



Issue 144 - July 2009

[Printable version](#) | [For free subscription](#) | [Previous issues](#)

also available in [French](#), [Portuguese](#) and [Spanish](#)

OUR VIEWPOINT

- [G8 and the climate crisis: Will deeds match words?](#)

INTERNATIONAL MANGROVE DAY

- [Mangrove Action Day- July 26th](#)
- [Ecuador: Memory and future emerge from women's struggle for their mangroves](#)
- [In Africa mangroves are disappearing and with them, the livelihoods of its people](#)
- [Bangladesh: losing mangroves to shrimp farming leads to food loss and environmental insecurity](#)

COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

- [Brazil: New legislation allows agribusiness to advance in the Amazon](#)
- [Dominican Republic: The people say "no" to the cement factory at Los Haitises!](#)
- [India: Dehradun Declaration of forest people](#)

COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

- [Brazil: FSC greenwashing of eucalyptus plantations is strongly questioned and a warning made vis-à-vis their advance in Piauí](#)
- [Laos: Chinese company Sun Paper plans eucalyptus monocultures](#)
- [Mexico: Oil palm business at the expense of the poor](#)
- [Statement on Tree Plantations from participants at recent Forest Movement Europe meeting](#)
- [GE trees: when scientists mutate into publicists](#)

OUR VIEWPOINT

G8 and the climate crisis: Will deeds match words?

The governments of some of the world's most powerful countries (1) recently met in Italy and produced a document titled "Responsible Leadership for a Sustainable Future". In their statement, they inform the world that they are "determined to ensure sustainable growth and to tackle the interlinked challenges of the economic crisis, poverty and climate change."

It could be funny, were it not because the current situation is so tragic.

The world is facing a major economic crisis, poverty is increasing worldwide –and also in those 8 countries- and the climate crisis is nearing disaster. All as a direct result of the “responsible” leadership provided by the governments of those –and a few other- countries over many decades.

It is obvious that no-one can blame countries like Tuvalu, Fiji, Laos, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, Gambia, Namibia, Uruguay, Cuba or most of the 192 member states of the United Nations for having created those problems. However, most of them are already heavily impacting on their peoples.

The G8 now promises that they will take “the lead in the fight against climate change”, but reality shows that they are doing exactly the opposite: protestors are being criminalized in the UK for trying to prevent the use of coal, oil is planned to be drilled in Alaska, oil and gas companies from G8 countries continue to profit from fossil fuels while consumption in G8 countries result in further rainforest destruction.

Countries already suffering from climate change have never expressed their desire to be “led” by the G8. On the contrary, they are demanding them and a few other powerful governments to accept their responsibility for the problems they have created and to do something about it. Not by 2050 but right now. Not with declarations but in concrete actions. Not through “market mechanisms” but through stringent legislation.

The world –its peoples and ecosystems- can no longer tolerate a system where a few governments –based on economic, political and military power- use and destroy the planet for their own benefit. In that respect, the G8 needs to be reminded what democracy means and to accept that they are a tiny minority with no leadership mandate from anyone except themselves.

The world does not want or need their “leadership” but it does need them to act in a “responsible” manner to address the climate disaster they have created. The world needs them to match their words with deeds.

(1) The G8's members are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The European Commission attends as well.

[index](#)

INTERNATIONAL MANGROVE DAY

Mangrove Action Day- July 26th

Mangrove Action Project (MAP) has been working since 1992 to halt the rampant destruction of the earth's mangrove forest wetlands that are threatened by unsustainable development. Such industries as charcoal and petroleum production, tourism and urban expansion, golf courses and marinas are all threats to mangrove forests today. Still, the largest threat stems from industrial shrimp aquaculture production, which is the largest contributor to current mangrove loss. Shrimp farms are located along the coastal zones for convenience for the investors, but at the cost of the coastal wetland zones which are cleared of mangroves to make way for the hundreds of thousands of acres of shrimp ponds. The shrimps are raised for export in most

cases, and the ponds themselves may last only a few years before being shut down because of pollution and disease problems affecting the farmed shrimp. Today, as a telling testament to this wasteful industry, there are over 250,000 ha of abandoned shrimp farms around the world, and over 1 million ha of important, productive coastal wetlands, including mangroves, have been devastated for the sake of a luxury seafood product for the wealthy nations to enjoy. But at what costs?

Over half the world's mangrove forests have been lost to such short-sighted development pressures. Today, only around 15 million ha of the estimated original 36 million ha of mangroves still exist, while much of the remaining mangroves are degraded and in poor health. Each year, around 150,000 ha or more of mangroves are being cleared. This loss of mangroves represents a serious threat to the future of life on this planet for several very relevant reasons.

For one, mangroves play a vital role in coastal biodiversity, acting as nurseries for juvenile fish and supplying much of the detritus that becomes part of the coastal food chain supporting a vast array of life in the process. Mangrove wetlands play an important role as stop-over sites and feeding sites for migratory birds. Mangroves also help hold coastal soils in place, preventing erosion and sedimentation, which can suffocate the sea grass beds and coral reefs, which are already threatened by pollution and global warming. They also filter out pollutants from upland, thus keeping the sea water purer. Mangroves themselves sequester massive amounts of carbon in their leaves and branches, as well as store carbon in the soils beneath their root structures. When mangroves are cleared vast amounts of carbon are released into the atmosphere contributing further to global warming.

Mangroves also protect coastal communities from hurricane force winds and wave surges. Many scientists believe that mangroves provided some important protection against the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that struck the coasts of Asia and East Africa. Those living behind healthy mangroves stood a much better chance of surviving the tsunami waves' onslaught.

For these reasons and more, in 2003, MAP joined other organizations from the global South to promote July 26th as Mangrove Action Day.

Background on Mangrove Action Day!

The plan to make this call to action arose during the "In the Hands of the Fishers Workshop" held in Fortaleza, Brazil in early 2003. The workshop attendees came from Brazil, Ecuador, Honduras, Colombia and Guatemala. The IHOF mainly focused on the issues surrounding mangrove and salt flats endangered by expansion of the shrimp farm industry, as well as strategies to help halt the continued expansion of these shrimp farm ventures. It was brought up during this workshop that an international campaign involving local fisherfolk should be undertaken where participating NGOs and local community representatives organize their own local events on the same day, thus linking these local events with each other to make an international movement or action.

July 26th was chosen because of its existing significance for the movement in Latin America led by Red Manglar. July 26th has been called the "Day of the Mangrove,"

commemorating that day in 1998 when a Greenpeace activist from Micronesia, Hayhow Daniel Nanoto, died of a heart attack while involved in a massive protest action led by FUNDECOL and Greenpeace, International. During this action the local community of Muisne (Ecuador) joined the NGOs in dismantling an illegally placed shrimp pond in an attempt to restore this damaged mangrove zone back to its former state. Since Hayhow's death, FUNDECOL and others have commemorated this day as a day to remember and to take renewed action to Save the Mangroves!

With no Greenpeace ship in sight on the horizon, we decided that the fisherfolk form cooperative flotillas to protest the destructive expansion of shrimp farming in their areas. This call got positive responses from Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Ecuador, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Honduras, Nigeria, Europe and the USA. And it looks like momentum is building globally for an annual commemoration of July 26th as Mangrove Action Day, with some groups organizing teach-ins, some mangrove tree planting, wetland clean-ups, protests and letter writing.

A New Call To Action on July 26th, 2009!

