

## **WRM Monthly Bulletin**

### [Subscribe to WRM monthly Bulletin](#)

*The Bulletin aims to support and contribute to the struggle of Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities over their forests and territories. Subscription is free.*

---

## **OUR VIEWPOINT**

### **Territories and food sovereignty: Where the struggles of peasants and forest communities converge**

This issue of the WRM Bulletin is co-produced with GRAIN. GRAIN works to support small farmers and social movements in their struggles for community-controlled and biodiversity-based food systems and against the corporate controlled industrial food system. WRM supports the struggles of forest-dependent communities in the defence of their forests and territories against industrial tree plantations, extractive industries and other threats to the life and livelihoods of such communities. While each of the two organisations have their particular history and focus, we see these struggles intimately connected and indeed we often come across each other in meetings, emails, fora and statements.

Over the past years we have gone further than that and established more active working relationships, initially mostly in Latin America but more recently in other parts of the world too. For example, we are now working together in a joint project that aims to support the struggles of local communities against large-scale industrial oil palm plantations in West- and Central Africa. So it is only logical that we ended up producing this bulletin together.

After all, many forest-dependent communities are peasants, and many peasants are forest-dependent communities; and they are all food producers. They are affected alike by the corporate agenda, be it through the expansion of eucalyptus and other monoculture tree plantations or by foreign investors that buy up land to plant crops for the international food and biofuel markets.

They are also vilified in the same way and often by the same people; for destroying the world's tropical forests with shifting cultivation practices, for causing soil erosion because of overgrazing and because of their supposed lack of capacity to produce enough food for a growing global population. They are often portrayed as backwards and standing in the way of progress. And, as we show in one of the articles in this bulletin (about REDD+ and agriculture), they are now targets for projects and programs to stop deforestation in the name of the fight against climate change.

The truth is, however, that it is not peasants and forest-dependent communities that are responsible for these problems. The real culprits are the fast expanding and corporate driven plantation economies with their polluting and water draining monocultures. They take up an increasing amount of fertile farmland and continue to massively plough under native forests and other fragile ecosystems. In the process, they produce huge amounts of greenhouse gas emissions. And – this is important to stress – they don't produce much food. They produce commodities for an ever voracious global export

market to feed the paper industry, the livestock industry and more recently the agrofuel industry. Despite this, forest-dependent communities are being told to stay out of the forests and find their food and livelihoods elsewhere. Peasant communities are thrown off their land to make way for the 'more productive' plantations.

As a result, peasants and forest-dependent communities around the world are being squeezed onto less and less land. Today peasants account for over 90% of all farms but control only a quarter of the world's farmland. Yet, they still manage to produce most of the world's food without nearly the amount of greenhouse gas emissions produced by large-scale industrial farms. But if the current global wave of land grabbing and land concentration is allowed to further expand, it will be difficult for them to continue to do so. Who then will feed the world?

### **Food sovereignty: a common struggle**

To counter the corporate driven food system and to articulate a vision that puts peasants and forest communities central in the struggle against the food, environment and climate crises, La Via Campesina – the global peasant movement - launched in the mid 1990s “food sovereignty” as the solution. During the past two decades, this has become a central axis in the struggle for a better food system of many movements and organisations. Placing food sovereignty at the centre of the agenda also means to recognize the crucial role of women in cultivating and reproducing seeds as well as providing food for their families and communities since ancestral times. While sustaining life, women also play an essential role in the front lines of struggles to defend territories and hence food sovereignty.

Among other things, this struggle includes:

- Integral agrarian reform to give land back to small farmers and local communities, and defence of territories that are so central for peasant and forest communities
- Agroecology as the natural farming method to feed the world
- Building upon indigenous knowledge and local seeds
- A frontal opposition to the industrial food system, corporate trade interests and technologies controlled by agribusiness
- A focus on local markets and short circuits under control of local communities
- An understanding that this struggle brings together the different food producers (farmers, fisher folk, pastoralists), different constituencies (food producers and consumers) in different locations (North and South).

Peasants and forest-dependent communities have the same struggle here, and a common opponent.

### **The climate agenda**

This issue of the WRM bulletin zooms in on the struggle against the climate crisis, another agenda that peasant and forest-dependent communities have in common. They are feeling the disastrous impact of climate change in their daily lives and livelihoods, but they also realise that they hold the key to averting the climate crisis.

For over 10 years, the world's governments at each annual climate conference have been wasting a lot of time pushing false solutions in order to avoid making any real

change in the current production and consumption model. Among these false solutions are proposals to turn forests into “carbon sinks” that can compensate for emissions done elsewhere under the REDD mechanism and related initiatives such as the “landscape REDD” approach. Now climate negotiators are also debating a vague “climate smart” agriculture proposal, all with the same intention to offset greenhouse gas emissions instead of reducing them at source. Governments are moving us deeper into this crisis because they are failing to address the real causes of climate change and corporations are increasingly controlling the agenda of the conferences and technologies connected with the false solutions that are proposed and backed by the UN.

