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Hiding deforestation: new trends and resistances



Amazon River, Santarem, Brazil.

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Hiding deforestation: new trends and resistances

Our Viewpoint

Green discourses and deforestation



Misiones, Argentina.

While forest-dependent communities around the world still confront the expanding threats and destruction of their territories, more pledges, agreements, projects and programs are being launched and implemented in the name of 'addressing deforestation and climate change'. Multinational corporations, governments, multilateral banks, United Nations (UN) agencies, conservation NGOs and their financial backers keep affirming that they –the same actors that in fact drive the direct and underlying causes of deforestation- can be 'the solution.'

This bulletin compiles seven articles from around the world that show how deforestation processes are more often than not hidden under 'green' discourses and flashy propaganda. The authors also remind us that forest communities - despite being criminalized and often conveniently blamed for deforestation and evicted from their territories - keep resisting this destruction and the false solutions imposed on them while being the stewardships of their forests, cultures and lives.

An article from **Indonesia** alerts that while the devastating impacts of the climate crisis are severely impacting thousands of fishing communities, an offset mechanism called 'Blue Carbon', promoted by the United Nations as a 'solution' to the crisis, is transforming coastal territories into tradable assets. While damage to mangroves result from hotels development, industrial shrimp farms, expansion of oil palm plantations and massive mining, Blue Carbon aims to greenwash the increasing and devastating destruction of these and other polluting actors.

From **Mozambique**, an article outlines the dangers of the growing conservation trust funds, such as the case of BIOFUND. This fund was created to finance the protected areas system

of Mozambique, with support from the World Bank, international cooperation agencies and conservation NGOs. It aims to capture large contributions, including revenues generated from biodiversity offset projects in the country, and speculate with that money in financial markets.

Another article shows how despite the pledges from the government of **Malaysia** to maintain a 50 per cent forest cover in the country, at least 3.4 million hectares of mostly forested areas have been designated for the development of monoculture plantations since the 1990s, including timber and oil palm plantations. The 50 per cent ambition appears to rest on statistics that consider monoculture plantations as part of the national 'forest cover'.

Another article exposes how the **Green Climate Fund**, which has the aim to support countries in the global South to respond to climate change, recently approved for the first time a so-called REDD+ payment based on 'results' in the Brazilian Amazon. It also warns that the International Finance Corporation, the World Bank agency financing companies, is preparing to request funding for subsidize private sector REDD+ projects that are bound to cause conflict with forest-dependent communities.

From **India**, an article highlights new attempts of the government, in hand with vested companies and conservationist NGOs, to capture forests and evict forest-dependant communities. After many attempts, a recent proposal for amendments to the colonial Indian Forest Act would de facto put an end to the Forest Rights Act, a fundamental law that recognizes many rights of *Adivasis* (indigenous peoples) and other traditional forest dwelling communities. The amendments include that all possible uses of forests by communities (unless permitted by forest officers) would be criminalized and creates a new legal category called 'production forests' which makes room for large-scale privatization.

The case of the Wimbí community in **Ecuador** highlights the harmful effects of oil palm plantations expansion in hand with land trafficking and timber plantations. Besides the forest and soil destruction in the area, community members' loss of their crops places more pressure on them to seek salaried work elsewhere—including at the palm company that evicted them. But the residents of Wimbí have not stopped fighting for their land and livelihoods.

Finally, the last article highlights the horrific violence and abuses carried out by the **conservation model** that seeks to "preserve nature without people." Reports from the organizations Rainforest Foundation UK and BuzzFeed News have uncovered the cruelty perpetuated towards indigenous peoples living within and around Protected Areas supported by **WWF**. This is definitely a deep problem of human rights abuses and colonial interventions in tropical forests. Conservation organisations are too often at the centre of these serious abuses.

Indonesia: Fate of Fishing Villages in the Climate Crisis and the Failure of ‘Blue Carbon’

Sugeng Haryanto, a 57-year-old fisherman from Jepara coast, Central Java, pushes his boat to the dock every week. For the last month, Sugeng could not go out to fish. High waves and strong winds were the main reason for Sugeng to keep his boat and fishing gear tied up in the harbor. He did not want to risk losing his life like some of his friends.

These days, fishing communities in Indonesia face climate-related problems that are difficult to understand. **From a reduced fishing period to natural disasters that occur every year in a growing number of coastal territories in Indonesia.**

Those territories include mangrove forests, seagrass meadows and intertidal saltmarshes. Due to these difficulties, fishers in Indonesia can only go to the sea for less than 150 days within a year. This means that the other 215 days they must refrain from any fishing activities.



Indonesian fishing communities are experiencing firsthand the harmful effects of the climate crisis. Throughout the last five years, at least 737 coastal villages suffered landslides, 2 651 were flooded, 307 were hit by flash floods, 1 484 were hit by tidal waves and 1 422 were impacted by tornadoes. In addition, 790 were hit by earthquakes, 6 were hit by a tsunami, and 54 coastal villages were affected by a volcano eruption. (1)

The fate of millions of fishers lies at the negotiation table every year during the UN climate talks. Unfortunately, these climate discussions have lost orientation as they fail to address the real and underlying problems of this crisis.

Now, not only the fishing boats are moored for longer and longer periods of time but **the fate of fishers' livelihoods and control over their territories is tied to the threat of this multidimensional crisis and the so-called solutions that accompany the crisis.**

When Carbon turns Blue

One of the UN reactions to this multidimensional crisis is a scheme called **Blue Carbon.** **Also known as Blue REDD,** it was introduced by UNEP and other UN agencies in 2009. Through many international meetings, UNEP asserted the importance of bringing **a new carbon offset scheme between emissions and carbon absorption in coastal territories.** According to its proponents, coastal territories rich in plants, such as mangrove forests, seagrass meadows and intertidal saltmarshes, take up and store large amounts of carbon dioxide. (2)

A 2009 publication from several UN agencies titled “Blue Carbon: the Role of Healthy Oceans in Binding Carbon,” affirms that the protection, management, and restoration of marine ecosystems would increase their capacity to absorb carbon to almost 10 per cent of the required global emission reductions. (3)

The Blue Carbon research conducted by Indonesia's Marine and Fisheries Research and Development Agency (Balitbang KP) states that seagrass beds have the potential to absorb around 4.88 tons of carbon per hectare per year. In total, seagrass meadows in Indonesia could store 16.11 million tons of carbon per year. And, in total, mangroves in Indonesia could store 122.22 million tons of carbon per year.

To this day, Blue Carbon is promoted continuously through international meetings as well as in the yearly UN Climate Summits. During the Our Ocean Conference held in Bali in 2018, **the Indonesian government encouraged marine conservation and Blue Carbon projects, aiming to include 20 million hectares by 2020 into such schemes.** By 2018, the area established for marine conservation reached 19.14 million hectares.

The Indonesian organization People's Coalition for Fisheries Justice (KIARA) highlights that **marine conservation has so far not been implemented as a bottom-up activity - originating from the knowledge and wisdom of the Indonesian maritime communities - but as a top-down activity, forced by the state. As a result, people in coastal communities become the victims of what from their perspective amounts to eco-fascist projects.**

Swapping Carbon? Planting Mangrove Trees

The Livelihoods Fund is supported by private companies. It invests since 2011 in offset projects around the world linked to the investors' supply chains. Three of these projects are in mangrove territories: one in Indonesia, one in India and one in Senegal. On their website, **Livelihoods Fund says that in Indonesia, until today, 18 million trees have been planted. In India, they claim that 16 million trees have been planted and in Senegal, 79 million trees.** (4)

Projects last for 20 years and **investors (private companies) will receive carbon credits from the mangrove trees planted by coastal communities.** Based on this, **these industries can continue their business as usual** (and emissions as usual) while claiming to have reduced their carbon emissions.

The investors of Livelihoods Fund are: agribusiness Danone; French multinational Schneider Electric; French bank group Credit Agricole; French luxury goods manufacturer Hermès International; French travel group Voyageurs du Monde; French postal service company La Poste Group; tire manufacturer Michelin; fragrance and flavors company Firmenich; French public financial institution Caisse des dépôts et consignations and German software and technology company SAP.

Repeating the Failures of REDD+

Blue Carbon was invented as a version of the REDD+ scheme (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) **for coastal and mangrove territories.** For almost 15 years, REDD+ has been promoted as a solution to deforestation in tropical forests. But deforestation continues. Unfortunately, REDD+ is a business-oriented scheme that gives rise to a variety of problems. Like elsewhere, **REDD+ projects in Indonesia have caused conflicts.**

One example is a REDD+ project in Henda village, Borneo Indonesia, organized by UNDP and funded by the Norwegian government. Research showed how this project has actually caused horizontal conflicts within the community. The conflict was caused by a lack of transparency and discriminatory management of REDD+ funds at the village level. One of the reasons for the conflict lay in the empowerment program linked to the REDD+ project did not involve all in the community which inevitably created jealousy among villagers. (4)

Another REDD+ project in the village of Mantangai Hulu also caused vertical conflicts with donors and the government. This REDD+ project was organized by the Kalimantan Forests and Climate Partnership (KFCP) and funded by the Australian government. The Mantangai Hulu village community granted their 120,000 hectares of forest to KFCP for a REDD+ pilot project. **When it became obvious that the project was more beneficial to the local facilitators, government and the donors, the village community organized resistance to the project.** The distribution of REDD+ funds was also not transparent and did not involve community participation. (5)

The failure of REDD+ to halt deforestation while causing many conflicts within and with communities should be an important lesson for world leaders to be more careful in responding to the climate crisis. At the same time, maritime communities in Indonesia are calling for action to address the climate crisis. However, **the proposed policies tend to be a 'patchwork', offering false solutions with emission reduction targets that are insufficient and dependent on offsets.**

Negotiations and possible solutions for facing the climate crisis need to return to the knowledge and needs of communities. **No more patchy solutions such as Blue Carbon or alike, which in fact put more burden on the State finance, increasing foreign debt.** The amount of debt also opens the doors for more corruption. These offset mechanisms, proposed by the World Bank, were always based on loans. However, on 2018, Indonesia's Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries refused the loan mechanism. But unfortunately, the implemented mechanism still relies into foreign investment and carbon trading, which creates the same problems as with the mechanism proposed by the World Bank.