MAP wishes to lend full support to the plans and actions of all network members for Global Action on 26 July 2009. MAP staff and volunteers based in the Seattle area will be attending the 35th Annual Ballard Seafood Fest on 25-26 July, tabling at this popular Seattle event and talking with consumers about the problems of shrimp farming worldwide. MAP will be promoting our "Shrimp Less, Think More" Consumer Awareness Campaign.

We ask that you and/or your organizations please join us all in a global protest against the ongoing losses of the mangrove forest ecosystems and the local communities that depend upon the mangroves for their lives and livelihoods. Please send MAP your regional or local plans for actions that are meant to commemorate this international Day for the Mangroves! MAP would like to again share your plans and ideas with our global network. We look forward to hearing from you soon in this regard!

For more details, contact mangroveap@olympus.net

[index](#)

Ecuador: Memory and future emerge from women's struggle for their mangroves

The Muisne canton, province of Esmeraldas hosted the "First Meeting: Women of the Mangrove Ecosystem of Ecuador, our dreams, our rights, our challenges," held in May this year.

Over 80 women shared this meeting, in which they told their stories as women who are facing discrimination and violence. Members of REDMANGLAR International came from Colombia, Honduras, Mexico and Brazil to reconstruct the historical memory of women who have always lived in mangroves.

Fisherwomen, shell, crab, oyster and clam gatherers, women companions of the

mangrove in their work, in their struggle to survive, reflected on where they come from and where they are going. They portrayed their stories and mangrove biodiversity, they portrayed their families working and playing in the mangroves. They also portrayed destruction and deforestation. They portrayed the way they wanted life to be in the future. They talked, made more friends, started finding other women like themselves and finding themselves.

They said that mangroves are the natural industry that gives them everything and that when the ecosystem is lost, life is lost. "I am sure that when León Febres Cordero was president they started felling the mangrove. Then along came the shrimp farmers to destroy the mangrove. Any President taking up office supports the shrimp farmers and forgets the poor," complained one of the participants.

The memory

Each one drew her story. The women from the province of Esmeraldas depicted themselves with a cigarette in their mouth; they smoke to keep the mosquitoes away when they are gathering shells from the mangroves. They depicted themselves in the midst of the exuberant mangrove ecosystem, but also in the midst of the devastation caused by industrial shrimp aquaculture. They said that there are hardly any shellfish left and that although they take great care of the ecosystem, much more has to be done, that they reforested together with their companions from other organizations, with students, voluntary workers and that they knocked down the walls of the shrimp ponds that came to invade and to destroy everything.

In the province of Manabi the struggling women from the mangroves come from two areas, the estuary of the Portoviejo River and the estuary of the Chone River. With the arrival of the shrimp farms the mangrove was lost. "We were fisherwomen; we also did short cycle farming. When the shrimp farms arrived we helped collect larvae for the laboratories and soon everything came to an end. Now we have no work, some of us are employed removing the heads off shrimps in the ponds, but it is hard work, they pay little and it is not a permanent job."

They remembered that previously the El Niño phenomenon had been a blessing because it was accompanied by abundant fishing and the land was renewed. "Since the loss of the mangroves, each El Niño phenomenon is a disaster arriving in our communities, everything is flooded, houses are lost and people have to leave their territory," they lamented.

In Guayas there is still a great diversity of fish, shrimps and shellfish, there is still a considerable extension of mangroves protected by the communities. But there are locations such as Puna Island, where the shrimp farmers have finished off the mangrove and many shell and shrimp gatherers no longer have any work or anywhere to get food from.

The mangroves have been almost completely wiped out in the province of Santa Elena, but it has coral reefs and fish banks that supply fisheries exuberantly. However, these resources must be protected as industrial fishing is depleting them and, because mangroves (the fishes' "nursery") no longer exist, this wealth will soon disappear.

The struggle

“We have been threatened, we have been attacked, the shrimp farmers have shot at us and they have thrown us out like dogs in order to take the mangrove away from us and to keep this heritage of ours. But here we are willing to give our lives if necessary because we were born here, this is where our history is, our stories, our work, our food, our families and friends,” stated the women from Esmeraldas.

And the women sang:

*I wish the president could hear me out
What I want to say to him now
Listen Mr. President, have a little pity
The mangroves are ours, they do not belong to the authority*

*Ay, until when and until when
Please until when
Until when will they harm
The poor people of Ecuador*

In the words of the women of Manabi “our dream is to see the result of our efforts and to recover the lost territory. To end the marches, win this struggle and enjoy what we have and what we recover.”

The future

These women’s dream is for the shellfish to come back. For those 1,000 or 1,500 that existed some twenty years ago to exist again today. They want to return to work gathering shellfish, gathering crabs. They dream that many species that can be used to feed themselves return, that the men continue to be “mangleros” making charcoal, making houses out of mangrove timber; that the mangroves return to their previous state and their lives too.

It is also true that all is not a bed of roses, that life in the mangroves is hard. “With my work as a shellfish gatherer I have given my children the possibility to study, so that they are not what I am, so they are something better. I feel proud of my children, I have given them progress. I didn’t leave them like I was left, as my mother didn’t give me any learning,” says Jacinta, the delegate of the Muisne canton, province of Esmeraldas and this consideration triggered off a heated discussion among the participants.

This is “because we are discriminated against, we are scornfully treated as “cholas” (half-breeds), because our work is not valued. A woman who goes to the mangrove is not respected like one who has a university profession and that is why we think our children must study to be respected and not discriminated against. Because society is like that, it does not understand how marvellous the mangroves are or that we give them their food with our work. It is not us who despise and renounce our mangroves, it is the country’s president, those in power, those who destroy, that do not understand,” reflected the women from the province of El Oro. “We want to raise our voices to be heard and have each of our ideals respected. To preserve what is ours and what enables the work of us women and men to cover our families’ economy. We want to

be admired for the effort we make to defend our territory and for discrimination to end so that our children can inherit the mangroves and feel proud of being from the mangroves. We dream that the violence in our communities ends, that they let us walk and run in our mangroves, working with dignity,” they affirmed.

“My dream of the mangrove is to sow it and cultivate it for my grandchildren and great-grandchildren to produce and to tell the same story I am telling you now. For them to be part of the mangroves as I am now a part,” stated Rosa, a crab-gatherer aged 52, who has taught all her generation to earn their living gathering crabs in the mangroves and loving them.

The meeting ended with an affirmation of life. On fifty hectares of mangroves illegally occupied and destroyed by Mr. Ilario Patiño with shrimp ponds, the women reforested two hectares of mangroves in the location of Casa Vieja, in the parish of Bolívar.

The Minister of the Environment has been requested to proceed to register this area and it is hoped that on this occasion, the reforestation carried out by the women will be guaranteed and that the area can live again.

Based on the account of the meeting, sent by C-CONDEM - Corporación Coordinadora Nacional para la Defensa del Ecosistema Manglar, manglares@ccondem.org.ec, www.ccondem.org.ec

[index](#)

In Africa mangroves are disappearing and with them, the livelihoods of its people

Mangroves are “an original habitat and a specific environment” consisting of trees with aerial roots that bury themselves in the mud but also of other shrubs and tree-like bushes that are distinguished by their ability to adapt to the environment and particularly to water salinity. This explains the specific location of each species within the ecosystem, known as zonation.

From Mauritania to Angola, the aerial roots of the mangrove *Rhizophora* are a privileged refuge where fish can spawn, and they play an important role in the economic life of the surrounding inhabitants. For them, mangroves represent an essential source of income and means of subsistence: fishing, firewood, timber, various foodstuffs, shellfish, medicines, tourism, etc. Additionally, mangroves regulate the tides and sedimentation and act as a protective barrier against storms and coastal erosion.