FAO’s director Graziano da Silva, in a debate about the next climate summit, recently said: “We believe that agriculture in the broad sense - including forestry, fisheries and aquaculture - can and must play a central role in addressing climate change (..)” (1) However, neither industrial tree plantation companies nor agribusiness companies can ever be part of the solution because the models they depend upon are the problem (2). It is rather peasant and forest-dependent communities that are convincingly offering and practicing food sovereignty as a solution. As GRAIN has calculated, the industrial food system is largely responsible for the climate crisis producing around half of all the global greenhouse gas emissions. While in contrast, a food system based on proper soil management, natural farming, local markets, fresh food and equitable land distribution would not only support many peasant and forest-dependent communities worldwide, it would also be able to lower emissions and put capture back carbon into the soils.

But there is a long way to go before we get there. As we show in one of the bulletin articles, the fertilizer industry is dominating the discussions and decision-making on what to do with agriculture and the world’s food system. Another article reflects on how trade deals move the world deeper into the climate crisis. REDD+ projects and carbon markets leave polluters off the hook and bar local communities from accessing forests for their livelihoods. And another article highlights how certification schemes set up to provide “green labels” to monoculture industries like timber, pulp, soy or oil palm are seeking alliances with REDD. A conversation between GRAIN and WRM on certification schemes and oil palm plantations sheds some light on what these schemes mean for local communities. And the issue of expanding eucalyptus plantations in Mozambique and Brazil, also covered in this bulletin, deserves attention: these plantations can be called “smart” from a corporate perspective, but in no way from a climate, food sovereignty and community well-being perspective.

In the lead up to the mobilisations around the next UN climate summit in Paris this December, social movements from across the world are preparing to put real solutions forward and denounce the false solutions that are now on the UN’s negotiating table. In this, it is important that the struggles and solutions of peasants and forest-dependent communities are centrally present.

*GRAIN* (<https://www.grain.org/>) and *WRM* (<http://wrm.org.uy/>)

1. <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/336488/icode/>
2. See further information on how large-scale monoculture plantations are a main driver of deforestation here:  
<http://wrm.org.uy/browse-by-subject/deforestation/direct-causes/large-scale-monoculture-plantations/>

And on the role of industrial agriculture as a main driver of deforestation here:  
<http://wrm.org.uy/browse-by-subject/deforestation/direct-causes/industrial-agriculture-and-cattle-raising/>

---

## **THE STRUGGLE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND THE CLIMATE AGENDA**

---

### **REDD Alert!**

### **How REDD+ projects undermine peasant farming and real solutions to climate change**

Agriculture is increasingly being discussed at high level forums on climate change that promote different initiatives which they claim will help farmers to adapt to climate change and reduce agriculture's greenhouse gas emissions. These initiatives are heavily influenced by corporations and governments that want to protect industrial agriculture and corporate food systems from real solutions to climate change that would provide peasants with more lands and support agro-ecological farming for local markets. As a result, small scale peasant agriculture is being targeted by a number of aggressively promoted false solutions to climate change while industrial and corporate-driven agriculture mostly continues with business as usual. One such programme is called REDD+.

A recent [publication from GRAIN and the WRM](#) explains some of the patterns that make **Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD)** a danger for peasant farming. The publication explains how REDD+ reinforces the corporate food system that is largely responsible for climate change, has robbed many communities and forest peoples of their territories and undermines the food and agricultural systems of peasants and indigenous peoples that can cool the planet.

In most cases, the information peasant communities receive about REDD+ projects is biased or incomplete. Many promises of benefits and employment are made by project proponents if the community agrees to the proposed REDD+ activity. But the majority of REDD+ activities limit the use of the forest for shifting cultivation, gathering and other subsistence use. Hunting, fishing, grazing or cutting some trees for construction of housing or canoes are also often restricted and the restrictions are enforced by REDD+ project owners, often with the support of armed guards. Furthermore, most communities are not informed that these projects generate carbon credits, or that the buyers of these credits are some of the largest corporations worldwide, whose businesses are built on fossil fuel extraction and the destruction of territories of traditional communities. Peasant farming is thus singled out as the cause of deforestation while the major drivers of deforestation are ignored. At the same time, large-scale drivers of deforestation like industrial logging, expansion of oil palm, soya or tree plantations, infrastructure mega-projects, mining, large hydro-dams – and above all, industrial agriculture expanding into the forest – continue without restriction (See [“REDD: a Gallery of Conflicts, Contradictions and Lies”](#)).

**Some patterns that make REDD+ a danger to peasant farming**

### REDD+ blames peasant farming practices for deforestation and emissions

Peasants around the world are being squeezed onto less land while still managing to produce most of the world's food, without nearly the amount of GHG emissions produced by large-scale industrial farms. The overwhelming majority of REDD+ projects, however, seek to reduce GHG emissions by further reducing the lands that peasant farmers and indigenous communities have access to or by changing how the land is used by peasant farmers.