Commodification of a Crisis

KIARA sees **the Blue Carbon initiative as a pretext to change the coastal and marine territories into tradable assets.** There are at least three reasons why the Blue Carbon Initiative is not the solution to the climate crisis.

First, the accounting of the carbon stored in the Blue Carbon projects is done in such a way that **it reaps profit for some individuals or a particular group but excludes many in the community who are affected by Blue Carbon projects because they can no longer use the mangroves or seagrass meadows like they did before.** Meanwhile, the existence and role of coastal communities in maintaining coastal ecosystems intact through using mangroves to harvest medicinal herbs, cosmetic ingredients, and as a source of food, are neglected.

Second, it is argued that one of the causes of the climate crisis is the destruction of mangroves due to poor management. **In Indonesia, damage to mangroves and coastal ecosystems results from patterns of extractive and exploitative developments such as coastal reclamation for hotels, apartments, or paid recreation areas, industrial shrimp**

farms, expansion of oil palm plantations on the coast and massive coastal mining. KIARA's Center for Data and Information notes that throughout 2018, there were at least 42 coastal areas in Indonesia that were reclaimed for such purposes.

Third, Blue Carbon is **unable to change the behavior of companies responsible for large amounts of carbon emissions** as it is merely a carbon offset.

Coastal territories have unique characteristics and are very vulnerable. Coasts are a transition area between land and sea. Pressure, both natural and human, is very evident. **The Blue Carbon initiative opens opportunities for elites to pawn and capture benefits in the name of climate change.**

Meanwhile, due to its vulnerability, coastal territories and communities will continue to be harmed by onshore developments, the worsening effects of climate change as well as the false solutions promoted at the UN climate negotiations.

Crucial decisions that will influence just how hard fishing communities across Indonesia will be hit by the multidimensional climate crisis will have to be taken in the next decade. Instead of the government building a powerful maritime vision and glorifying the archipelago's past, it would be wise to first focus on reducing the effects of the climate crisis on artisanal fishers while **saving the Indonesian coastal and maritime world from the entrapment of carbon trading.**

Don't sell our sea in the name of carbon trading!
Our Sea, Our Identity, We Are the Sea!

Susan Herawati

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(1) Indonesia Center for Data and Information, 2019

(2) For more info on Blue Carbon, see WRM, "Blue Carbon" and "Blue REDD": Transforming coastal ecosystems into merchandise, 2014, https://wrm.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Blue_Carbon_and_Blue_REDD.pdf

(3) Access the publication: <http://www.grida.no/publications/145>.

(4) See their website at: <http://www.livelihoods.eu/portfolio/>

(5) Anggraeni, Nur. (2013). *Melestarikan Tradisi, Meningkatkan Kesejahteraan: Pandangan Tentang Dampak Program REDD+ di Kalimantan Tengah*. Master Thesis UGM

(6) Firmaherera, Vice Admira. (2013). *Konflik Pengelolaan REDD+: Studi Kasus di Desa Mantangai Hulu, Kecamatan Mantangai, Kabupaten Kapuas, Propinsi Kalimantan Tengah*. Master Thesis UGM

and Hidayah, Nur Putri. (2013). *Pemberdayaan Kelompok Masyarakat Desa Kalumpang Kedatangan mantangai dalam Mendukung Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation Plus (REDD+)*. Master Thesis UGM.

Mozambique: The Threat of Biodiversity “Offsets”



Analyses of Hurricane Idai’s recent passage through Mozambique indicate a strong relationship between this devastating hurricane and extreme weather events. It is a dire warning that the problem of global warming must be resolved urgently. Unfortunately, that is not expected to happen. **Governments of the most industrialized countries, pressured by their multinational corporations and financial institutions—such as the World Bank—are promoting so-called “offset mechanisms” in response to the ongoing destruction and environmental contamination.**

One of the best-known offset mechanisms is REDD, which stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (1). Instead of reducing the carbon dioxide emissions from the burning of oil, gas and coal—which is the main cause of global warming—this mechanism allows polluting industries to “offset” these emissions from their own countries in another place, for example in Mozambique.

The government of Mozambique is committed to the REDD mechanism. **By adopting a definition of forests that accepts any area with trees, the government is including monoculture tree plantations in its REDD strategy.** This is evident, for example, in the “Forest Agenda 2035.” In this document, published at the beginning of 2019, the government states that it intends to plant one million hectares of trees by 2035 (2). In addition, it seeks to attract foreign financing for REDD in forested areas. It recently signed a US \$50-million agreement with the World Bank, with the objective of reducing deforestation, and with it, carbon dioxide emissions from forests (3).

Biodiversity Offsets

Another, lesser-known offset mechanism, but one that has been proposed for Mozambique, is offsets for biodiversity loss. Its proponents claim that in the case of companies that destroy biodiversity, such as through open-pit mining, a biodiversity offset project elsewhere could “compensate” for that destruction, by maintaining or improving biodiversity in the other place. According to its proponents, this mechanism could ensure that there is no “net” loss of biodiversity.

The most utilized way to apply this mechanism has been through individual projects. For example, the British-Australian mining company, Rio Tinto, is extracting ilmenite in

Madagascar to export to Canada. To compensate for the destruction of biodiversity caused at the mine, the company installed a biodiversity offset project in another forest with similar characteristics, 50 kilometers north of the extraction site. The company claims that this forest is threatened, and that its offset project—in collaboration with the NGO, Birdlife International—could save it. According to the company, a tree plantation project would even “increase” biodiversity (4).

However, the strategy planned for Mozambique seems to focus on another kind of offset for biodiversity loss. A 2016 document known as the “Mozambique Biodiversity Offsets Roadmap,” prepared by World Bank consultants in collaboration with BIOFUND in Mozambique, proposes a national system to implement biodiversity offsets, “minimizing environmental damages caused by rapid economic development.” The proposal aims to **mitigate “the adverse impacts of large-scale development projects,”—as the companies that cause the destruction would contribute to the maintenance and even expansion of Mozambique’s protected areas system.** They also state that individual projects—such as the example of Rio Tinto in Madagascar cited above—would be part of the proposal. The system of protected areas in Mozambique covers 26% of the national territory, yet receives only 9% of the resources that would be needed for their maintenance.

What is BIOFUND?

BIOFUND is a conservation trust fund that was created in 2011. These kinds of funds now exist in over 80 countries, and they have “mobilized close to US 800 million dollars for conservation,” from governments and financial institutions interested in financing protected areas through such funds. Although it claims that it would not supersede the responsibilities of the State, **BIOFUND is a public-private partnership that was created to assume the role of financing the protected areas system of Mozambique, with support from the World Bank, bilateral international cooperation agencies and conservation NGOs.** The aforementioned report by World Bank consultants boasts that BIOFUND is an “independent, private, non-profit” organization that is “well-positioned to receive, manage and disburse funds for offsets over time” (5).

The main problem that BIOFUND points out in financing conservation in Mozambique is the dependence on external resources. In 2014, 81% of conservation was financed with external sources. BIOFUND’s solution was to create **a fund that captures relatively large contributions, and speculate with that money in financial markets to increase the size of the fund. The profits generated would be invested in environmental conservation.**

Evidently, **the biodiversity offset mechanism appears to be another possible source of resource capture,** as long as there are biodiversity-destroying projects that have been proposed and implemented within Mozambique. In fact, Mozambique is experiencing a phase of economic growth that is higher than the global average, stemming from projects and industries that cause major destruction to biodiversity—such as mining, oil and gas extraction and hydroelectric power plants.

The Role of the World Bank

The World Bank has had a key role in the propagation of offset mechanisms, such as REDD and biodiversity offsets. In its criteria from 2012, the International Finance Corporation—the Bank’s arm that finances private companies—included the option for companies to destroy

critical biodiverse areas on the condition that they present a plan explaining how they intend to “offset” that destruction.

In 2015, the Bank produced a report for Liberia similar to its Mozambique report. In the report, it shows how Liberia can use money from the mining sector—which has a strong presence in the country—to finance “protected areas” (6). This is what they call an “opportunity” for the conservation sector. What is not mentioned is that wherever these companies set up, areas rich in biodiversity will be destroyed. Nor is it mentioned that mining will also destroy the livelihoods of local communities, just as Brazilian company Vale’s mine in Tete province in Mozambique has done. Nor is there discussion about how with offset projects, an even larger number of communities will face various problems.

What Are the Threats of Biodiversity Offsets?

The first threat is the logic of the mechanism in and of itself, which depends on destruction in order to pledge “offset” resources in other places—thus creating the need for the narrative that these other places are under some threat. The consultants who develop this narrative generally blame communities as being the main threat. This is a simplistic view of reality, and a perverse one for communities that depend on forests. It means that **the more destruction there is, with all its well-known disastrous consequences, the more resources BIOFUND will receive**. The mechanism ends up creating an incentive for environmental destruction in Mozambique to continue and worsen. One may ask: How can a “conservation” fund, such as BIOFUND, feed off of the destruction of the biodiversity that it claims to conserve? Should it not help stop the destruction in the first place?