Scientists estimate that three-quarters of the fish caught in the tropics depend on mangroves for food or shelter. Mangroves are spawning and nursery sites both for coastal and deep-sea fish.

The northern part of Cameroun is characterized by abundant estuaries and mangroves, through which rivers flow into the sea. These mangroves act, among other things, as breeding and spawning areas for various species of fish and shellfish..

In Senegal, mangroves greatly contribute to the social, economic and cultural welfare of the inhabitants of the Saloum Delta. This is also an important rest area for numerous species of migratory birds. This wealth has earned it international status as a World Heritage site. "A unique biological diversity, today endangered by the disappearance of this natural habitat," says Abdoulaye Diamé, of the NGO WAAME (West African Association for Marine Environment).

In Kenya, mangroves cover some 54,000 hectares and are mainly to be found in the Lamu and Tana River districts. They are a direct source of numerous wood and non-wood products. The wood products are: timber, building timber and coal, used both in urban and rural areas. Building timber is classified in various categories according to its use. It is also used to make masts for boats and traps for fish. The largest mangrove trunks are used to build traditional boats. The aerial roots serve as floats for fishing nets. The local inhabitants also make furniture with mangrove wood. Among the many non-timber products found in the mangroves are honey, medicines, crabs and fish.

Nigeria has the largest surface of mangroves in Africa: 7,386 km² (UNEP-WCMC, 2007). The eight species of mangroves existing in the area are to be found there. The inhabitants carry out various economic activities: fishing, shrimp farming, timber production, tourism, etc. The Niger Delta mangroves are considered to be a significant conservation area for the west coast of Africa because of their extraordinary biological diversity. Studies have shown that almost 60 percent of the fish in the Gulf of Guinea breed there.

Nevertheless, mangrove extension is steadily decreasing. It is a fairly vulnerable ecosystem that is already very degraded in the areas further from the coast. Between 1980 and 2006 a quarter of the mangroves in the west of Africa disappeared and it is expected that the loss will rise to 70 percent if no measures are taken.

The degradation of these ecosystems has a considerable impact on biological diversity and the socio-economic activities depending on it: the disappearance of species of fauna and flora, poverty, unemployment, disputes, nutrition-related diseases, etc.

Two different processes affecting mangroves should be noted. In some cases their total destruction may be observed due to commercial logging, to their substitution by shrimp-ponds or their elimination by large-scale tourism undertakings. However, in other cases degradation of mangrove systems takes place – although many trees may remain standing – due to oil exploitation. That is to say, the installation of pipelines and seismic exploration cause deforestation; while oil-spills, waste dumping and gas flaring pollute the water and the air and seriously affect the ecosystem as a whole.

In Kenya for example, between 1983 and 1993 the port of Mombasa and the surrounding waters received 391,680 tons of spilled oil, affecting the Puerto Ritz and Makupa cove mangroves. Something similar has taken place in Cameroun, where pollution caused by the oil industry is endangering mangrove integrity.

However, the most serious case of large-scale mangrove degradation from oil production occurs in the Niger Delta in Nigeria, where oil giants such as Shell and Chevron extract millions of dollars worth of oil from the Niger Delta, in exchange for

social and environmental destruction.

Regarding deforestation, the area of Nigerian mangroves dropped from 9,990 km² to 7,386 km² between 1980 and 2006.

In terms of degradation, major oil spills have occurred that have devastated rivers, killed mangroves and coastal life and affected the health and livelihoods of millions of inhabitants of the Niger Delta. As denounced by Amnesty International, the local communities rely on “the land and natural waterways for their livelihood and sustenance. Now, they have to drink, cook with and wash in polluted water and eat fish contaminated with toxins. They have lost farming land and their incomes from oil spills and breathe air that reeks of oil, gas and other pollutants.”

(<http://www.amnesty.org.au/action/action/21246/>).

The countries of the North say that they are concerned over poverty in Africa. However, their oil companies continue to destroy the sources of food of millions of Africans whose lives depend on the health of the mangroves. More than receiving surplus food, what mangrove communities really need is for these companies to leave and before they go, to restore the mangroves they have destroyed. In this way their true wealth will return and the hunger they suffer from today will be left behind. .

Compilation of documents sent by Abdoulaye Diame, WAAME, e-mail: abdoulayediame@yahoo.com: «La mangrove, la sécheresse et le sacré» Abdoulaye Diame; «Article sur la situation des forêts au Cameroun», Moudingo E. Jean Hude, Cameroon Wildlife Conservation Society; «Sénégal. Lutte contre la dégradation des écosystèmes de mangroves»; “Conservation and management of mangrove forests in Kenya”, Joseph K. S. Lang’at and James G. Kairo, Mangrove Reforestation Programme; “One wrong step too many: FAO supports unsustainable shrimp farming and food insecurity investments in Nigeria”, Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD); « Biodiversité du Parc marin des mangroves en République démocratique du Congo: faune ichtyologique», Réseau africain pour la conservation de la mangrove (RAM), y “Niger Delta’s Mangrove Communities Threatened By Continued Gas Flaring”, MAP Alert Action.

[index](#)

Bangladesh: losing mangroves to shrimp farming leads to food loss and environmental insecurity

Industrial shrimp farming has been a major cause of mangrove wetlands destruction in Bangladesh –some 45%- and has led to biodiversity loss as well as to the loss of livelihood for millions of people who have depended on mangroves.

In the 90’s, the World Bank promoted and supported shrimp aquaculture as part of the drive for export-led policies. An article by A. K. M Enayet Kabir (1) assesses that “In the name of earning foreign exchange, many people are now associated with shrimp cultivation, which has covered a vast area of the coastal districts of Bangladesh since the 1980s.”

And he wonders: “We have hardly assessed as to where the valuable forex goes and who are the beneficiaries? The forex earned at the cost of local people's health and adverse effects on our Sunderbans is not benefiting the people.”

In a country which has the highest level of malnutrition in the Asia-Pacific region affecting 70-80% of children with a very high infant mortality rate, subsistence fishing could be a resource to alleviate this problem. However, shrimp cultivation has polluted the environment in and around the Sunderbans, undermining the very basis of shrimp culture by disturbing the natural nutrient cycle.

Loss of mangroves have also led to loss of protection regarding cyclones. A study by J. Martinez-Alier et al.(2) comments that “Television reports of flooding and loss of life in Bangladesh are not uncommon in Northern homes, but the connection to destroyed mangroves, abandoned shrimp farms, and decreased coastal defence against cyclones is not often made. Deforestation has left the area highly vulnerable to sea water intrusion when cyclones strike. Thus, the lack of food security because of the enclosure of the mangroves in order to produce a luxury export product such as shrimps is compounded by environmental insecurity.”

A research carried out by India's University of Delhi and Duke University in the United States studied storm-related deaths from the massive cyclone that in 1999 wiped out entire villages in the eastern coast of India. The study (3) found that villages shielded from the storm surge by mangrove forests experienced significantly fewer deaths than did less-protected villages.

The research findings were made public in April this year, just a month before cyclone Aila killed some 90 people in the south-western districts of Bangladesh and flooded about 40 per cent of the shrimp farms in the Khulna region in May 26. (4)

Tragically, replacing mangroves for cash earning shrimp production has now led people into bankruptcy and left them with no protection nor food.