REDD+ proponents have the erroneous assumption that shifting cultivation in particular, a practice commonly used by forest peoples around the world, is a major cause of deforestation. This is simply not true. What is usually lumped together under the term "slash-and-burn" in reality are hundreds of different land use practises, adapted to the local circumstances. Far from causing large-scale forest loss, these practises have allowed forest-dependent communities to maintain the forests they depend on. Where shifting cultivation is leading to forest degradation, rotation cycles are usually shortened because less land is available for shifting cultivators. This is almost always a result of expanding industrial plantations or mega-infrastructure projects or industrial logging, which grab land peasant communities rely on for food production.

Another argument used by REDD+ proponents is that the "opportunity cost" is lower than it is with restricting the expansion of plantations and industrial farms. The "opportunity cost" is a measure of the economic value that would have been generated, by companies or peasants, if deforestation activities were allowed to continue. The consultants can see the money that plantations generate for companies; but they do not see the whole value that forest areas represent for peasant communities in terms of local food production, housing, medicines, biodiversity, culture, etc. For REDD+ proponents, therefore, it is more "cost" effective to stop peasants from using forest lands than it is to stop plantation companies and corporate farmers.

### REDD+: Good business for carbon companies, international conservation NGOs, consultants and industrialized countries

One of the big promises of REDD+ is that forest-dependent communities and peasant farmers will get paid for protecting the forest. To entice governments and communities of the South, REDD+ proponents routinely make exaggerated claims about the size of the global trade in carbon credits – or the expected size of a future forest carbon market.

The reality is that the price for carbon permits has been in free fall since 2008. And while carbon permits might swing back to the expected price, the experiences of existing REDD+ projects that sell carbon credits show how most of the supposed profits that are in theory going to communities will be captured by others.

Before a REDD+ project can sell carbon credits, a lot of technical documents have to be written, certified and verified by different auditing firms. All of these preparations cost money. And they are not cheap. They add up to what is called the 'overhead costs' or 'transaction costs' of REDD+ projects.

For international conservation groups like The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, and WWF by contrast, REDD+ is good business because they are able to capture a large portion of the international aid and climate funding available for REDD+. They are involved in many REDD+ projects and initiatives and act as advisors

on national REDD+ plans. None of these groups have revealed the size of their REDD+ budgets, or how much of their funding comes from the climate finance that industrialised countries account as REDD+ payments to the global South.

Industrialised countries also stand to gain even more from REDD+ if the new UN climate treaty currently being negotiated provides them with the possibility to take the credit for tropical countries reducing deforestation. One of the proposals on the table is that the countries providing financial support for REDD+ count REDD+ reductions towards their own emission targets – a very convenient option for governments in industrialized countries seeking ways to avoid deep emissions cuts at home.

#### REDD+ undermines food sovereignty

There are different ways that REDD+ projects commonly undermine local food production and create food insecurity among local communities. In some cases, families participating directly in the offset project must reduce their production of food crops in order to plant trees for the project. In other cases, the REDD+ project prevents the communities from accessing forested areas that they rely on for hunting and gathering, for shifting cultivation or for grazing.

The regular failure of REDD+ initiatives to 'establish alternatives to slash-and-burn' or 'modernise' peasant agriculture through proposals developed by far-away project owners or conservation NGOs points to another tension inherent in REDD+: these projects are concerned first and foremost with maximizing carbon storage in the area that will deliver carbon credits. Initiatives to involve peasant communities and forest peoples are an afterthought, a requirement from donors or to show supposedly participatory project implementation.

#### REDD+ undermines community control over territories

Tradable REDD+ credits are a form of property title. Those who purchase the credits do not need to own the land nor the trees that are “storing” the carbon, but *they do own the right to decide how that land will be used*. They also usually have contractual rights to monitor what is happening on the land and request access to the land at any time they choose for as long as they own the carbon credit.

Communities often are not informed about how the contract they sign for REDD+ projects might undermine their control over their territories. Often, obligations that communities or families enter into are not clearly explained or they are described in ambiguous terms that can easily be misinterpreted. Seeking legal advice on such complex and ambiguous technical documents is made difficult because almost all REDD+ contracts contain strict confidentiality clauses.

Another important way that REDD+ projects affect community control over territories is by creating divisions within communities. While many promises of employment through REDD+ projects remain unfulfilled, REDD+ projects generally do hire people from within the community to work as forest rangers or guards whose role it is to report on compliance with REDD+ project rules within the community. In other words, they are expected to keep an eye on other members of the community. Their role is to report to the project owners if community members cut down trees, hunt, fish, grow food crops in the forest or use the forests as they have always done but which is forbidden under the REDD+ project rules. This form of 'employment' creates divisions within the

community that will negatively affect the ability of communities to organize and work together to defend their territories.

#### How changes in the law inspired by carbon markets are threatening agrarian reform

Forest Code in Brazil is an example for how legal changes informed by REDD+ and similar offset trading initiatives pose a risk to agrarian reform and peasant rights to land. The 2012 revision of the Forest Code extends the use of tradable forest restoration credits. These are credits that a landowner can sell if s/he has cleared less forest than allowed under the Forest Code. Farmers who have in the past cleared more forest than the law allowed and are obliged under the 2012 Forest Code to restore the area cleared in excess of the legal limit – or risk losing access to agricultural credit lines – can buy these forest restoration credits instead of restoring the forest on their own land.