It must also be stressed that **it is impossible to “offset” the biodiversity of one place in another place**—since every area, place and site has specific and unique biodiversity, which is particularly important for communities, and should be valued and conserved. The biodiversity of a place cannot be subjected to a simplistic view that uses mere economic calculations and incomprehensible equations to claim an “offset” or “net” losses.

The mechanism poses another threat, both to the communities and to the areas and forests upon which they depend. In the case of the Rio Tinto project in Madagascar, the communities living in the “offset” area were subjected to severe restrictions. They were labeled as a threat to the conservation of biodiversity in that place, despite the fact that they have been living there and safeguarding the forest for generations. **In the case of Mozambique, when the World Bank states that resources from destructive companies can also be used to expand protected areas, this means that communities living in these areas run a serious risk of expulsion**. This would generate more situations of conflict and environmental injustice in the country, and land grabbing would double: in the areas of destruction and in the offset areas.

It is important to highlight that large corporations support the creation of mechanisms like biodiversity offsets, as they are a way for corporations to continue destroying and profiting for a longer time. **Despite the promises in World Bank documents that this mechanism—through BIOFUND—could benefit communities, experience shows that they will be much more harmed by losing lands and forests upon which they depend**. Combatting deforestation and conserving biodiversity is clearly necessary and urgent. But it cannot be done by establishing destruction as an “opportunity” to conserve. This is pure opportunism,

which perpetuates the profound social and environmental injustices of a devastating economic model that is ever-deepening in the country.

ADECRU (Acção Académica para o desenvolvimento das comunidades rurais, Moçambique), JÁ! (Justiça Ambiental, Moçambique) and WRM

(1) Industries can buy pollution certificates, the so-called carbon credits, which give them the right to pollute. Through the REDD mechanism, a country with tropical forests is paid to conserve a forest that is supposedly under threat, or to establish a tree plantation to absorb and therefore store carbon from the atmosphere. Through this action, the ongoing industrial pollution would be “offset.” But it is a false solution. Forests or plantations are temporary carbon sinks, while industries that purchase the right to pollute continually add more carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. In this way, over the course of time, REDD exacerbates global warming. Furthermore, REDD projects and tree plantation projects—such as pine or eucalyptus trees—cause many other problems for local communities, who lose access to forests and fertile lands. To make matters worse, communities are generally pointed to as being mainly responsible for deforestation and environmental degradation.

(2) Agenda Florestal 2035 e Programa Nacional de Florestas. Mitader, Febrero 2019, Documento para divulgación y consulta pública.

http://www.dinaf.gov.mz/pirf_mreddplus/attachments/article/183/DOC_AGENDA%202035%20e%20Programa%20nacional%20de%20florestas.pdf

(3) The World Bank. Mozambique and Democratic Republic of Congo Sign Landmark Deals with World Bank to Cut Carbon Emissions and Reduce Deforestation, February 2019.

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/02/12/mozambique-and-democratic-republic-of-congo-sign-landmark-deals-with-world-bank-to-cut-carbon-emissions-and-reduce-deforestation>

(4) WRM Bulletin 223, Rio Tinto’s Biodiversity Offset in Madagascar: How Culture and Religion are Used to Enforce Restrictions, 2016, <https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section2/rio-tintos-biodiversity-offset-in-madagascar-how-culture-and-religion-are-used-to-enforce-restrictions/>

(5) BioFund, <http://www.biofund.org.mz/>

(6) WRM Bulletin 213, World Bank paving the way for a national biodiversity offset strategy in Liberia, 2015, <https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/world-bank-paving-the-way-for-a-national-biodiversity-offset-strategy-in-liberia/>

Indigenous territories in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo, threatened by monoculture plantations



Indigenous communities blockade. Ph: Save the Mulu Rainforest

Despite their proximity to the Gunung Mulu National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Area, the indigenous Penan community of Kampung Batu Bungan in Mulu, the state of Sarawak, reported in January 2019 that **a road construction for an oil palm plantation is encroaching upon their customary territory**. The community set up a blockade against Radiant Lagoon operations, a Malaysian palm oil company, and filed a police report in Marudi to halt the encroachment. Reportedly, road construction workers simply dismantled the blockade.

In addition to the road, the company is already preparing seedling of oil palms. At the nursery site, Penan and Berawan villagers from the Mulu region found on March 2019 **dozens of kilograms of Antracol, a pesticide whose use has been banned by the European Union for fears it may damage the unborn child**. This was found in Radiant Lagoon's greenhouse for oil palm seedlings. (1)

Government pledges versus government actions

In September 2018, the federal Minister of Plantation Industries announced that the new government would not allow more expansion of oil palm plantations in the country in its efforts to ensure that Malaysia maintains a 50 per cent forest cover. By December, Sarawak also announced that it would be adopting this commitment. However, many questions remain as to what this pledge actually means.

Between the late 1990s and mid-2000s, the Sarawak Forests Department has issued a total of 43 timber tree plantation licences, covering an area of 2.8 million hectares under its Licence for Planted Forests (LPF) system.

These LPF licences are located on both, the reserved production forest as well as the non-reserved state-land forests. The reserved production forests are forests that have been legally declared to serve timber production purposes "sustainably" in perpetuity and have been placed under the full authority of the Forests Department. Non-reserved state-land forests are the remaining forests that do not receive such a "protection" and can be legally converted for other land use activities and are still partially under the authority of the

Department of Land and Survey. Therefore, logging in a permanent forest estate follows more stringent guidelines and management plans, in comparison to non-reserved state-land forests.

Some of the LPF licences allow companies to use no more than 20 per cent of their concession areas for the cultivation of oil palm. **Plantable areas are estimated to be at 1.3 million hectares for timber trees and 285,520 hectares for oil palm.** As of December 2013, 325,314 and 146,578 hectares have been planted with timber and oil palm trees, respectively. (2) Despite the lack of more recent official figures, the organization Sahabat Alam Malaysia, SAM (Friends of the Earth Malaysia) believes that **most available licences in Sarawak have already been handed out by now. However, not all areas have been developed, as these are large concession areas.**

In addition, since the late 1990s, the Sarawak Department of Land and Survey also has been issuing plantation permits on land that is not under the authority of the Forests Department. Such land in turn may be put under the authority of agencies such as the Land Custody and Development Authority (LCDA) and the Sarawak Land Development Board (SLDB). They may be developed either by the private or the public sector, or through some form of private and public partnerships, with or without the involvement of native communities. Based on the data on the websites of various state and federal agencies, SAM (Friends of the Earth Malaysia) has estimated that today, the land targeted for plantations outside of the LPF system may stand around 800,000 hectares. (3) However, no complete data is available on the total size of the licences that have actually been issued and to what extent they involve the cultivation of oil palm. Meanwhile, the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) shows that in 2017, oil palm cultivation areas in Sarawak has reached 1.5 million hectares. (4)

It is important to note that **oil palm plantations are not the only cause of conflicts and forest destruction in Malaysia. Monoculture tree plantations for timber extraction and hydroelectric dams are two other causes** of conflicts and deforestation. The development of monoculture tree plantations for timber extraction and oil palm trees is in fact allowed on reserved production forests. In Sarawak, such forest conversions also take place on non-reserved state-land forests.

Therefore from the late 1990s onwards, **more than 3 million hectares in Sarawak have been licensed to monoculture plantations** – considering the LPF licences, those issued by the Land and Survey Department and the federal agency for oil palm development statistics-, where **the total area specified for timber tree plantations is larger than that for oil palm. This is a quarter of Sarawak's total land.** Additionally, SAM's research has shown that **the same trend also takes place in Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah.** (5) In Peninsular Malaysia, by 2017, 399,861 hectares of its reserved production forests have been set aside for timber tree plantations. (6) In Sabah, by 2017, 451,239 hectares of its reserved production forests have been set aside for tree plantation and another 77,134 hectares are under oil palm cultivation. (7) Altogether in Malaysia, the areas targeted for new monoculture plantation development involving forest conversions is at least 3.7 million hectares, larger than the size of the state of Pahang. **Many of these areas also fall within indigenous customary territories.**

The central problems are thus deforestation and the violations of indigenous peoples' rights and their customary land rights, as the case in Batu Bungan shows. Oil palm is only but one of the commodities of choice.

Therefore, the ambition of the new federal government to maintain a 50 per cent national forest cover appears to rest on **statistics that consider monoculture plantations, along with the adjacent fragments of forests, as ‘forest cover’**. This would be in line with the misleading UN’s FAO definition of forests.

According to the Kampung Batu Bungan community, considerable destruction to the forest, river and other resources has already taken place as a result of the road building alone. Even though the community had first heard of the arrival of the oil palm plantation in 2018, they never consented to the project. The absence of any meaningful consultation process also means that people are left without crucial information. They did not receive documents identifying the project proponents, its agents, the boundary and size of the project operations and other important details. They also wonder about the profits that are derived from the trees felled for the road construction. **The community demands that the encroachment onto their customary territory is immediately halted.**

This situation is not an isolated case in Sarawak, or even Malaysia. It is not just about oil palm plantations. As the Report of the National Inquiry into the Land Rights of Indigenous Peoples published by the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) in 2013 stated, **the violations of the indigenous customary land rights in the country is a systemic issue and the lack of their tenure security must first be addressed.**

This, in line with the federal and state governments’ commitment to halt deforestation, puts into the spotlight the **need to review and revoke large monoculture licences that affect indigenous customary territories and reserved production forests and non-reserved state-land forests, regardless of the commodity involved.**

Further, the federal cabinet needs to provide an update on the status of the SUHAKAM national inquiry report. It is time for the federal and state governments to take heed of the recommendations of the 2013 SUHAKAM report and protect the rights of indigenous peoples in the country. It is also imperative that the federal and state governments respect the call of the Penan community of Kampung Batu Bungan. Their proximity to the internationally renowned Gunung Mulu National Park must also be considered.