(1) “Ecological impact has to be assessed”, A. K. M Enayet Kabir,
http://www.ecologyasia.com/news-archives/2002/may-02/independent-bangladesh_280502.htm

(2) “The Environmentalism of the Poor”, J. Martinez-Alier, UK,
<http://www.wrm.org.uy/actors/WSSD/alier.pdf>

(3) “Mangrove Forests Save Lives In Storms, Study Of 1999 Super Cyclone Finds”, ScienceDaily, April 21, 2009,
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/04/090414172924.htm>

(4) “Blow to shrimp cultivation”, The New Nation,
<http://nation.ittefaq.com/issues/2009/06/22/news0737.htm>

[index](#)

COMMUNITIES AND FORESTS

Brazil: New legislation allows agribusiness to advance in the Amazon

On 9 July 2008 the Brazilian Senate adopted a provision by the Executive known as a

“provisional measure,” subject to the subsequent approval of the Legislative. The provision has been harshly questioned by environmentalists and various political and social sectors in Brazil, including the former Minister of the Environment, Senator Marina Silva.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the dictatorial governments of the time granted incentives for the occupation of the Amazon, benefiting large landowners who gained strength in the region and illegally took over public land. This situation led to disputes with the traditional peoples of the area.

Last June, in a third attempt, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva promulgated the “provisional measure” that became a law (Conversion 09 (PLV) Bill), that had been adopted by the Chamber of Deputies and subsequently by the Senate. With this law the situation of the occupiers of over 67 million hectares of state land in the Legal Amazon – that covers a total of 508.8 million hectares in the states of Acre, Amapá, Amazonas, Mato Grosso, Pará, Rondônia, Roraima and Tocantins and part of Maranhão- is now regularized.

Up until now, the concession of public lands – by the National Institute for Settlement and Agrarian Reform – to private individuals for rural use and without requirements such as calls for bids, was limited to 500 hectare units. The legal measure increases this limit to 1,500 hectares. This implies that regularization will leave 72% of the land under the control of 7% of the occupants, who may farm it or put cattle on it and after three years, may put it up for sale.

The complaints allege that the measure does not distinguish between peasant occupiers: usually families that have established themselves to work the land (“posseiros”) and speculators – both those trying to obtain the greatest number of plots to subsequently sell them at a greater value and those who have taken over the land by means of violence, usually large landowners (“grileiros”) who have created a real mafia and who concoct documents and deeds in areas that are marked by disputes and deforestation.

According to Marina Silva, the measure “will mean a process of land privatization, of legalization of areas that have been illegally appropriated [Grilagem: Illegal drawing up of deeds and appropriation of land] with serious damage to the Plan of Action against Deforestation in the Amazon.”

Ariovaldo Umbelino, Professor of Agrarian Geography at the University of Sao Paulo explains: “Another part of this ingenious operation to legalize the appropriation of land of the National Institute for Settlement and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) in the Legal Amazon, has been to take advantage of the increase in deforestation in that region to carry out a new real estate registry. This will enable the ‘grileiros’ who had not yet registered the public land that they had appropriated up to December 2004, to do so now and thus qualify to ‘buy’ land that they had taken over without the need to bid. Furthermore, the notice in the INCRA website on the new registry, absurdly recognizes already the ‘grileiros’ as ‘posseiros’: ‘The owners or ‘posseiros’ of areas greater than four fiscal modules [...] shall have to submit to INCRA, between 3 March and 2 April, documents proving their ownership or peaceful possession of the land, ground plans and descriptive specifications with the correct geographical location of the rural real

estate' (<http://www.incra.gov.br>). It should be noted that the plots of peasant farmer families in the Amazon cover less than 100 hectares each and that the changes foreseen in the new legislation are intended to regularize the appropriation of public lands that corrupt INCRA officials illegally 'sold' to agro-bandits." (1)

According to Greenpeace's Nilo D'Ávila, "The trend is for the larger and better property to remain in the hands of real estate speculators and of people who do not live on that land. The door for real estate speculation in the Amazon is totally open. And the result of the sum of these actions that the government is promoting will be equivalent to deforestation."(2)

It is worth noting that the pressure from social and environmental organizations managed to make some improvements to the original measure. Presidente Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva introduced a veto on article 7 of the provision that allowed land to be transferred to legal entities or individuals that did not inhabit the region and who managed their lands using a "front." However criticism pointed out that this may not be of significance considering that the speculators do not usually act as legal entities.

The agrarian reform that through mobilization by the people had laboriously been introduced into the constitution, is being "blocked," according to the words of the coordinator of the Landless Workers Movement (MST - Movimiento de Trabajadores Sin Tierra), Joao Stedile. "Land that should be used for the agrarian reform is being allocated to foreign companies to produce eucalyptus, soybean, cattle and agrofuel," (3) he denounced, mentioning among others the major companies engaged in eucalyptus plantation and pulp production, such as Aracruz, Veracel y Suzano.

According to MST data, "In 1992, there were a little over 19 thousand large landowners holding over 2 thousand hectares which, as a whole, amounted to 121 million hectares. In 2003, the number of these properties had risen to 32 thousand (almost double) and the total area amounted to 132 million hectares. In 11 years, 12 million hectares have been taken over by the large landowners." (4)

These are times when a dangerous world process of land appropriation by agribusiness is taking place, as an answer to the financial and food crisis. Governments and companies have launched themselves into the search for farm lands in Asia and Africa, but they are also reaching Latin America. China and Saudi Arabia are interested in acquiring farm land in Brazil. According to INCRA there are four million hectares in Brazil registered in the name of foreigners and over half of this area is located in the Amazon.

At the present time, the General Attorney of the Republic has filed an appeal of unconstitutionality before the Brazilian Supreme Federal Court against the new law for the regularization of invaded lands in the Amazon region, considering that it violates article 188 of the Constitution which provides that "the purpose of public and fiscal land shall be compatible with the agricultural policy and the national agrarian reform plan." Furthermore, it affirms in its article 191 that "those who, not owning rural or urban real estate, possess as their own uninterruptedly for five years and without opposition an area of land in a rural zone, of no more than fifty hectares, making it productive through their work or that of their families, and having on it their dwelling, shall acquire ownership."

The last word has not been said. Resistance continues.

(1) “A farra da legalização da grilagem”, 03/04/2008, Ariovaldo Umbelino, <http://www.mst.org.br/mst/pagina.php?cd=5162>

(2) “MP da Grilagem beneficia poucos posseiros com muita terra na Amazônia”, 06/07/2009, Brasil de fato, <http://www.brasildefato.com.br/v01/agencia/nacional/mp-da-grilagem-beneficia-poucos-posseiros-com-muita-terra-na-amazonia/>

(3) “MST denounces that the Agrarian Reform is “blocked” in Brazil,” AMARC-ALC, <http://www.agenciapulsar.org/nota.php?id=13954>

(4) “MST assesses the Agrarian Reform in the country and criticises agribusiness,” 14/04/09, Adital, <http://www.adital.com.br/site/noticia.asp?lang=ES&cod=38204>

[index](#)

Dominican Republic: The people say “no” to the cement factory at Los Haitises!

The “Los Haitises National Park” located between the Provinces of Samana, Monte Plata and Hato Mayor, has been classed as a protected area since 1976. Its distinctive features as a subtropical rainforest make it not only an important sanctuary for the country’s native flora and fauna but also the most important expression of Caribbean mangroves.

Its importance, however, is not only due to its qualities as an ecosystem hosting extraordinary and unique biodiversity and cultural resources – making it the habitat of numerous endangered endemic species– but also because of its very special interconnected groundwater system, that makes it an irreplaceable water reserve. This location is where the Payabo, Los Cocos and Naranjo rivers converge and it is also the outlet for the Yuna River.

Another important aspect of Los Haitises is its cave system where pictographs and petroglyphs created by the island’s distant ancestors have been found, making it a world heritage area. For many people visiting it, the experience is that of a trip to pre-history.