These tradable forest restoration credits put a key instrument for Agrarian Reform in Brazil at great risk. The historical instrument of Agrarian Reform has been the expropriation of *latifúndios* that could be shown to be unproductive and thus not fulfilling the constitutionally required "social function" of the land. The introduction of tradable forest restoration credits created an instrument that could shield owners of *latifúndios* from expropriation for social purposes because these credits would transform unproductive estates into carbon factories and repositories of environmental reserves. This in turn would allow land owners to claim that the land is fulfilling the constitutionally required "social function".

#### REDD+ facilitates the expansion of corporate agriculture

The deforestation caused by the agriculture sector over the past few decades is almost entirely due to the expansion of commodity crops for export and for animal feed, with the vast majority of this expanded production on large-scale industrial farms and plantations. Deforestation is then directly linked to international commodity supply chains that are controlled by a small number of transnational food corporations. These include commodity traders and producers like Cargill, Louis Dreyfus Group, Bunge, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), JBS or Wilmar International, food companies like Nestlé, Danone, or Unilever, and supermarkets and fast food chains like McDonald's, Walmart or Carrefour.

To shield themselves from bad publicity and to protect their supply channels, corporations have established voluntary certification schemes and commodity roundtables with the participation of a few large international NGOs (see separate article in this bulletin).

### **Conclusions**

The problems are clear, the solutions exist ...and they are very different from the REDD+ concept.

REDD+ helps to conceal the fact that while agriculture is a major contributor to climate change, not everybody growing crops shares the same responsibility for the emissions. It is the industrial food system – with its heavy use of chemical inputs, its erosion of soils, its deforestation and its emphasis on production for export markets – which is the main source of greenhouse gas emissions.

Yet, REDD+ falsely blames shifting cultivation and peasant farming for deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions. In reality, peasants are already proving that it is possible to 'feed the world' while producing far fewer emissions than the export-led, industrial model of agricultural production. Giving lands back to small farmers and indigenous communities is the most effective way to deal with the challenges of feeding a growing global population in an era of unpredictable climate change. REDD+ is a dangerous distraction from urgent action in this direction.

Access the publication here: <http://wrm.org.uy/other-relevant-information/how-redd-projects-undermine-peasant-farming-and-real-solutions-to-climate-change/>

## **Why the RSPO facilitates land grabs for palm oil**

*\*\*This article is based on a conversation between Winnie Overbeek, the international coordinator of the World Rainforest Movement, and GRAIN on September 2014, which was published by GRAIN at "[Planet palm oil](#)". The information has been updated for this article.*

### **GRAIN (1): What is the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)?**

**Winnie:** The RSPO is an initiative that was founded in 2001. It is a partnership between the palm oil industry and a few NGOs - the WWF is a very important one. In my view, you can see it as a response of the palm oil industry to the conflicts and the environmental problems, especially deforestation, caused by the very fast expansion of the industry, mainly in Indonesia and Malaysia, over the past 20 years.

The RSPO now has over 750 members and only 13 of them are NGOs, so the remaining 737 members are companies somehow related to the oil palm sector. You have palm growers, you have the palm oil processors and traders, you have the consumers' goods manufacturers, and some banks and investors. And in a process that is very similar to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification system, the RSPO delivers certificates to palm oil producers, based on a set of principles and criteria approved by RSPO members. The RSPO states on its website that it has already certified about 2.56 million hectares - this figure of October 2015 - of oil palm plantations as 'sustainable'. They call it "sustainable oil palm production", which is supposed to rest on legal, economically viable, environmentally appropriate and socially beneficial management practices.

### **GRAIN: (2) What does the current land grab for large-scale industrial oil palm monoculture mean for communities affected by this and for the companies that promote it, and what is the role of RSPO?**

**Winnie:** Local communities can only lose from the current wave of land grabs for palm oil. They lose access to vital lands and water resources, now and for future generations. And they have to face all of the impacts that come with vast monoculture plantations within their territories – pollution from pesticides, soil erosion, deforestation, and labour migration. Experience also shows that the employment generated by the plantations often goes to outsiders, and that most of the jobs are seasonal, poorly paid, and dangerous. Certification schemes, such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), do not question this, they rather play a role of facilitating the continued expansion calling it 'sustainable'.



Furthermore, the large-scale industrial plantation expansion threatens local palm oil production in Africa and some places in Latin America, based on people's control over lands and the production process – most often in the hands of women – , involving for example in Africa millions in more than 20 countries where oil palm is a native species and part of people's culture. Based on oil palm a number of products for the local markets are produced and sold. These plantations most often are not extensive monocultures that depend on chemical inputs, and most often offer very good quality palm oil for cooking and other products for local use.