While state agencies have designated at least 3.4 million hectares of mostly forested areas for the development of monoculture plantations since the 1990s, including for oil palm plantations, many of these plantations have not been fully developed yet. **There is still opportunity to halt the destruction of many indigenous territories and recognize their rights to their customary land. This would protect a sizeable area of actual natural forest cover, including the forests that provide a home to the Kampung Batu Bungan in Mulu, Sarawak.**

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(1) Bruno Manser Fonds, Save the Mulu Rainforest, <https://savemulu.org/en/news/banned-pesticide-found-in-mulu-oil-palm-plantation>

(2) Official Website of Forest Department Sarawak, Forest Plantation Development in Sarawak, <https://forestry.sarawak.gov.my/page-0-362-1129-Forest-Plantation-Development-in-Sarawak.html> For further information, see “Malaysian palm oil – Green gold or green wash”, Friends of the Earth

International and other member groups, 2008, <https://www.foei.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/04-foei-sarawak-full-report-lr.pdf>

(3) Land Custody and Development Authority (PELITA), Plantation development, <http://www.pelita.gov.my/business/1> and Sarawak Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (SALCRA), Oil Palm, <http://www.salcra.gov.my/en/about-us/core-business/plantation/oil-palm.html>, Sarawak Plantation Berhad (SPB), Location of operation units, <http://www.spbgroup.com.my/locality-map.htm>

(4) Ministry of Primary Industries, Palm Oil, <https://www.mpi.gov.my/index.php/en/statistic-on-commodity/dataset/711->

(5) SAM, Urgent call to halt further forest conversions, 2016, https://www.foe-malaysia.org/urgent_call_to_halt_further_forest_conversions

(6) Annual Report 2017, Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia, https://www.forestry.gov.my/images/Laporan_Tahunan/2017/Laporan_Tahunan_2017.pdf

(7) Annual Report 2017, Forestry Department of Sabah, <https://www.forest.sabah.gov.my/ar2017/ar-2017.pdf>

Misguided funding: Green Climate Fund support for REDD+



Amazon River, Santarem, Brazil.

The Green Climate Fund was set up by governments with the aim to support countries in the global South to respond to climate change. **In February 2019, the Fund approved a payment of US\$ 96 million to the government of Brazil** which had requested payment via the UN Development Programme (UNDP), **for greenhouse gas emissions not released into the atmosphere in the years 2014 and 2015**. This was achieved, the UNDP proposal argues, by the government of Brazil having taken measures to reduce deforestation. **It was the first time the Green Climate Fund Board approved a funding request for a so-called 'results-based' payment for REDD+**. (1) The details of the decision (see below) demonstrate why a large proportion of the payment is likely to be granted for emission reductions that exist on paper only.

The Green Climate Fund has announced it will provide more funding to REDD+ activities in the near future. One particularly objectionable funding request comes from the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the branch of the World Bank that finances private sector companies. **The IFC is requesting subsidies so that companies can set up new REDD+**

projects or sell their carbon credits from already existing REDD+ ones – projects which are known to have caused controversy and conflict.

What is the Green Climate Fund?

The Green Climate Fund was created in 2010 by the 194 countries that are part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). (2) It is one of the possibilities through which governments (mostly but not exclusively from the global North) can transfer money they committed under the UN Paris Agreement on climate change. The Fund does not implement projects itself. Instead, **it allocates funding to project proposals submitted by multilateral institutions like UNDP, the World Bank's IFC, as well as national or regional agencies, including development banks or private banks and NGOs such as WWF or Conservation International.** By the end of 2018, the Green Climate Fund had cleared 75 national, regional and international entities from the public and private sector so they are allowed to submit funding proposals to the Fund.

When they set up the Green Climate Fund, 43 national governments committed to making an initial US\$ 10.3 billion available to the Fund. By the end of 2018, a total of US\$ 4.6 billion had been allocated to 93 funding proposals covering activities in 96 countries. Of the funds that remain from the initial government contributions, US\$ 600 million are set aside for funding of projects already in the Green Climate Fund project pipeline. This includes REDD+ projects like the one awarded to the government of Brazil in February 2019 or an IFC proposal expected to be presented to the Green Climate Fund Board in July 2019. The IFC proposal would include the trading of REDD+ credits from private sector REDD+ projects.

Millions of dollars for 'results' in reducing deforestation even though deforestation is rising

In February 2019, at its 22nd meeting, the Green Climate Fund Board approved the first request for so-called 'results-based REDD+ payments'. On behalf of the government of Brazil, the development agency UNDP requested payment for "results achieved through REDD+ in the Brazilian Amazon biome in 2014 and 2015". **The Board agreed to pay US\$ 96 million for 18.82 million tonnes of carbon dioxide which the government of Brazil claims were not released into the atmosphere as a result of government action to reduce deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon** during those two years. In the project documents, UNDP and the government of Brazil announce that a second request for payment will be submitted "in future", for results in reducing emissions from deforestation supposedly achieved during 2016 and 2017. (3)

The Brazilian government and UNDP explain that they are requesting payment only for a small portion of the 2.39 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions that according to their calculations have not been released as a result of reduced deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon between 2014 and 2018.

But is this calculation credible? Not really. Much of the Green Climate Fund payment will therefore be for carbon dioxide emissions that either still were released into the atmosphere or for savings that exist on paper only. Here is why: **The UNDP payment request calculates the volume of emissions that the government of Brazil claims have been reduced through REDD+ in 2014 and 2015 by comparing recorded deforestation in 2014 (5.012km²) and 2015 (6.207 km²) to the average deforestation between 1996 and 2010**

(16.64 km²). This average includes the peak years of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon, and therefore the average is very high.

This average is called the "forest reference emission level" in the UN climate negotiation jargon. When the government of Brazil submits this forest reference level to the UN (it will be used to check if the government of Brazil will achieve the emission reductions it promised under the UN Paris Agreement in 2015), the hectare figures are converted to tonnes of carbon dioxide. (4) This is also the unit used in the UNDP payment request to the Green Climate Fund: For every tonne of carbon dioxide that the Green Climate Fund accepts as a "REDD+ result", it pays five dollars. **Because the average deforestation between 1996 and 2010 was so high (and was reduced before REDD+ existed!), actual deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon today could more than double yet the government of Brazil would still be able to claim payment for 'results' in reducing deforestation!**

Clearly, something must be wrong if a Fund set up to finance action to help avoid climate chaos is paying US\$ 96 million to a government that has announced to be cutting back even further action to reduce deforestation – in a region where deforestation has already started to rise again. (5) **The Green Climate Fund also does not request a commitment that the carbon for which payment has been received, remains locked up in the forest after payment.** With deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon rising, the US\$ 96 million payment may merely delay the release of emissions from deforestation in by a few years.

Without commitment to maintaining the carbon 'locked' and without any information about how much carbon will be 'saved' as a result of the activities that will be funded by the payment from the Green Climate Fund, the payment is nonetheless marketed as 'results-based.' The government of Norway, a major contributor to the Green Climate Fund and the largest funder of REDD+, announced it would double its financial contribution to the Green Climate Fund shortly after the Board approved the REDD+ funding for Brazil. (6)

Luring peasant farmers into a Payment for Environmental Services Programme while large-scale deforestation remains unaddressed

Some argue that even if the calculations are not so accurate, the money will at least ensure much-needed funding for peasant farmers and indigenous peoples. In reality, the money will be used to lure peasant farmers into a six-year Payment for Environmental Services Programme (called Floresta+). **This Programme addresses neither the underlying tenure insecurity nor the lack of government policy support for peasant farming. Instead, it pushes further the intensification of farming practises by paying farmers if they use less than the legally allowed 20 per cent of their land. By contrast, large-scale deforestation as a result of corporate destruction for cattle ranching or soy or eucalyptus monocultures will continue unrestricted.**

Scaling up subsidy for private sector REDD+ projects in conflict with communities?