But at present all these values are endangered as the area is to be turned over to produce cement. At the location where the area’s main aquifers converge, a cement factory is being built with the sponsorship of the Dominican Mining Consortium. The project will not only ruin the Los Haitises area, but also affect the health of the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages by contaminating the rivers Comate, Yabacao, Cambita, Almirante, Casuí, Boyá, Socoa, Sabita and the underground Brujuela, which supply over 50% of the water used in the country.

This is why the inhabitants of the area have voiced their total rejection of the project, considering that it will have negative impacts on agricultural production, that provides them with their main sources of food. The United Communities’ Small Farmers Movement (MCCU - Movimiento Campesino de la Comunidades Unidas) has started judicial proceedings demanding the annulment of the licence enabling the cement

factory to be installed. This implies suspending work until the judicial proceedings have finalized.

However, on 30 June most of the inhabitants of Gonzalo that had been leading and participating in the struggle for the preservation of Los Haitises and against the installation of the cement factory received notices that they were to be evicted from the plots they occupy within the following 10 days, alleging that these plots belong to the State Sugar Council (CEA - Consejo Estatal del Azúcar). According to the small farmers, these lands were transferred to them and many farmers possess CEA loan documents while others initiated a process over 8 years ago to obtain the deeds from the institution. They consider the evictions to be a clear reprisal for having participated actively in the struggle against the cement factory.

In addition to the small farmers' movement there is a youth movement that, with guitars in hand, one day in May camped in the Gonzalo Municipal District, Province of Monte Plata. Since then they have attracted the attention of the country and of the cybernetic world. They refute the myth that youth "don't care about anything." The Gonzalo camp has become an effervescent call for action, a cry of concern, a statement of hope that much of the game is yet to be played. With guitars and ciphered codes, contemporary youth movements practice new forms of social mobilization, with different strategies to face the excesses of those who, in the name of progress lead the country back into the past.

The Gonzalo camp has become a place of resistance, of encounters and unstructured articulation to reject the cement factory of those who, believing themselves to be the owners of the country, relentlessly want to install it in Los Haitises.

From the Camp for Solidarity with Los Haitises, they are demanding the annulment of the concession allowing the Dominican Mining Consortium to build the cement factory in the vicinity of Los Haitises and that the land granted to the Consortium be returned to the small farmers who have been evicted.

Article based on material sent by Alexander Mundaray, a member of the MCCU small farmers' movement and information available at the webpage Ecolucha <http://www.ecolucha.org/> and Clave Digital <http://clavedigital.com.do/>

[index](#)

India: Dehradun Declaration of forest people

On 10-12 June 2009, adivasis, forest workers and other forest dwellers from 16 states of India held a conference on 'Resisting commodification of Forests; Establishing community governance over forest resources'. After discussing and debating they united in a strong message called the 'Dehradun Declaration 2009'.

Forests and forest people, and the whole world, are immersed in a crisis which is more than that: *"This is no ordinary crisis. Not merely, a climate crisis - or in your words this magnified self-created monster of a financial crisis. We believe it's a crisis of Civilizations."* On one side the civilisation that "rests on ideas of power, territories,

boundaries, profit, exploitation and oppression". The civilisation that tries "to own everything, including Mother Nature. This is what drives your civilisation. You need this world of oppression and exploitation; to survive and feel good." On the other side, the civilisation of the rest of the people. Those who don't see the world in terms of pure merchandise. People like the forest people of the world who state: "We, the forest people of the world living in the woods, surviving on the fruits and crops, farming on the jhoom(1) land, re-cultivating the forest land, roaming around with our herds have occupied this land since ages. We announce loudly, in unity and solidarity that let there be no doubt on the future: we are the forests, and the forests are us and our existence is mutually dependent. The crisis faced by our forests and environment today will only intensify without us."

It is a fundamental clash: "If you want to include us in your world by 'civilising' us, we will happily choose to remain uncivilised. Call us savages, we do not care! We have learnt amidst these trees, this water, this air, and other forest beings- a life of freedom, of being without boundaries, and yet never forgetting the boundaries of nature."

The Dehradun Declaration becomes the voice of the Indian forest people who speak loud: "We, therefore, reject your unnatural law, your civilization of tyranny and cruelty. What freedom? We see no freedom in being driven out of our forests, separated from water, land, fields, trees, air, and friendly animals, to the ecosystem to which we belong. What freedom, which doesn't forget to chain its own brothers and sisters. False Freedom! We see no truth in a society that remains haunted by the prosperity of a few capitalists, whilst, never forgetting to oppress the workers, adivasis, dalits, women and poor of the world! We reject you!"

And they warn: "There is a climate crisis around and no amount of free trade, capital or technology will eliminate the roots of this crisis. You forget that the crises has emanated from the way your society is structured - an edifice based on an unending desire for resources and a way of life that sees nature as an object of exploitation and extraction. Fools! You are doomed to bear the brunt and suffer the pains of your actions, but we ask you - Why must we suffer? You have intruded in our lifestyle, in the rhythm of Mother Earth. You have corrupted the environs by your vehicles, industries, arms, and development and your actions have created a crisis in our homes. You have sinned against the essence of our being, and amidst our rage and tears, we reject the basis of your being: a thought - of mistrust, of control, of vicious self-interest, of injustice, and blame.

How dare you blame us for a climate crisis? It is the product of un-natural practices, and it has devastated our lives. How could you cut our trees unthinkingly? Temperature is increasing, rainfall is diminishing and the forests are burning- consuming themselves in pain. Now you want us out of our habitats in the name of conserving our forests! You kill, unsparingly, relish in "terrorizing" busts of tigers, decorating your mantelpiece - all pointing to your moral sensibility and - yet you have the audacity to tell us to leave the forests so that you can protect the Tigers! What law do you know? Who are you to teach what is legal? You are illegal - contradicting the very law of nature - of coexistence. You have no solutions - you only destroy.

You may not care of our times, but, spare a thought for the coming generations, their inheritance. Do you wish to present to them a world of chaos and destruction? Are you so

blinded by your greed? At least, now - in this crisis - we need to unite, all civilizations, and forest people of the world, to resolve the crisis, to restore our relationship with nature.

Today, at Dehradun, we call for and welcome the solidarity and harmony of all world's forest people; workers, adivasis and fellow travellers, on this journey to realizing the fulfilment of our existence, in communion with our forests. We warn your civilization that we are a people, united in struggle against the structure of capitalism - of greed, thievery and profiteering. We warn the nations of the world, that you must not forget to honour our existence, or else from deep within our hearts - we shout out loud: NO MORE SILENCE! We will rise from the ashes of your devastating fire! To resist your order, undeterred by your traps. We will rise - a united forest people - together, in strength and solidarity, to challenge the very fabric of your civilization, and become one with nature, again!

Arise! Forest People of the World Unite! Zindabad! National Forum of Forest Peoples and Forest Workers, India”

(1) A patch of arable land in the forest.

