give and reproduce life.

*Guardians of the Y'vera, Corrientes, Argentina*

<https://guardianesdelyvera.org/>

Y'vera (Y= Water / VERA= Shining) is a word in the Guaraní indigenous language. Reclamation of the language is one of the pillars of the organization, Guardians of Y'vera.

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## RECOMMENDED

### **Indigenous Peoples in Argentina fight against lithium exploitation**

In Jujuy, in northwest Argentina, indigenous communities and workers from different sectors are fighting against a provincial constitutional reform that was approved in June 2023. The reform enables lithium extraction in indigenous territories and criminalizes social protest, among other rights violations. Lithium is considered a “strategic” resource, especially for companies and countries in the North, as it is crucial for the electrification of cars and other products. After weeks of the police violently repressing protestors, the [communities announced that they will walk](#) more than 1,600 kilometers to Buenos Aires, the capital of the country, to demand the repeal of this reform and the recognition of communal land ownership. Jujuy is part of what is known as the “lithium triangle,” which covers part of Argentina, Chile and Bolivia. To learn more about this struggle, we recommend reading the [Jujuy section of the news portal, “Agencia Tierra Viva”](#) and this [article from Agencia Pelota de Trapo](#), in which journalist and writer Raúl Zibechi analyzes what is happening in Argentina in the context of advancing extractivism in Latin America.

### **Largest pulp mill company, Suzano, attracts billions despite massive land grabbing**

DW news portal investigated ongoing socio-environmental conflicts in Brazil related to Suzano, which manages over a million hectares of eucalyptus plantations across the country and plans to almost double that in the next decade. They expose that the company is facing 262 possible and probable civil and environmental proceedings, and 2,449 probable and possible labour proceedings. Despite this terrible record, the company has attracted billions in 'green' investments. Read further in English here: <https://www.dw.com/en/greenwashing-brazils-sustainable-paper-company-eucalyptus-pulp-producer-suzano/a-65724286>

### **Devastating impacts to communities in northwest Guinea by a World Bank's funded Biodiversity Offset**

An article from ProPublica exposes how the World Bank Group is backing up biodiversity offset projects via its arm that works with private companies, the International Finance Corporation, which has funded at least 19 with biodiversity offsets. The article focuses on the Compagnie des Bauxites de Guinée, a mining company which sought funding to expand its mining operation in northwest Guinea. The expansion as well as the offset project has enabled the devastation of villages and helped a mining company justify the deaths of endangered chimps. Read the article in English here: <https://www.propublica.org/article/biodiversity-offsets-guinea-world-bank-group-chimpanzees-outbreak>

### **Palm plantations and REDD+ programs in Pará, Brazil: land grabbing and violence**

The Brazilian justice system annulled the registration of two properties of Agropalma, the largest sustainable palm oil producer in the Americas, due to the fact that they were usurped lands. This is in the state of Pará, the epicenter of oil palm monoculture in Brazil. These lands, which are still in the company's possession, include Quilombola communities' territories. Ignoring the agrarian conflict and the court's decision, Agropalma is about to commercialize palm oil. Furthermore, the

company will launch a REDD+ program, without having consulted the communities, and without mentioning the conflict in its documents. The REDD+ program will increase the private surveillance and security system of forests. Meanwhile, Agropalma is increasing armed surveillance and control over the forests, in order to keep the carbon so it can trade it. Read a full report by Avispa Midia in [Spanish](#) and [Portuguese](#), in addition to an article on this issue in this bulletin.

### **Sharing knowledge and experiences from struggles in defense of forests**

Activists from the World Rainforest Movement (WRM) and the World March of Women share their reflections after an exchange that took place in Brazil, with activists from different territories in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The exchange was an opportunity to have discussions and share challenges, with an emphasis on the contribution of feminism in struggles to defend forests and their communities. Read an article here: <https://capiremov.org/en/experience/exchanging-wisdom-knowledge-and-experiences-of-struggle-for-the-forests/>

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Editor: Joanna Cabello

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

### **WRM International Secretariat**

Av. Bolivia 1962 Bis, CP 11500 Montevideo, Uruguay

Phone/Fax: +598 26056943

[wrm@wrm.org.uy](mailto:wrm@wrm.org.uy) / <http://www.wrm.org.uy>