The Board of the Green Climate Fund will have to decide on an even more climate-damaging REDD+ funding request at its meeting in July 2019. **The International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank agency financing the (corporate) private sector is preparing to request funding for a 'Multi-Country Forest Bonds Programme', "to avoid deforestation in multiple forest basins by leveraging the investment potential from capital markets. Funding**

REDD+ activities and providing price support for carbon credits will demonstrate a results-based financing model." (7)

There are many reasons for the Green Climate Fund Board to reject this proposal, among them:

- The IFC already launched in 2017 a 'Forest Bonds' initiative offering investors ('bond holders') to choose between receiving REDD+ credits from the controversial Kasigau Corridor REDD+ project in Kenya and receiving the annual interest payment in cash. Reportedly, not a single Forest Bonds 'bond holder' has wanted to receive their annual interest payment in the form of REDD+ credits.
- The money which the IFC raises by selling 'Forest Bonds' is *not* invested in forest protection. In fact, investments funded with this money may even cause deforestation. The only funding going to 'forests' (in the form of a subsidy to private sector REDD+ project speculators) is the purchasing contract that will be signed with REDD+ project owners who will provide the REDD+ credits that bond holders can choose instead of the annual interest payment in cash. These private sector REDD+ projects have shown to be particularly controversial. (8)
- Green Climate Fund money will be used so the IFC (or a company on behalf of the IFC) will be compensated if it has to sell (or give) the REDD+ carbon credits for less money than they bought them for. There is no climate benefit in such a subsidy (which the IFC calls "Liquidity Facility" in its proposal). In the project proposal, the IFC proposes to pay the standard five dollars per REDD+ credit; but as mentioned above, bond holders of the 2017 Forest Bond have preferred to receive their annual cash payments instead of receiving REDD+ credits at the price of five dollars per credit.
- Even though REDD+ was claimed to be a mechanism to attract private sector funding to forest protection, the private sector has not shown much interest in investing in REDD+ projects - which is a good sign considering that almost all existing REDD+ projects have caused conflict with communities and none can guarantee the contribution to climate protection they claim to be providing. The IFC proposal is to provide cheap loans and help with marketing of the REDD+ credits to private sector investors potentially interested in setting up new REDD+ projects. As mentioned before, such private sector REDD+ projects are bound to be bad news for forest communities and the climate.
- In addition, private sector REDD+ projects will complicate governments' accounting of carbon emissions: If a private sector investor sells carbon credits from a REDD+ project to IFC or someone else, the government of the country in which the REDD+ project is happening, will have to take out the tonnes of carbon sold as REDD+ credits from its national carbon accounting balance sheet. Those are supposed to keep track of the national pledges and actions at the international level. If countries do not take out the tonnes being sold as REDD+ credits from their accounting, the same tonne of carbon would be counted twice, by the buyer of the REDD+ credit and in the government's carbon balance sheet. In the language of the UN climate negotiators, this is called 'double-counting'.

In short, approval of **the IFC funding would amount to a massive waste of scarce Green Climate Fund money**. The money would subsidize private sector REDD+ projects that are

bound to cause conflict with forest-dependent communities and are unlikely to address the drivers of large-scale deforestation.

The Green Climate Fund's enthusiasm to pay for 'REDD+ results' (even when there are no verifiable results!) and subsidize carbon offsetting comes at a time where it is clearer than ever that the time for offsetting is over. **Real emission cuts are needed –oil must be kept in the soil and coal in the hole, in other words.** (9) It also coincides with recognition by many early REDD+ proponents that REDD+ is the wrong instrument for tackling drivers of large-scale deforestation. (10) This analysis, as well as the documentation of the conflicts and violation of forest-dependent community rights that private sector REDD+ projects are regularly embroiled in, seem to have so far escaped the attention of the Green Climate Fund Board members. **Based on the experience with REDD+, there is no basis for the Green Climate Fund Board to approve subsidies for private sector REDD+ projects.**

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(1) REDD stands for **R**educing **E**missions from **D**eforestation and **F**orest **D**egradation. The "plus" in REDD+ indicates that forest conservation, sustainable forest management and afforestation also qualify as REDD+ activities.

(2) For more information from the Green Climate Fund, see 'About the Fund - Green Climate Fund.

<https://www.greenclimate.fund/who-we-are/about-the-fund> For an explanation of how the Green Climate Fund subsidizes REDD+, see: Kill, Jutta, and Liane Schalatek. *Green Climate Fund and REDD+: Funding the Paradigm Shift or Another Lost Decade for Forests and the Climate?*

Washington, DC: Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2019. <https://us.boell.org/2019/03/21/green-climate-fund-and-redd-funding-paradigm-shift-or-another-lost-decade-forests-and>

(3) For the project information, see the Green Climate Fund country webpage for Brazil:

<https://www.greenclimate.fund/countries/brazil>

(4) Government figures on carbon dioxide emissions from deforestation have little relation to the amount of carbon dioxide that is actually released into the atmosphere when forests are destroyed. For example, most governments, including the government of Brazil, do not include emissions from drought-induced forest fires in the data the government reports to the UN climate convention.

(5) See for example, Bradford, S. & M. Torres (2017): Brazil on verge of legitimizing Amazon land theft on a grand scale, warn NGOs. Mongabay. <https://news.mongabay.com/2017/06/brazil-on-verge-of-legitimizing-amazon-land-theft-on-a-grand-scale/> and Lang, Ch. (2019): Brazil's funding proposal for REDD results-based payments to the Green Climate Fund would set a terrible precedent. <https://redd-monitor.org/>.

(6) Usher, Ann Danaiya. "Brazil receives first Green Climate Fund grant for REDD+. Critics warn of 'paper reductions' with no real climate benefits." *Development Today*, March 15, 2019

(7) See the presentation *Green Climate Fund's Private Sector Facility and the REDD+ Results-Based Payments* under section 4 at the 18th meeting of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility Carbon Fund:

<https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/carbon-fund-eighteenth-cf18-june-20-22-2018-paris>

(8) ReCommon (2016): Mad Carbon Laundering. How the IFC subsidizes mining companies and failing REDD projects. <https://www.recommon.org/eng/mad-carbon-laundering/>

(9) Lund, J.F. et al. (2017): Promising Change, Delivering Continuity: REDD+ as Conservation Fad. *World Development*. Volume 89, January 2017: 124-139

(10) The webportal REDD Monitor provides in-depth coverage of the wide range of controversies, inconsistencies, contradictions and conflicts associated with REDD+ and results-based payment schemes for REDD+: www.redd-monitor.org. A further source of information on REDD+, including a map to locate a wide range of critical academic and NGO literature on REDD+ is the Heinrich Böll Foundation's Webdossier *New Economy with Nature*. <https://www.boell.de/en/dossier-new-economy-nature>

Attempt to Re-Colonize Forests in India

The new Draft Amendments to Indian Forest Act



Protests in North Bengal against the evictions: "We will resist all attempts to evict forest dwellers". Ph: Swarup Saha

As general elections for a new Indian parliament draw nearer, **the far-right BJP government's offensive against forests and forest communities in India scales up.** Earlier this year, this unabashedly pro-corporate government failed to defend the landmark Forest Rights Act of 2006 in a Supreme Court decision and created a situation where about 10 million forest dwellers of India face summary eviction (1). The government has now proposed **new amendments to the colonial Indian Forest Act which would not only make forest bureaucracy more powerful than ever, but would also de facto put an end to the Forest Rights Act altogether, besides legalising the entry of big corporations into the forest sector.**

India's Forest Rights Act (FRA) is a fundamental law that recognizes many rights of *Adivasis* (indigenous peoples) and other traditional forest dwelling communities. It also empowers village assemblies – *the Gram Sabhas* – to govern their own forests as well as other forests they depend on. The FRA has been under attack since its inception - not only from the mining and tree plantations industry, to name a few, but also from the conservation industry. (2)

The draft amendments to the Indian Forest Act of 1927 (IFA) were sent to various state governments for comments on 07 March 2019 by the central Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC), though they are yet to be officially released for public comments. **Activist groups call the proposed new IFA worse than its colonial version — it perpetuates the same historic injustice against forest communities** which the FRA had sought to address. (3) **It is a move to re-colonise the prevailing colonial forest regime**, instead of democratising it so the law can serve critical environmental, rights and livelihood needs of people through the primary agency of *Gram Sabhas*, say the groups.

More Coercion, more State Control

According to the proposed amendments, the state would appoint Forest Settlement Officers who would 'settle' all kinds of forest rights. Unless otherwise explicitly claimed, sanctioned and recorded — in writing —, **community rights would be extinguished. The**

amendments do not foresee any role for community institutions such as the *Gram Sabhas* in the entire rights recognition process; yet, the FRA provides for such a role. Besides, even in cases of adequately recorded rights, those can be ‘acquired’ in the interests of conservation and then ‘commuted’ — which means that the rights holders can be paid off, irrespective of the forest rights’ nature, scale and location.

Instead of withdrawing forest offence cases, as demanded by various civil society groups, **all possible uses of forests by communities (unless permitted by forest officers) would be criminalized**. Entering a forest without permission would constitute a ‘forest offence’; and people can be picked up and detained on mere suspicion of a possibility of an offence being committed, their houses broken into and searched, all without any warrant. These provisions violate Articles 21 and 22 of the Indian Constitution, as pointed out by many activist groups in India. (4)

The draft amendments introduce a new legal category called ‘production forests’ which makes room for large-scale privatization. These new ‘production forests’ that can be notified in all kinds of forests, can be used for ‘sustainable’ forestry operations such as logging, monoculture commercial plantations and ecosystems services trading, including carbon trading under REDD plus.

In cases of possible conflicts emerging between the state and people or villages over the ownership and control of forests, such forests can be taken over by the state.

Policy Reforms: Movements use FRA to Stop Deforestation

This turn of events was not really unexpected. Neoliberal policy reforms enacted or proposed in the last five years seek to undo democratic reforms such as the landmark 2006 Forest Rights Act (FRA) and Amendments to the Wild Life Protection Act of 2006, initiated during the tenure of the previous United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government. Both pieces of legislation, in particular the FRA, together with the 1988 National Forest Policy and the 1996 PESA (Panchayat Extension Act to the Scheduled Areas), sought to provide a policy framework that brought welcome reliefs for the beleaguered forest communities in India and marked significant departures from the colonial model of forest management based on coercion and extraction.

The FRA in particular seeks to replace the infamous forest *raj* — feudal-colonial rule of forest bureaucracy — with decentralised and localised control and governance. In the long term, this will enable better-looked-after and cared-for biodiverse forests in place of a *bricolage* made of logging coupes, monoculture commercial plantations and so-called ‘human-free’ wild life parks, all of which relentlessly displace forests and their complex ecologies made of human and non-human inhabitants. No wonder that the state was unwilling to implement the law. Forest officers of all ranks, corporate-owned media and big conservation NGOs kept on opposing FRA from day one. Inversely, new movements in opposition to extractive industries and state stranglehold over forests increasingly started to mobilise around the implementation of FRA. **The new movements picked up older legacies and threads, and turned state laws such as FRA and PESA into sites of new struggles**.