The full declaration is available at: <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/India/Dehradun.html>

[index](#)

COMMUNITIES AND TREE MONOCULTURES

Brazil: FSC greenwashing of eucalyptus plantations is strongly questioned and a warning made vis-à-vis their advance in Piauí

One year ago, Judson Barros, Coordinator of the Piauí Environmental Network stated that “the south of Piauí has been destroyed, its rivers and streams poisoned to satisfy the voraciousness of some companies that seek easy profit through the destruction of ecosystems, with their coal, soybean, timber, castor-oil and eucalyptus activities. The wealth produced remains in the hands of a few people, while most of the population continues living but not enjoying the assets offered for free by Mother Nature. Family farming hardly exists any more. None of the towns where soybeans, castor plants, timber or coal are present have shown changes in their social profiles. Rural workers die from poison and the State pretends not to notice that the workforce is based on slave labour, biodiversity is implacably destroyed, the waters of the Cerrado (Brazilian savannah) are disappearing and deserts are being created.” (1)

To make matters even worse, the pulp and paper company Suzano has appeared on the scene. It is encroaching on the Atlantic Forest, on the banks of the River Paranaíba and on the Cerrado, where it has received authorization to establish monoculture eucalyptus plantations covering 160,000 hectares. Of course, the company has also brought with it many promises of jobs: between 12 and 30 thousand indirect jobs and 3,500 direct ones...”

“This discourse was used when Bunge Foods and Brasil Ecodiesel settled in Piauí”,

reflected Barros, adding: "Today the situation is cruel, no jobs are being created, the factory has been closed down as the government discovered that cars can't run on castor-oil." But only after having put a lot of public money into the business. The Governor gave 100,000 hectares of public land to this company, worth approximately 50 million Brazilian Reais. Is the destruction of the environment justifiable because it is going to generate some jobs? They try to instil in the people that because of these jobs, society must passively accept the destruction of entire forests in the neighbourhood of Teresina [the capital of Piauí], completely eliminating the fauna and flora, contributing to increase the heat and lack of rain in the region and transforming the Paranaíba into a gutter, worse than it is already. The water supply in the capital in terms of quality and availability will also be seriously impaired."

The examples of what is going to happen are plentiful, in spite of the trite promises. As stated in an open letter sent to the FSC national and international offices and those of the certifying company IMAFLORA disseminated on 10 July (2), "For a decade now the Green Desert Network has been warning Brazilian and international society about the profound and negative impacts of monoculture eucalyptus plantations on society, on the economy and on the environment in the extreme south of Bahia, the north of Espírito Santo and in Minas Gerais, denouncing the lack of sustainability of chemical and industrial eucalyptus plantations. Furthermore, the Green Desert Network has mobilized a significant segment of regional society, giving rise to a series of public hearings in municipal, state and federal parliaments and also to legal proceedings, even brought before international courts, in which the State and monoculture plantations are made responsible for the violation of economic, social, cultural and environmental human rights."

Social, peasant, landless and traditional peoples' movements, workers' unions, churches, non-governmental organizations, technicians, academics and individuals participating in the Alert against the Green Desert Network have denounced that the agrochemicals used in eucalyptus plantations "since the seventies and until today have polluted the soil and the water in a macro-region, their lands have overlapped traditional ethnic territories, their mechanization has generated large-scale unemployment, their industrial pollution has affected an enormous territory, their trucks and facilities have disrupted rural highways and communities, their outsourcing and degradation of labour have mutilated and poisoned workers, while disability pensions have not been conquered. Their management of monoculture plantations has generated food insecurity and the concentration of land in a territory showing high rural exodus, a lack of Agrarian Reform and public policies and with no deeds for traditional territories."

In spite of all this, Suzano's monoculture eucalyptus plantations have been granted FSC certification, through the Imaflorea certifying company. The Alert against the Green Desert Network states in its press release that the FSC seal "certifies and greenwashes as sustainable this social and environmental tragedy instead of contributing to reduce social, economic and environmental inequality in the region."

The issue of certification of harmful monoculture tree plantations is something that has already been suffered by the communities that resist them. Veracel was certified in the extreme south of Bahia, Plantar was certified in Minas Gerais and now, Suzano has

been certified. As the Networks states in its open letter “Unfortunately FSC’s principle 10 continues to go against the flow in the environmental debate, granting certification of uniform tree plantations as sustainable forests and misrepresenting the message of the green label to the consumers from the North.”

It is precisely these consumers who should know that “For us, the Green Desert Network, the FSC for the Suzano Company has been a greenwashing of a company that would not even be financially sustainable if it were not for the enormous and advantageous public moneys invested by the State, under the form of direct investment, credit or tax concessions. The Suzano Company’s green seal should be revised immediately and withdrawn, enabling the granting of deeds to traditional territories, peasant farming and the agrarian reform, promoting agro-ecology, food sovereignty and the recovery of the climate and the Atlantic Forest in the region.”

They finally conclude that “devastating companies deserve FSC and FSC deserves the devastating companies! Those who do not deserve FSC are the peasant, landless communities, the *Quilombolas* (slave descendents), the indigenous and riparian peoples and the neighbouring peoples, hit by these plantations. Neither do the final consumers in the North, interested in revising their excessive consumption, deserve FSC.

All the false promises that Suzano is now making in Piauí – such as the 12 to 30 thousand indirect jobs and the 3,500 direct ones – have been made before in Espírito Santo and Bahia, but now it is known that their eucalyptus plantations not only did not generate jobs but resulted in massive unemployment. As the Green Desert Network stated in its letter of 10 July “the socio-environmental disputes throbbing in the north of Espírito Santo and in the extreme south of Bahia, arising from the installation of thousands of hectares of monoculture plantations, are about to occur in the states of Maranhão and Piauí”. Considering that Suzano’s plantations in Piauí are still at the environmental impact assessment stage, it is essential for the local inhabitants to know that all the company’s promises are false and that they are still on time to avoid the social and environmental disaster that will be caused by the establishment of these plantations.

(1) “O papelão da Suzano no Piauí”, Judson Barros – Coordinator of the “Rede Ambiental do Piauí”, http://www.portaldomeioambiente.org.br/pma/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=717

(2) Press Release by the Alert against the Green Desert Network, 10 July 2009

[index](#)

Laos: Chinese company Sun Paper plans eucalyptus monocultures

A Chinese company called Shandong Sun Paper is planning to establish 100,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations in Savannakhet province in central Laos. Of this area, the government has granted a 50 year land concession to Sun Paper for 30,000 hectares. The remaining 70,000 hectares is to be planted by farmers on their own land, under contract to Sun Paper. The US\$15 million project is planned to start in early 2010.

“We also plan to build wood pulp mills in Xepon or Phin district,” Sun Paper's Deputy General Manager, Ying Guang Dong, told the Vientiane Times. Sun Paper plans to invest US\$300-500 million to build a pulp mill with a capacity of 300,000 tonnes. “Then we will invest about US\$1.8 billion for the second phase,” Ying said.

Ying claims that the pulp mill will employ 10,000 people. If true, it would be either the largest or the most labour intensive pulp mill on the planet. Sun Paper is China's largest private paper company, with an annual capacity of more than 2.2 million tonnes of paper and paperboard. It employs a total of about 7,000 people. Botnia's US\$1.2 billion pulp mill in Uruguay, which has a capacity of one million tonnes of pulp a year, employs a grand total of 300 people.

While Sun Paper exaggerates the number of people it will employ, it is at least honest about how much money it will provide to local communities: US\$200,000. This money is supposed to build schools and health dispensaries, and to construct and maintain roads. There are 44 villages in the concession area. That works out at about US\$4,500 per village, which may be better than nothing, but not by much.

Sun Paper does not even plan to employ local people in its plantations. “Currently, we aim to use labor from Vietnam to cut the wood in the plantations,” Ying told the forestry industry information company RISI in February 2009.

Before the pulp mill is built, the wood will be exported via the port of Da Nang in Vietnam. In March 2009, Sun Paper announced that it would invest US\$15 million in a wood chip mill in Vietnam to process the wood from Laos. From Vietnam, the wood chips will be shipped to Sun Paper's plant in Yanzhou city in China. Part of Sun Paper's operations in Yanzhou are run as a joint venture with International Paper.