There is no demand justification for the expansion of oil palm plantations. The growing global market for palm oil is not about resolving world hunger. It is mainly a product of new biofuel mandates and the substitution of cheap imported palm oil for locally produced oils and fats (whether animal or vegetable) in the production of processed foods by global corporations. People do not need more oil palm plantations; corporations do.

**GRAIN (3): In your experience of working with community organizations, has the RSPO been a solution for communities? Has it helped to make palm oil sustainable?**

**Winnie:** It is true that the RSPO, according to some of the organisations we work with, has resulted in some benefits, and it is important also - I imagine it is for any certification scheme - that they can show some positive results. So, for example, they have been able to slow down deforestation a bit, or at least to make companies slow down their expansion rate. But it is also true that for those communities that have filed complaints to the RSPO, in Indonesia for example (the country with the most problems between communities and oil palm companies), none of these complaints have come to a satisfactory conclusion for the communities. And this is very worrisome, because the complaint mechanism is the last option to correct problems not solved in the certification procedure. If the complaints mechanism of the RSPO doesn't even function, what can we think of the whole certification process?

It's not easy for communities to access this complaint mechanism in the first place, and this has to do with the second point I want to make, which is the fact that the RSPO has been set up without any community participation. The RSPO has produced a number of procedures, of principles and criteria, and these are often very difficult for communities to understand. The language that they write these procedures in, even the complaint mechanism, is different from the language of the communities. I mean that they are written in a very technical way, not in a way that facilitates access by communities. It is written in the language of companies, consultants, scientists, and it is also the language of the NGOs that are participants, which are most often constituted of specialised workers with university degrees. They can easily understand the documentation. It is much more difficult for communities. This is a big advantage for the companies that are seeking a certification, and often a source of frustration for communities.

One example is how, within the certification process, they define forests that should not be planted with oil palm. They call them high conservation value forests (HCV), and they are determined by the identification of areas by consultants that are hired by the company - not by the communities. Most often, communities do not understand this concept because for them, their whole territory, often made up of different forested areas that they use for many different things, like agroforestry, is important. All these

different forested areas are very important for communities, and not just one single part of this area, like the RSPO proposes.

Another problematic aspect with the RSPO is that it's not an effective instrument to solve the increasing land grabbing problems in the global South, the planting of more monocultures for exports. It does not question the palm oil industry's logic of expanding plantations and markets. If this is not taken into account, how can there be talk of "sustainable" palm oil at the global level?

At the local level, there are two characteristics of plantations that are also not being questioned by the RSPO: their large scale and their monoculture production. These are two aspects that always have a lot of social, environmental, economic and cultural impacts. They require lots of pesticides and water, and they occupy a lot of territory that multiple people are living on - because they are most often settled on fertile land - so it is very problematic to call plantations that are large scale and monoculture "sustainable", and for us it's impossible. So when the RSPO puts a label on such projects, declaring them "sustainable", they give a false promise to consumers that the palm oil they consume is coming from a sustainable plantation, that it's benefiting people and benefiting the world. That is simply not true.

A final important problem with the RSPO is that it is a mechanism, like other new trends like REDD+ , that is dividing us as a civil society formed by communities, social movements, and NGOs. Certification is being used as a tool to assist certain communities at certain times, while in other countries - or even in the same country - the same tool is being used to silence or overpower people and control their territory.

These mechanisms, like certification schemes or REDD+ projects, need therefore to be seen, to be understood in a broader context. We should reflect on our commitment to solidarity with those who are being abused by certification schemes and REDD+ projects. This is still, I think, not happening enough, and is very worrying. So now, for example, it's also a trend that mechanisms like RSPO and REDD+ are coming more together. The high conservation value forest areas I talked about earlier, that RSPO wants to protect, are now also being called "high carbon forests". This means that, eventually, a company certified by the RSPO could also sell carbon credits from its area, even as studies show that agrofuels produced from large scale, monoculture production can result in even more CO<sub>2</sub> emissions than using fossil fuels for energy generation.

Overall I think the limitations and the problems of the RSPO in the long term are much bigger and more significant than its benefits for communities, and I would say that the contrary is true for companies: They get much more benefit from the RSPO than what it costs them to put in. At the end of the day, companies get stronger with mechanisms like the RSPO and the struggle of communities to resist against land grabbing, to defend their territories, gets more difficult.

### **Corporate smart agriculture**

As the UN climate negotiations in December approach, there's only one major intergovernmental initiative on climate and agriculture, and it is controlled by the world's largest fertiliser companies. The Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture,

launched in 2014 at the UN Summit on Climate Change in New York, is the result of several years of efforts by the fertiliser lobby to block meaningful action on agriculture and climate change.

The fertiliser industry's policy coup has been partly possible because its role in climate change is severely underestimated. People associate Shell with fracking, not the Norwegian company Yara. But it is Yara, one of the largest chemical fertilizer producers worldwide, that coordinates the corporate lobby for shale gas in Europe and it is Yara and other fertiliser companies that suck up most of the natural gas produced by the fracking boom in the US.