In the last two decades, strong tribal and peasant movements against mining and forced industrialization erupted in forest and coastal areas of Odisha. In Niyamgiri, the Dongria

Kondh, a typical forest community, mobilized successfully against a proposed bauxite mining project by the infamous Vedanta group, which would have otherwise destroyed their forest and livelihoods. As in Niyamgiri, the farmers of Jagatsingpur successfully invoked FRA in their long struggle against forced land acquisition by the state to set up a huge plant by the Korean steel giant Posco. In Mahan, in Madhya Pradesh, the forest communities organised under the banner of Mahan Sagharsh Samiti (MSS) succeeded to stop a coal mining project jointly owned by Esaar and Hindalco, which threatened to destroy 1200 acres (over 486 thousand hectares) of old Sal forests, besides displacing 54 forest-dependent villages and their 500,000 residents. (5) Forest communities, including the indigenous Madia Gonds in the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra, have long been opposing the string of proposed iron mines, which would directly destroy approximately 15,000 hectares of dense forests and will affect another 16,000 hectares. In the neighbouring Korchi area, gritty community resistance forced premature withdrawal of an iron mining project. (6) In the Sarguja and Raigarh districts of Chattisgarh, the communities mobilised against coal mining. (7) In other areas of Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and West Bengal, communities and their movements have assumed control of their forest spaces, stalling and sometimes stopping logging operations by the forest department. (8)

State Responds with more Deforestation

Though popular resistance has been using state laws such as FRA and PESA to stop deforestation and elaborate legal provisions are in place for community control of forests, these did not seem to deter the Indian state from going ahead with organised deforestation.

According to official statistics for forest 'diversion' compiled by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, **a total of 1.5 million hectares of forests were diverted in the time period 1980-2019**. From this, more than half a million were for **mining**, the rest for **thermal power, transmission lines, dams** and other projects. (9) In the last three years (2015-18) alone, the Indian Government has given 'forest clearances' for **clear-cutting more than 20,000 hectares of forests** (10), most of them dense.

Under FRA, the process of forest diversion mandatorily includes the community consent on completion of forest rights recognition process, which has meant that **such forest clearances have been routinely issued on the basis of consents obtained largely by coercion and fraud**. (11) The Government counts such rampant 'diversions' of forests among the 'organised' and 'managed' drivers of deforestation, and apparently does not list emissions caused by those in its greenhouse gas emissions inventory. It, however, collects huge sums of money from the commercial users of forestlands according to **its controversial Compensatory Afforestation (CA) protocol, which obliges industries and other forest users to pay for 'compensating' their destruction with new plantations and ecosystem services** (12). After the enactment of the Compensatory Afforestation Act 2016 (CAF Act), the accumulated CA funds would now reach the state forest departments with greater ease, and as the activist groups apprehend, these would be increasingly **used to undermine community control of forests**. Completely ignoring widespread opposition against the new CAF act and in abject violation of FRA, the Indian state is seeking to institutionalise and legitimise the process of putting the country's forests on sale.

Attack on FRA: Neoliberal reforms

While efforts to dilute the Forest Rights Act started during the tenure of the previous United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, systematic and relentless attacks on the legislation started only after the present BJP government came to power in 2014. In the same year, India's National REDD plus strategy was released, which called for wholesale commodification of India's forests in the name of climate change mitigation. In 2015, the government came out with a prescription for privatising India's forests, which had to be shelved because of widespread protests. In 2016, the infamous Compensatory Afforestation Act was passed. In 2018, the National Forest Policy was launched, which prescribed, among other things, unimpeded entry of corporate capital in forestry, besides legalising joint forest management (JFM), a system of so-called 'participatory forest management' where the Forest Department creates and controls communities for forest protection.

Despite FRA and its empowering provisions, people's access to forests have consistently been curtailed and criminalised: the state keeps harassing and persecuting communities and movements trying to implement FRA on their own, and criminal cases are lodged against not only the community activists and *Gram Sabha* members asserting their rights and powers under FRA but also marginalised people not aware of the law. The National Crime Record Bureau reports (2014, 2015) on environmental crime in India reveal that 77 per cent of the total 5 846 cases recorded in 2014 are related to violations of the Indian Forest Act of 1927 and the Wildlife Protection Act. Most of the cases were against tribal communities and peoples. (13)

This sequence of events embodies a never-ending cycle of state repression, the latest instances of which are the much-discussed February 2019 eviction order by the Indian Supreme Court and the Indian government's proposed amendments to the Indian Forest Act. On 13 February 2019, the Supreme Court, while hearing a long-pending petition against FRA (the contention was that more forest rights meant increased deforestation and the rights holders were largely 'encroachers' in state forests) filed by certain conservation NGOs and retired forest officers, ordered that in all cases of 'final rejection' of forest rights claims under FRA, the claimants have to be summarily evicted. If carried out, this order would mean eviction of about ten million forest dwellers. After vociferous protests from all sections of the society, the eviction has been temporarily put on hold. Immediately afterwards, the Indian government came up with the draft amendments to the Indian Forest Act which in effect puts an end to FRA and makes forest officers sole authority to **privatise forests and deny communities' forest rights, ostensibly in the interest of climate change mitigation, 'production' forestry and conservation.** (14)

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(1) See WRM 242 bulletin, "Indigenous Baiga Women in India: Our story should be heard", February 2019, <https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/indigenous-baiga-women-in-india-our-story-should-be-heard/>

(2) For more information on FRA and other forest movements in India, see WRM 209 bulletin, "Indian Forest Struggles: the quest for alternatives", December 2014, <https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/indian-forest-struggles-the-quest-for-alternatives/>

And you can sign a petition urging to stop the evictions at: <https://wrm.org.uy/other-relevant-information/forest-dwelling-communities-in-india-urgently-need-your-support/>

- (3) Joint Press release by Community Forest Resources-Learning and Advocacy (CFR-LA), All India Forum of Forest Movements (AIFFM), Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM) and Akhil Bharatiya Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Samiti (ABMKSS), also separate releases by AIFFM and Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD)
- (4) *ibid*
- (5) See <https://www.greenpeace.org/india/en/issues/environment/2547/mahan-gram-sabha-to-be-held-behind-a-curtain-as-police-seize-signal-booster-solar-panels-and-other-communication-equipment>. In March 2015, the Ministry of Environment refused clearance for the Mahan project. Subsequently, Ministry of Coal announced that the Mahan coal block would not be auctioned for mining: See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-32443739>
- (6) In Korchi alone, 12 mining leases were proposed, impacting over 1032.66 hectares. See Neema Pathak Broome. N.P, Bajpai. S and Shende. M(2016): *Reimagining Wellbeing: Villages in Korchi taluka, India, Resisting Mining and Opening Spaces for Self-Governance*: <https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/reimagining-wellbeing-villages-in-korchi-taluka-india-resisting-mining-and-opening-spaces-for-self-governance>. See also <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/mining/experts-panel-red-flags-power-mining-projects-in-western-ghats-37201> and <http://cat.org.in/portfolio/trials-oppose-cluster-of-4-iron-ore-mines-in-zendepar/>
- (7) See also Sethi. N: *Five coal blocks in Chhattisgarh might see land conflict*, January 15, 2015: https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/five-coal-blocks-in-chhattisgarh-might-see-land-conflict-115011500019_1.html
- (8) Interviews with activists from All India Forum of Forest Movements (AIFFM).
- (9) http://egreenwatch.nic.in/FCAProjects/Public/Rpt_State_Wise_Count_FCA_projects.aspx
- (10) According to information presented in the Parliament, Telangana topped the list with 5,137.38 hectares, followed by Madhya Pradesh with 4,093.38 and Odisha with 3,386.67 hectares. See <https://scroll.in/article/908209/in-three-years-centre-has-diverted-forest-land-the-size-of-kolkata-for-development-projects>
- (11) Mahan Gram Sabha to be Held 'Behind a Curtain' as Police Seize Signal Booster, Solar Panels and Other Communication Equipment, Press Release by Greenpeace India. See: <https://www.greenpeace.org/india/en/issues/environment/2547/mahan-gram-sabha-to-be-held-behind-a-curtain-as-police-seize-signal-booster-solar-panels-and-other-communication-equipment/>
- (12) See WRM 217 bulletin, "Deforestation funds more plantations: The new Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill in India", September 2015, <https://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section1/deforestation-funds-more-plantations-the-new-compensatory-afforestation-fund-bill-in-india/>
- (13) Observations by Geetanjoy Sahu, School of Habitat Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS): e-mail communication
- (14) See https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/modi-govt-s-move-to-amend-forest-act-takes-a-giant-leap-backwards-119040101292_1.html. The Preamble to the Draft Amendments say: "Whereas it is imperative to conserve forests, to improve the ecosystem services that flow from forests, to ensure environmental stability and wellbeing of people in general and forest dependent people in particular, to meet the national developmental aspirations and the various international commitments, to strengthen and support the forest based traditional knowledge and all matters connected therewith or ancillary or incidental thereto, with peoples' participation and to provide a comprehensive legislation to deal with issues related to forestry sector and therefore the Indian Forest (Amendment) Act, 2019 is enacted (...)"