One problem that Sun Paper will run into is that there is not sufficient land available for large scale concessions in Savannakhet province. In October 2007, the Vientiane Times reported that “Savannakhet authorities are facing difficulties in supplying land for foreign investors, who have requested thousands of hectares over the past years for their projects.” An Indian company, Birla Lao Pulp & Plantations Company Limited, is reported to be running into serious difficulties finding enough land for its proposed 50,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations in Savannakhet province.

Sun Paper has carried out environmental impact studies and claims it will involve people living in the concession area in the decision-making and monitoring process. It claims it is going to “employ” 50,000 people as tree growers. But there is a history of this sort of project in Laos, the most notorious being the Asian Development Bank's Industrial Tree Plantation Project. In December 2005, the ADB's Operations Evaluation Department concluded that the ADB project had “failed to improve the socioeconomic conditions of intended beneficiaries, as people were driven further into poverty by having to repay loans that financed failed plantations.” Put another way, the farmers that Sun Paper hopes will grow its trees for them need their land to grow food on.

In 2007, the Lao government suspended the issuance of new land concessions “after learning such arrangements were negatively affecting local communities”, as the Vientiane Times put it. In May 2009, the government announced a Prime Minister's decree on state land leases and concessions, which once again allows large scale

land concessions. Yet little has changed in Savannakhet. No new land has appeared in the province. So the questions remain. Where will Sun Paper find the land? Who will benefit? And why on earth did the Lao government agree to this project?

By Chris Lang, <http://chrislang.org>

[index](#)

Mexico: Oil palm business at the expense of the poor

Since 2004 the Mexican government has been promoting the expansion of oil palm plantations. Presently there are 9 oil extraction plants in four states, 6 of which are located in Chiapas, the main palm oil producing state in Mexico. During 2009, the government of the state of Chiapas will reach a total of 44 thousand hectares planted with oil palm trees and its governor has announced that by 2012 the intention is to reach a total of 100 thousand hectares, with a future projection reaching over 900 thousand hectares.

What is clear is that palm oil production has been possible thanks to strong government support, making it a profitable business. Direct support to farm operators for productive reconversion has been given in addition to trade promotion programmes and fostering of exports, advice and training etc. The European Union, also interested in oil palm plantations for agrofuel has been promoting the plantations in Chiapas since 2005, and more specifically, in the Lacandona Forest buffer zone and the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve buffer zone on the frontier with Guatemala.

Both the Federal and Chiapas governments affirm that the palm trees are being planted in areas that had previously been deforested by cattle raising and other activities that are no longer profitable. However, many activities are no longer “profitable” for the entrepreneurial market because the government’s strategy to gain land for oil palm has been to decrease support to other sectors in order to give them over to these plantations. The government has abandoned rural areas and small farmers and, within the rationale of the Free Trade Agreements, it has focussed on the agribusiness market and not on food sovereignty. Small farmers, peasants and indigenous people are forgotten and very often obliged to enter these new dynamics and provide both cheap labour and their lands, thus subsidizing agribusiness profits. The oil palm business would not be profitable without the major subsidies granted by the government, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), with their funding of programmes such as Procampo, intended for investment in oil palm plantations.

As denounced by the International Declaration against the ‘Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil’ (RSPO) (http://www.wrm.org.uy/temas/Agrocombustibles/Declaracion_Internacional_RSPO.html) monoculture oil palm plantations “replace tropical forests and other ecosystems, leading to serious deforestation together with loss of biodiversity, flooding, the worsening of droughts, soil erosion, pollution of water courses and the apparition of

pests due to a breakdown in the ecological balance and to changes in food chains”. Additionally, monoculture oil palm plantations “also endanger the conservation of water, soil, flora and fauna. Forest degradation diminishes their climatic functions and their disappearance affects humanity as a whole.”

The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Forests identified as causes of deforestation and forest degradation governmental policies to replace forests with industrial tree plantations – such as oil palm – in addition to the advance of the agricultural frontier, pushed forward by monoculture tree plantations. Nevertheless, in the Montes Azules region, where deforestation has reached 80 percent of the 220 thousand hectares of forest, the government is talking of creating “protection belts through high impact production projects, such as oil palm,” among others.

Oil palm plantations have not improved the living conditions of the population but worsened them. One of the serious problems that they cause is related to water. Faced with no supply of drinking water, the over 11 thousand people who live in the municipality of Marques de Comillas in the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve mainly consume water from wells from groundwater sources. Oil palm plantations, great consumers of water, jeopardize the availability of water in the region. They also use large quantities of agrochemicals: insecticides such as endosulphan and other chemicals, including rodenticides that end up in the water courses. Hurricanes make the problem more serious when they cause the rivers to overflow, as is the case in the Lacandona forest with the Lacantun River, which contaminates the local farmers’ subsistence crops and scatters agrochemicals in an area of rich biodiversity.

According to studies by the Chiapas Produce Foundation, the income of “an average ejido farmer with seven hectares and an average production of 19 tons per hectare” is the equivalent of 274 pesos (21 dollars) per day, that is to say, less than the Mexican minimum wage per hectare. Within the annual investment to establish one hectare of palm trees, the technological package costs the farmer roughly 6,500 pesos (that is 17 pesos or 1.3 dollars per day): it includes sowing (preparation of the land, purchase of the seedlings, weed control, clearing of paths, application of weed-killers, manual plantation), fertilization, pest control, pruning, equipment and services. One third of the cost is allocated to weed-killers, fertilizers and rodenticides. Furthermore, for the first three years there is no production or harvest and only as from the eighth year can 100 percent be harvested.

The farmers working for an oil palm processing company are usually trapped in this situation. The Extraction Plant of the Palma Tica de Mexico company offered seedlings to the farmers, on credit, under the condition that they sold all their harvest to the company. In many cases the farmers have neither the training nor the appropriate tools to harvest; in other cases they do not have the training or the technical advice for overall cultivation, control and management of the plantations. Very often the indigenous or peasant farmers selling to oil processing companies are not protected by purchase contracts or agreements, or insurance. This implies that if the company does not want to buy their production, they are not obliged to do so. There are no price differences in relation to the quality of the product being delivered.

In 2008, a group of workers from the AGROIMSA oil plant in the municipality of Mapastepec were repressed by public forces and an advisor and several leaders

were arrested, some of them remaining in prison. They were also laid off which led to a labour dispute.

Moreover, oil palm plantations exclude other types of production. In the municipality of Villa Comaltitlan, one of the main cattle raising areas together with other coastal municipalities, it has been confirmed that the drop in cattle raising “was not due to negligence on the part of the farmers, but rather to the arrival of other crops that cannot be combined with cattle-raising. For example banana and oil palm plantations have taken up space, implying a drop in cattle-raising.” In Chiapas monoculture palm plantations have had disastrous impacts on honey production, on which thousands of bee-keepers depend. The crisis has become more serious as the plantations increase. They also cause other damage: in the municipality of Acapetahua, Mr. Manuel Jimenez stated that “the main culprits causing the destruction of roads and highways are the heavy goods transporters, as they cause damage with their trucks loaded with stones, cane and oil palm fruit.” At the Mapastepec municipal seat, “along the ditch made to introduce drainage the land subsided (...) in the 15 September neighbourhood and now traffic is obstructed and great clouds of dust arise, affecting the health of the neighbours.” Gabriel Colon and Elio Ventura, who live in this neighbourhood, have demanded that the mayor’s office mend the road that has a lot of traffic, mainly trucks loaded with oil palm fruit going to the oil processing plant.