Fertilisers, especially nitrogen fertilisers, require an enormous amount of energy to produce and generate about 1-2% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Chemical fertilisers destroy the natural nitrogen in soils, so farmers have to use more fertilisers every year to sustain yields. Over the past 40 years, the efficiency of nitrogen fertilisers has decreased by two thirds and their consumption per hectare has increased 7-fold. Furthermore, supplies of nitrogen fertiliser, which is produced almost entirely from natural gas, are expected to grow nearly 4% per year over the next decade. New studies show that the rate of nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O) emissions, a gas that is 300 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), increases exponentially as more fertiliser is applied. Fertiliser use is expanding fastest in the tropics, where soils generate even higher rates of N<sub>2</sub>O emissions per kg of nitrogen applied, particularly when the soils have been deforested.

There is a growing body of evidence that shows that farmers can stop using chemical fertilisers without reducing yields by adopting agroecological practices. As a response, fertiliser companies have moved aggressively to control the international debate on agriculture and climate change, and to position themselves as a part of the solution.

### **Fronting for fertilisers**

The fertiliser industry is dominated by a handful of corporations. Yara, which is over 40% owned by the Norwegian government and its state pension fund, dominates the global market for nitrogen fertiliser, while US-based Mosaic and a few companies in Canada, Israel and the former Soviet Union operate cartels that control the global potash supply. Mosaic is also the leading producer of phosphates.

These companies are represented by a number of lobby groups. The main ones at the global level are The Fertiliser Institute, the International Fertiliser Industry Association and the International Plant Nutrition Institute. Fertiliser companies are also represented by energy consumer lobby groups such as the International Federation of Industrial Energy Consumers. Yara chairs its Gas Working Party, which, in collaboration with Fertilisers Europe, is lobbying heavily for shale gas development in the European Union.

In North America, Yara and other fertiliser companies and lobby groups co-founded the Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture ("Field To Market") alongside other major food and agribusiness companies like Walmart, Kellogg's, and Monsanto. Also active in this alliance are big US environmental NGOs, such as the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). These NGOs work directly with Yara,

Mosaic and other fertiliser companies on "climate smart" fertiliser efficiency programmes. The same NGOs and fertiliser front groups are behind Solutions from the Land, a US alliance of agribusiness corporations and corporate farmers established to prevent environmental regulations that could affect the industry. In early 2015, Solutions from the Land changed its name to the North American Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture and now acts as the regional coordination for the Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture.

Moreover, Yara is particularly active within the World Economic Forum (WEF) where it chairs the WEF's Climate Smart Agriculture working group, through which it coordinates the implementation of "climate smart" fertiliser programmes with Nestlé, PepsiCo, Syngenta and other companies in Asia and Africa. Yara is also working with these companies in developing programmes in Africa (called Grow Africa) and in Mexico (called Grow Mexico).

Fertiliser companies also collaborate with the research centres of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) on various climate smart initiatives in the Global South, such as the "Climate Smart Villages" programme that the Mexico-based International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) runs in collaboration with the International Plant Nutrition Institute. The relationship extends to the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) funded by the Bill Gates Foundation and which has several areas of cooperation with the CGIAR and the fertiliser industry, such as the African Green Revolution Forum that was established by Yara and AGRA in 2010.

The main vehicle for the promotion of fertilisers in the Global South, however, is the International Fertiliser Development Center (IFDC) which was established in Alabama, US, in the 1970s and is funded by several fertiliser companies, including Yara. IFDC lobbies governments for policies that increase fertiliser use and promotes different fertiliser application techniques, such as integrated soil management that AGRA, the World Bank and other funding agencies have embraced as "climate smart".

All of these various corporations, agencies, front groups and alliances have converged to promote "climate smart agriculture" as the official response to climate change. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) first coined the term in 2010 as a means to attract climate finance to its agricultural programmes in Africa. Yet, the term only became significant in international policy circles in 2012 after the second Global Conference on Agriculture, Food Security and Climate Change, organised by the World Bank and FAO and hosted by the Government of Vietnam.

The choice of Vietnam was no accident. Yara and other food and agribusiness multinationals of the WEF had recently launched a major public-private partnership with the Vietnamese government under which these corporations were given exclusive responsibility over the "value chains" of the country's main export commodities. The Vietnam programmes were adopted as WEF's first pilot project for climate smart agriculture, which Yara was tasked with overseeing.

By the time of the next Global Conference in South Africa a year later, the fertiliser lobby and its allies had produced a plan for the creation of an Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture to be formally presented at the UN Climate Summit in September

2014 as the international community's main platform for action on climate change and agriculture. The US State Department then took the lead in moving the plan forward.

Today the Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture is stacked with fertiliser companies, front groups and NGOs and companies that work directly with them. Its Steering Committee includes Yara, Mosaic, EDF and TNC, as well as the governments of Norway and the US.

### **Pollution as the solution**

There is no precise definition for "climate smart agriculture", and deliberately so. The Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture instead leaves it to its members to determine what "climate smart agriculture" means to them.