Ecuador: Stories of Dispossession and Deforestation Caused by the Extraction of Palm and Wood



Ph: Colectivo de Geografía Crítica del Ecuador

The community of Wimbí is located in Esmeraldas on the northern Ecuadorian coast. It is fighting to defend its territory against the advance of African palm, spearheaded by the company, Energy & Palma. This is a story of plunder, wherein **the increase in deforestation in the Chocó forest has gone hand in hand with the expansion of this crop. Powerful actors of the Ecuadorian agroindustry are perpetrating this plunder, along with logging companies** and the complicity of the State—which is unable to guarantee the ancestral rights of communities who have been living in this area for more than 300 years.

The production of African palm for the export of its derivatives began in the eighties in Ecuador. However, in the last 20 years, there has been significant growth of this crop in the country. In 1995, there were 105,855 hectares of the crop; while in 2017, this figure rose to 319,000 hectares (1). Almost half of the national production occurs in the province of Esmeraldas (2). **In this province, it is estimated that palm plantations have deforested at least 100,000 hectares of mangroves and cloud forests in Chocó** (3).

Since March 2017, the Critical Geography Collective of Ecuador (CGCE, by its Spanish acronym) has been working with the community of Wimbí (4). Faced with **growing pressure from palm companies and land traffickers**, community members decided to seek help in surveying and systematizing geographic information related to the conflict. This is all in order to support the judicial processes that the community has underway to defend their lands.

A Long History of Extractive Conflicts

The Chocó forest is inhabited by diverse traditional and indigenous communities; it is here that Energy & Palma is advancing. The interest of industries in the Chocó forest is not new, however; its history must be understood largely in relationship to the successive waves of investment, the expansion of the agricultural frontier and the dispossession caused by successive attempts to integrate Esmeraldas into the national economy and world market.

The territory of the Wimbí community went through the banana “boom” in the 1960s. Small-scale mining has also been a constant activity. However, new forms of illegal mining, introduced progressively in recent decades—and often carried out by people from outside the community—involve the use of large amounts of chemicals that pollute the water and have serious effects on the health of inhabitants. Additionally, logging companies have advanced upon community territory over the last 30 years—in some cases through negotiations and pacts, and in many other cases simply through actions. This is all compounded by the most recent conflicts with oil palm companies.

The Entry of the Energy & Palma Company

The Energy & Palma company is part of the La Fabril group, which was created in 2006. Formerly called Palmeras del Pacífico, **Energy & Palma is the third largest company in this sector in Ecuador, concentrating 10% of national production.** It has both its own plantations and processing plants in Esmeraldas and Santo Domingo, and it recently obtained “social responsibility” certifications. This is part of its sales strategy to appear to produce “sustainable palm oil” (5). The reality in the affected communities, however, shows what is hidden behind these certifications.

Conflicts between Energy & Palma and the inhabitants of Wimbí began to escalate with a process of purchase and sale of land that the company completed with Mr. Miguel Egas. Egas, in turn, is tied to lawsuits over the sale of lands and rezoning of communal areas in this region (6). At that time, several families grew food crops for their own consumption on plots, which were claimed by the company. While the community fought to recover their land, the judge ruled that the purchase and sale had been legal, and that the company could use the land.

However, **before the trial, the company had already tried to convince community members to sell their land in exchange for jobs on the plantations.** The overwhelming refusal of community members, who had been warned by the experiences of many other communities and neighboring villages, led the company to seek other ways to expand in the area. Wimbí is located right on the frontier of the expansion of oil palm companies, bordering their plantations.

For decades, Wimbí has been demanding that the Ecuadorian state recognize its ancestral territory. Anthropological studies proving the existence of a culture, and ties between these people and the land they have inhabited for 300 years, have supported this request. Official recognition is of vital importance to the community, given that the Ecuadorian Constitution protects these kinds of areas and their peoples—by guaranteeing regulation of their territory through specific demarcations.

Nevertheless, according to the manager of Energy & Palma, the communities of the region are the ones invading the land and taking advantage of the companies, whom they extort to obtain some kind of revenue.

Thus, the expulsion of community members from this part of their lands, and the destruction of communal cultivation areas, took place in early 2017, with judicial support. But **the residents of Wimbí have not stopped fighting for what they consider to be theirs.** In August 2017, members of the community took back part of these lands and re-planted coffee and citrus trees—in an act to reclaim their territory.

The Territory of Wimbí Today

Community members report that their territory covers approximately 22,000 hectares. We can divide this area into three zones based on land tenure. Zone I (16,286 ha) is the largest, and is the Wimbí territory that is formally part of the Río Santiago Cayapas community. Zone II (5,050 ha) is in a legally uncertain situation, given that there are no formal deeds for most of it. And Zone III (664 ha) is the only area for which the community has a title. CGCE's work has focused mainly on Zone II, as this is the area with the most conflicts and greatest danger of dispossession at this time.

The company has already dispossessed a total of 100 hectares in Zone II. Its interest is to expand by approximately 1,430 hectares on the lowest lands, where the establishment of plantations would be more economically viable.

To the northeast of the community, Wimbí also shares a border with the logging company, Plywood—belonging to the Peña Durini group. The community reached an agreement with the company about its presence in their territory a good while ago. The community currently has a relatively peaceful relationship with this company; the conflict seems to have concentrated on the oil palm activity. This may be due to the fact that **palm plantations make any other kind of activity impossible in the territory where they are located, and they have a major impact on the social and economic relations of the place.** Community members' loss of their crops places more pressure on them to seek salaried work elsewhere—including at the palm company that evicted them. However, relations with loggers are not always peaceful.

According to information from community members—several of whom frequent the area to go hunting—**loggers look for timber trees in a perimeter all along the road, going down to the rivers.** However, they avoid going down with the logs so as not to be seen by people from the community. Instead, they take the wood out in pickup trucks along the path going northeast, to where this path joins other secondary roads.

Once again, land trafficker Miguel Egas is involved. Community leaders themselves have discovered that the workers are leasing the timber extraction permit [to Egas]. Nonetheless, **logging activity is following the road that has been cleared, affecting community lands.** Moreover, we could see that the collection points for the wood are located next to Zone III—that is, the area for which the community *does* have formal titles.

The Territory of Wimbí Over Time

Through conversations with community elders, we learned that just two generations ago, it was common practice for some inhabitants of Wimbí to be spread out—in order to grow food on the borders of the rivers, pan for gold and hunt in the rainforest. But as time went by, there were fewer and fewer of these inhabitants. The drastic drop in the price of bananas, the increase in migration abroad and the harsh living conditions upstream led to the abandonment of houses located in areas along the rivers.

Another factor is the old railroad track in the northeastern part of the territory. While the train was still active, several families from the community had their crops near the railroad, as it was relatively easy to take their produce to port by loading it in the train cars. The

discontinuation of the railroad in the 90s meant that farming at such distances no longer made sense, and these people abandoned their lands.

One of the most recent pressures specifically involves the logging company, Plywood. This company is currently on land that formerly belonged to the community. In conversations with community members, we were able to clarify that the presence of the logging company today is the result of a negotiation by mutual agreement. **Before the company arrived, the river was the only possible way to get to Wimbí. Its inhabitants agreed to the company operating on those lands on the condition that it open up the only (and current) vehicle-accessible road**—a road in precarious conditions. This considerably improved the community's connection with the rest of the province; now, "it only takes two hours to get to the paved road."

"The state did not make this road. We sacrificed the mountain so they [the logging company] would give us the road in exchange. This is a logging road; they would take their production out along this road." (Interview with Wimbí resident 1, 2018).

Thus, in a context of abandonment by the State and pressing needs for infrastructure and services in the territory, the companies were able to negotiate their entrance and establishment in the community. "Sacrificing the mountain" was the only option left for the community members.

Thus, we see how over the course of its history, the territory of Wimbí has been changing, becoming smaller. **The redrawing of community boundaries over time is also the result of these processes of negotiation, intervention, conflict and abandonment.**

The incursion of oil palm is already happening, and it threatens to expand. Meanwhile, the community is affected by the illegal extraction of wood, whose main protagonist is the same land trafficker who allowed the oil palm company to come in. The entry of Energy & Palma, and the land trafficker's activities, are part of a new cycle of dispossession—this time more violent than in the past, and with more complicity on the part of some officials. If these officials ultimately do not exercise justice and guarantee the rights of Wimbí inhabitants, there is a strong possibility that the community could end up losing once again.

This article is based on the study, "Mapping and social survey related to land conflicts in the community of Wimbí, San Lorenzo." To see the complete information and references, and the maps created, you can view the report at this link: <https://bit.ly/2HglxkK>

Critical Geography Collective of Ecuador, www.geografiacriticaecuador.org, [@GeoCriticaEc](https://twitter.com/GeoCriticaEc)
Quito, June 2018

(1) See, Potter, L., *La industria del aceite de palma en Ecuador: ¿un buen negocio para los pequeños agricultores?* M.Eutopía, Num. 2, 2011 and Lasso, 2018, <https://lalineadefuego.info/2018/07/10/la-palma-aceitera-en-el-ecuador-un-cultivo-social-y-sustentable-por-geovanna-lasso/>

(2) Surface and Continuous Agricultural Production Survey, ESPAC, 2016.

(3) PLAN V., 2017

(4) For several years, the Critical Geography Collective of Ecuador (CGCE) has accompanied various territorial conflicts that affect the fundamental rights of communities, neighborhoods and indigenous peoples throughout the country. CGCE's contribution focuses mainly on being able to offer a geographic perspective of the disputes that occur in these actors' living spaces.