There is no doubt that great business deals are made at the expense of the poor, on their lands and territories and at the cost of humanity’s common assets. Enough of monoculture plantations!

Summarized and adapted from: “La palma africana en México. Los monocultivos desastrosos”, Gustavo Castro Soto, Otros Mundos, AC/Amigos de la Tierra México, 12 June 2009. The complete article may be accessed at:

<http://www.wrm.org.uy/paises/Mexico.html#info>

[index](#)

Statement on Tree Plantations from participants at recent Forest Movement Europe meeting

The Forest Movement Europe (FME) is an informal network of more than 45 NGOs from 12 European countries. It is a loose movement with no formal membership and without a formal secretariat that has been working on forest issues for nearly ten years.

It was mainly due to the activities of the groups that participated in the movement that the tropical rainforest campaigns in Europe took off, imports of tropical timber into several European countries declined and the struggle of forest peoples, e.g. in Sarawak, Malaysia and the Amazon were headline stories.

The FME meets once a year and in this year’s meeting, June 2009, the following Statement on Tree Plantations was issued, supported by many NGOs and some individuals:

“The undersigned participants of the Forest Movement Europe wish to express our concern about the spread of fast wood tree plantations in the South, which are being implemented with support from some European governments and the direct involvement of a number of corporations based in Europe.

In spite of the fact that those plantations are resulting in a large number of severe social and environmental impacts, they continue to be promoted as ‘planted forests’ as a means of hiding their true destructive nature.

Local communities impacted by eucalyptus, pine and other fast wood monocultures state that ‘plantations are not forests’. All the available evidence proves that local communities are right, because while forests provide a wide range of benefits to both people and the environment, plantations result in:

- the appropriation of forest land that provides for peoples’ livelihoods
- the destruction of forests and other equally valuable ecosystems
- the depletion of water resources
- the impoverishment of soils
- the disappearance of plant and animal biodiversity.

We therefore call on European governments to stop all types of support to the spread of fast wood plantations and to adopt a clear definition of forests, which excludes large scale monoculture tree plantations.”

The document with signatures is available at:

http://www.wrm.org.uy/plantations/information/Statement_Tree_Plantations_2009.html

[index](#)

GE trees: when scientists mutate into publicists

The Convention on Biological Diversity’s (CBD) mandate is to protect the world’s biodiversity. Strong campaigning from an increasing number of NGOs and IPOs raised the threats posed to forest biodiversity by genetically engineered trees. The issue was discussed and addressed by the Convention, that agreed about the need to take a precautionary approach regarding the release of GE trees into the environment.

The CBD’s stance has been welcomed by organizations concerned about the fate of the world’s forests and its peoples but is being strongly opposed by those who stand to gain from the GE tree business.

A recent article from four pro-GE tree scientists illustrates how unscientific some people can be when trying to put their case forward. The article, produced by Stephen Strauss, Huimin Tan, Wout Boerjan and Roger Sedjo is titled “Strangled at birth? Forest biotech and the Convention on Biological Diversity”.

The article is quite long and detailed, which shows the importance that the pro-GE tree

lobby gives to the CBD's stance on the issue. At the same time, the article shows how far these scientists are willing to go in order to defend their positions. What follows are a few examples to illustrate this, but we encourage people involved in the issue to analyze the article in full at http://www.globaljusticeecology.org/stopgetrees_news.php?ID=294

The title tends to make people believe that GE tree have been “Strangled at birth” by the CBD. However, the authors forget to say that GE tree research is being carried out in at least 20 countries and that field trials already exist in at least 11 countries (see details in http://www.wrm.org.uy/subjects/GMTrees/Information_sheets.html). What the CBD is doing is simply to apply the precautionary approach to avoid the possibility of irreversible impacts on biodiversity resulting from those GE trees. That is to say, that the CBD is complying with its mandate.

The CBD's position is in fact strengthened by what the article says. Strauss et al provide the arguments for doing so.

They say that “Perhaps the most credible science-based concerns about GM trees relate to their potential for wide dispersal of seeds and pollen when they are allowed to flower.” They add that “There is wide agreement from scientists that until very strong containment genes are developed, socially accepted and their efficiency verified in the field, **some level of gene dispersal** —either from pollen, seeds or vegetative propagules—is **certain in most forestry species**. Moreover, the distances over which dispersal can occur are large, on the order of kilometers or more.”[emphasis added] To make matters worse, they add that “The limited level of domestication of most tree species contributes to this concern, as propagules are generally fit enough to survive in wild or feral environments.”

The above should be enough for most scientists to desist in carrying out such a dangerous activity, but not for Strauss et al.

Among the many arguments they use to justify their research and open air field trials, the following is a good example of their unscientific approach. They say that “**very few** GM species are under commercial development that are sexually compatible with wild forests, **or will be used in or very near to wild forests**, and thus it will be **extremely rare** that transgenes could introgress into wild tree genomes **to a significant degree**, and thus become common in wild ecosystems.” [emphasis added]

For people who try to prove all their points by emphasizing that they are scientists —as these four do throughout the article- the above paragraph proves exactly the opposite: a totally unscientific approach.

1) The difference between hypotheses and fact is blurred and the former are shown as synonymous to the latter. Evidence:

- science cannot know if GM species “will be used in or very near to wild forests”, because this will be defined by companies and governments
- science cannot know if “it will be extremely rare that transgenes could introgress into wild tree genomes to a significant degree” or not
- there is no quantification regarding the meaning of “extremely rare” or “to a significant

degree”

2) There is confusion regarding species and forests

- GM species can be sexually compatible or incompatible with natural tree species but not with “wild forests”
- The use of the undefined expression “wild forests” might mean that their only concern refers to contamination of species living in “primary” forest and not to the species themselves

3) Existing evidence is hidden

- the most common genus being genetically engineered is poplar (several species). However, the article fails to mention that there is already evidence of GE contamination of “wild” (native) poplars in China.
- The article fails to mention that the two main other trees being genetically manipulated are pine (which grows in many “wild” forests around the world) and eucalyptus (native to Australia and grown in a very large number of countries in the world). In both cases, seed and pollen dispersal would be inevitable and no scientist can prove that eucalyptus forests in Australia would be safe from GE contamination
- They say that “The area planted with GM forest [sic] trees is likely to remain relatively small; forest plantations [sic] comprise only 5% of the world's forest cover”. They fail to mention that the area of plantations, according to FAO, covers a total of 270 million hectares! To describe such an area as “relatively small” is unscientific, to say the least.

Similar examples abound throughout the article, but perhaps one of the most enlightening is the following: “ ... there may be potential benefits for wild tree species from some kinds of GM trees; for example, a wild tree might benefit by acquiring a trait enhancing stress resistance and thus acquire resilience in the face of new forms of biotic or abiotic stresses, perhaps brought on by rapid climate change”.

The above of course acknowledges the fact that GE tree contamination will occur, if GE trees are released. At the same time it is difficult to understand -unless the authors have a PhD in futurology- how science can determine if “wild” trees may benefit or not from acquiring new traits or if the species with “enhanced resistance” will not endanger forest biodiversity precisely because of the new trait.

In sum, the article ends up proving that NGO arguments for calling on a ban on GE trees are scientifically correct and helps to strengthen the CBD's call for a precautionary approach.

By Ricardo Carrere

(1) Strangled at birth? Forest biotech and the Convention on Biological Diversity
Nature Biotechnology 27, 519 - 527 (2009). Steven H. Strauss, Huimin Tan, Wout Boerjan & Roger Sedjo

[index](#)