The FAO, one of the leading organisers of the Alliance, produced a sourcebook and an accompanying list of ten climate smart agriculture "success stories". All of the examples are top-down extension programmes, including a nitrogen fertiliser application technique that focuses on small farmers in the Global South. The CGIAR has a similar set of climate smart "success stories" that focus on the Global South, promote the use of fertilisers and GMOs, and make no mention of agroecology. Most climate smart agriculture initiatives, however, come directly from the private sector, through alliances between the major agribusiness and food companies.

What this means on the ground can be seen in the model project that Yara is implementing with PepsiCo on the plantations that supply oranges for its Tropicana juices. Under the project, PepsiCo gets these plantations to purchase Yara's "low carbon footprint" branded nitrogen fertilisers, which are supposed to produce less fertiliser runoff. These "premium branded fertilisers" were developed by Yara "in order to avoid a situation where only organically produced food would gain the climate brand of approval".

Perversely, in Africa, where much of the attention of the Global Alliance is focussed, the fertiliser industry and its allies maintain that increasing the use of fertilisers is a "climate smart" way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Yara and Syngenta are running trials in Tanzania to show that increasing yields with chemical fertilisers and hybrid seeds "reduces the need for deforestation, thereby avoiding GHG-emissions". Africa however is not merely of interest to the fertiliser industry as a way to deflect attention from agricultural emissions in industrialised countries. It is the world's fastest growing market for chemical fertilisers and an important new source of natural gas reserves, especially on the east coast between Tanzania and Mozambique. Yara is a leading player in initiatives to promote large-scale industrial agriculture in Africa, such as the WEF's Southern Agricultural Growth Corridor project in Tanzania, where Yara is coincidentally in talks with the government for the construction of a new US\$2.5 billion nitrogen fertiliser plant.

Dramatic and rapid reductions in GHG emissions can be achieved in our food systems without major economic consequences for people. The elimination of chemical fertilisers is one of the easiest and most effective places to start. Doing so would improve livelihoods for farmers, provide more nutritious foods, protect the ozone layer and help provide safe water systems. There are plenty of studies showing that farmers

using simple agroecological practices can produce as much food without chemical fertilisers on the same amount of land.

Kicking the fertiliser habit is not a technical problem; it is a matter of politics. No meaningful action can occur until the fertiliser industry's grip on policy makers is loosened. Let's start making this happen by shutting down the Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture and booting the fertiliser companies out of the COP21 in Paris.

GRAIN (<http://grain.org/>)

Access the publication here: <https://www.grain.org/article/entries/5270-the-exxons-of-agriculture>

### **Two bright shining lies teaming up: Certification roundtables and REDD+**

Certification has been described as the brightest of bright shining lies of the sustainability movement. And in recent years, certification roundtables have teamed up with another bright shining lie - REDD+. In the case of REDD+, the lie starts with the name. REDD+ is not designed to actually reduce emissions, at least not the emissions caused by those responsible for large-scale deforestation. Instead, REDD+ blames forest loss on peasant farmers and forest peoples while the corporations and government policies really responsible for large-scale deforestation continue unabated, with the deforestation they cause often greenwashed by the twin labels of commodity certification standards and REDD+.

“Certification is one of the brightest bright shining lies of the sustainability movement. I have seen the evidence too many times”, Scott Poynton writes in his 2015 book 'Beyond Certification'. (1) Poynton is a long-time supporter of voluntary certification and for many years he worked to improve the performance of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) in particular. WRM's experience and documentation of the realities of both the FSC and the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) certainly confirm Scott Poynton's conclusion. (2) And in recent years, certification roundtables have begun to team up with another bright shining lie - REDD+. REDD stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation and the plus stands for much else, from industrial logging to tree plantations. In the case of REDD+, the lie starts with the name. REDD+ is not designed to actually reduce emissions, at least not the emissions caused by those responsible for large-scale deforestation. Even staunch REDD supporters like Ecosystem Marketplace have pointed out that REDD is no more than a financing mechanism *that might help people who wanted to save the forest*. No more than that, *"because anyone who responded to purely economic incentives would opt for palm oil"*, or soy or beef or eucalyptus or sugar cane. (3)

Maybe it's because voluntary certification standards and REDD+ are precisely *not* designed to deal with *the* main cause of deforestation – the unabated expansion of industrial agriculture and the related infrastructure from roads to hydrodams, oil wells and natural gas deposits (see article on the fertilizer industry and climate change in this bulletin) – that consumer goods companies like Unilever and international pledges claiming to halt deforestation increasingly promote them?

One such international pledge is the New York Declaration on Forests. The Declaration was launched during the Climate Summit hosted by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon in New York in August 2014. Among the signatories are 30 national governments and some of the largest corporations in the food sector, including Unilever, Cargill and Bunge (see the [editorial of WRM's September bulletin](#)). The signatories of the declaration commit to cutting deforestation in half by 2020, and eliminating it entirely by 2030. But the Declaration doesn't include a plan for how to do that, nor does it say anything about halting the expansion of oil palm, soy, eucalyptus, acacia or sugar cane plantations or cattle ranching. And that's the same for similar initiatives such as the Indonesian Palm Oil Pledge (4) or the Sustainable Palm Oil Manifesto (5).