(5) El Telégrafo, 2018, <https://www.eltelegrafo.com.ec/noticias/economia/4/grupopalmicultor-certificacion-granresponsabilidadsocial>

(6) The story of this trial and of Miguel Egas is long. This man was one of the plaintiffs against the association of Santiago Cayapas River Association (CRSC, by its Spanish acronym), of which Wimbi is a part. After a prolonged process, in which the plaintiffs ending up winning the lawsuit against the dead (the original founders of the CRSC), MAGAP carried out a rezoning process of communal boundaries that affected Wimbi. Since then, Miguel Egas has been fragmenting parts of this territory to sell or extract rent, without the community's permission. Miguel Egas is also tied to the Peña Durini group, which for decades has been involved in timber extraction from the CRSC territory.

WWF in the DRC's Salonga National Park: Torture, murder and gang-rape



Sign at the entrance of the Salonga National Park. Ph: Salonga National Park

An investigation by the organization Rainforest Foundation UK found that communities living around the Salonga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo have been subjected to torture, murder and gang-rape at the hands of park rangers supported by funding from the WWF and a range of international donors.

The investigation reports serious incidents, including, **two cases of gang-rape, two extra-judicial killings, and multiple accounts of torture and other forms of mistreatment** committed by park guards.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) started working in Salonga National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in 2004. Since 2015, **WWF has been responsible for the park's management.**

About 700 communities live around the park, including an estimated 130,000 people living in a "corridor" between the two separate halves of the park. When the park was established in 1970, many of these communities were evicted from the park and banned from accessing their ancestral forests, which they depend on for survival. **These communities report widespread malnutrition, which they overwhelmingly attribute to conservation-related restrictions on traditional hunting and fishing activities.**

Conservation measures have become increasingly militarised in recent years. Anti-poaching initiatives are run by the Congolese protected areas authority (ICCN - *Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature*), sometimes in collaboration with the Congolese

army, on top of the approximately 300 eco-guards that are employed at Salonga National Park.

“It is common for women who venture into the park to be raped, and men face extortion and torture,” said one villager living on the park’s boundary to the investigation team.

WWF and the German Development Bank

In May and October 2018, Rainforest Foundation UK informed WWF and KfW, **the German Development Bank – one of Salonga National Park’s funders**, about the alleged human rights abuses. In January 2019, WWF agreed to commission an investigation into the case of abuse in Salonga National Park.

In February 2019, the investigation confirmed the **murder of three men, the rape of six women, and the torture of three men by eco-guards between 2002 and 2016**. However, even though it was not agreed that the report would be confidential, WWF told Rainforest Foundation UK that it will not make the investigation available, except under conditions of strict confidentiality.

Simon Counsell, Executive Director of Rainforest Foundation UK said: “Shocking though these reports are, we fear that the real extent of the atrocities could be much greater. In just two areas near Salonga, interviews with over 230 local people showed that a quarter of them reported being the victims of some kind of abuse. WWF needs to make the reports of its latest investigation available, to publicly acknowledge what has happened in Salonga, and publicly commit to helping the victims and ensuring that such abuses and harm to local communities will not happen again.”

At the same time, journalists at BuzzFeed News, who have reported on widespread abuses around National Parks supported by WWF across Africa and Asia, have taken out a legal case to get KfW to release documents about correspondence related to the development bank’s funding of Salonga National Park. BuzzFeed News wants to know when KfW, and the German government, found out about the serious human rights violations and how it dealt with them. So far, KfW has provided 5.4 million euros (around US6 million dollars) for management of Salonga National Park.

“It’s about control”

In 2015, a WWF employee was named the park’s top official, in charge of hundreds of eco-guards. After he left the job, in an interview with Nomad magazine, he said about the communities living in Salonga National Park, “I spent my first five days on a dug-out canoe visiting various sectors of the park. The deeper you get, the more isolated and undeveloped it gets. There’s a heavy-handed police presence. I went to a very isolated village, where a contingent of police greeted me in full riot gear, with rocket launchers. It was very intimidating. It’s about control. There were always stories of extortion, theft, rape and beatings. They were a law unto themselves, as were the Congolese army assigned to the park to control poaching. They did a good job reducing poaching, but in a rather heavy-handed way”. (1)

Unfortunately, the abuses in Salonga National Park are just the latest to be documented by the Rainforest Foundation UK and Buzzfeed News. **This is definitely just the surface of a**

wider problem on human rights abuses and colonial interventions in tropical forests. Conservation organisations are too often at the centre of these serious abuses.

(1) NOMAD, Accidents happen in Congo, August 2017, <https://nomadmagazine.co/accidents-happen-congo/>

This article was written based on the following materials:

Rainforest Foundation UK, *Widespread Human Rights Abuses in Africa's largest Forest Park*, March 2019, <https://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/widespread-human-rights-abuses-in-africas-largest-forest-park>

Rainforest Foundation UK, *RFUK calls on WWF to immediately release details of investigation onto human rights abuses*, April 2019, <https://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/rfuk-calls-on-wwf-to-immediately-release-details-of-investigation-into-human-rights-abuses>

Buzzfeed News, *Part I: WWF's Secret War; Part II: Internal reports shows WWF was warned years ago of "frightening" abuses; and Part III: WWF says Indigenous People want this park but and internal report reveals fears of ranger "repression"*, March 2019,

<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/tomwarren/wwf-world-wide-fund-nature-parks-torture-death-REDD-Monitor>, "Torture, murder, rape": WWF must release its report about abuses carried out by eco-guards in Salonga National Park, <https://redd-monitor.org/2019/04/02/torture-murder-rape-wwf-must-release-its-report-about-abuses-carried-out-by-eco-guards-in-salonga-national-park/>

ACTION ALERTS

Finnish and Uruguayan Organizations Against a New UPM Pulp Mill

Finnish company, UPM, plans to install its second pulp mill in Uruguay—which would be one of the largest in the world and produce over two million tons of pulp per year. The project requires a new railway route and a port terminal for the company, as well as the expansion of high voltage electrical distribution lines and several processing plants in a duty-free zone. A declaration by Finnish and Uruguayan organizations call for the withdrawal of this project, which would result in serious impacts. Read the declaration (in Spanish) here:

<https://bit.ly/2vWkpfl>

Sarawak: Save the Mulu Rainforest from oil palm plantations!

An area of 4.400 hectares of the Mulu rainforest is currently being converted into palm oil monocultures; an area directly adjacent to a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Mulu National Park. The affected indigenous Berawan and Penan communities were not consulted and oppose the project that will destroy their forest and livelihoods. The Bruno Manser Fonds (BMF) is calling for a moratorium on new oil palm plantations and for an immediate halt to logging in the Mulu National Park region. [Please sign the petition now!](#)

RECOMMENDED

Brazil's Amazon: The Wealth of the Earth Generates the Poverty of Humankind

As the largest rainforest in the world, the area most rich in minerals and the main biogenetic reserve of the planet, the Amazon is one of the most desirable territories for global capital. As the attack against the Brazilian Amazon expands under the right-wing government of Jair Bolsonaro, the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research analyzes the advance of capital in the region; it provides a perspective on the international and national scope of mining and agribusiness projects, agrarian conflicts and the destruction of biodiversity, as well as the challenges that peoples face. Read the report (in English) here: <https://bit.ly/30fskmw>

Planting Conflicts: Monocultures and Dispossession in the Peruvian Amazon

A short documentary by Oxfam Peru shows the serious environmental and social problems that come with the expansion of monoculture tree plantations in the Peruvian Amazon. Thousands of hectares have been deforested—mainly with the cultivation of oil palm—which, in addition to affecting forests and streams, affect several native communities. With the apparent collusion between governmental agencies and the companies involved, the expansion of palm is a latent threat in the Amazon. Watch the video (in Spanish) here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40nC60nQxBw>

Voices of Women Against Extractivism

The most recent monthly bulletin of the Latin American Network of Women Defenders of social and environmental rights brings together several articles from the region that highlight the violence that the extractive model and climate change exert on women. You can read their bulletins (in Spanish) at the following link: <https://www.redlatinoamericanademujeres.org/recursos/boletines>

Papua: Co-optation of indigenous traditions for oil palm monocultures

Indigenous Papuans are seeing their forest being destroyed to be replaced by monoculture plantations. An interview by Mongabay news to anthropologist Sophie Chao evidenced the complex tensions between communities and the monoculture that is being imposed upon them. Cooptation and manipulation of their ritual traditions is a common tool used by land grabbers.

Read the interview in English here: <https://news.mongabay.com/2019/03/how-land-grabbers-co-opt-indigenous-ritual-traditions-in-papua-ga-with-anthropologist-sophie-chao/> and also see the latest release from the Gecko Project and Mongabay showing the opaque deals for one of the biggest projects on oil palm plantation expansion in Indonesia: <https://news.mongabay.com/2018/11/the-secret-deal-to-destroy-paradise/>

Free Trade Agreements: Instruments that Subjugate Rights

A workbook created by the Biodiversity Alliance seeks to rethink the effects of the free trade agreements, as well as point out their harmful effects; since these are powerful “legal” frameworks—in parallel to national legislation—that grant corporations leeway to maneuver, while shutting out possibilities for people to access justice. Nevertheless, the struggles are going strong. Read the publication (in Spanish) at:

<http://www.biodiversidadla.org/Recomendamos/Tratados-de-Libre-Comercio-Instrumentos-de-desvio-de-poder-que-sojuzgan-el-Derecho>

Articles of the Bulletin can be reproduced and disseminated using the following source: **Bulletin 243 of the World Rainforest Movement (WRM): “Hiding deforestation: new trends and resistances”** (<https://wrm.org.uy/>)

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