Instead of outlining an action plan that would put a halt to the destruction caused by ever-expanding industrial agriculture monoculture plantations and cattle ranching into forests, they promote linking of voluntary certification standards like RSPO or FSC with REDD+. In addition, similar initiatives supported by global food corporations introduce another misleading concept: zero *net* deforestation. The Consumer Goods Forum, for example, "*a collaboration of 400 retailers, manufacturers, and service providers with combined annual sales of over US\$3 trillion*" that counts many large global food corporations from Unilever to Cargill, Mars and Nestle among its members, has set the target to pursue "*zero net deforestation*" by 2020. But zero *net* deforestation is not the same as zero deforestation! (6) Zero *net* deforestation means companies can continue destroying forests as long as they can show a certificate that someone elsewhere has planted trees or protected some forest of at least the same size as the one they converted into pasture or monoculture plantation and that apparently otherwise would have been destroyed.

What these bright shining lies of the sustainability movement do, is increase social acceptability in climate conscious overseas markets for the continued deforestation for expansion of agricultural export crop plantations and cattle ranching. They do so because carbon calculations and REDD+ credits make the resulting increase in greenhouse gas emissions invisible – or claim that the emissions will not harm the climate because their release has been nullified by extra savings elsewhere. The assumption is that buying certified REDD+ offset or forest carbon credits (generated through restricting peasant farming practises, shifting cultivation and other forest uses - see article in this bulletin on REDD and agriculture) can compensate for the deforestation emissions caused. The evidence is overwhelming that this assumption is false (see [more information here](#)). What's more, REDD+ also means that even more land will be locked up for commodity crop production: the actual production area for which corporations can obtain a label from existing certification roundtables *and* the land used as a REDD+ offset, also certified to some standard attesting that the climate-conscious consumer can keep buying the product in question without scruples.

The combination of the two bright shining lies of voluntary certification standards and REDD+ and the addition of the concept of 'zero *net* deforestation' thus allows corporations to continue their destruction behind the smokescreen of green labels and misleading carbon calculations. Just like the environmental and social standards negotiated at certification roundtables were the response to growing consumer demand for "sustainable" commodity crops, the same certification initiatives are increasingly considering carbon in response to the growing attention to climate change among

consumers and government initiatives. All the large agricultural commodity roundtables, whether for oil palm, soy, sugar cane or beef, now include requirements related to greenhouse gas emissions. The focus of the combined bright shining lies of REDD+ and voluntary certification standards is therefore not on halting expansion but on enabling expansion of industrial agriculture into intact forests by working around patches of 'high carbon' or 'high biodiversity conservation value' forests.

Wide corporate engagement in these initiatives shows that the twinning of certification roundtables and REDD+ provides opportunities to food corporations concerned about their image in climate-conscious markets yet keen on continued expansion. And they can increasingly count on government support. The UK's Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC), for example, writes in a document explaining why it will fund the 'Initiative for Sustainable Forest Landscapes' (ISFL), launched by the World Bank in 2013: *"There is growing interest from the private sector in shifting their supply chain to sustainably produced commodities. This is driven by consumer demand, wanting to avoid negative publicity and concern over security of supply. The Consumer Goods Forum has committed to zero deforestation supply chains for beef, soy, palm and pulp/paper by 2020, but needs help from governments to achieve this. This is why we are working together with them and other governments in the Tropical Forests Alliance 2020 (TFA2020). Changes in the private sector in line with these commitments could bring alternative revenue streams to REDD+ countries, which is especially important in the absence of a deep market for carbon credits from forests."* (7) The DECC paper shows why zero *net* deforestation is so appealing: It is a concept open to confusion! While the DECC statement suggests a commitment by the Consumer Goods Forum to halting deforestation, the Forum has merely committed to work towards zero *net* deforestation by 2020. That means they could claim to have achieved their goal despite continued destruction of forests as long as their members set up enough industrial tree plantations to arrive at a net balance of zero loss of tree cover!

The Public Relations potential for companies aiming to appear green and yet expand their turn-over is obvious. *"This is exactly the type of initiative that we are delighted to support. We need to find new forms of public-private partnership to address global challenges such as deforestation,"* Paul Polman, the chief executive officer of Anglo-Dutch multinational consumer goods company Unilever said when the World Bank launched the ISFL.

And Unilever is not alone. Christine McGrath, Vice President of External Affairs at Mondelēz International, commented that the company is *"looking forward to working with the World Bank to determine how the BioCF Initiative for Sustainable Forest Landscapes can help contribute to our strategy for sourcing key commodities such as coffee and palm oil from regions where tropical forests are protected."* Alfred Evans, head of Bunge Environmental Markets was equally enthusiastic about the ISFL: *"Bunge is pleased to join the World Bank in discussing the formation of the BioCarbon Fund Initiative for Sustainable Forest Landscapes, a groundbreaking initiative. [...]. This new form of engagement between the public and private sector would be of benefit to all stakeholders. In particular, BioCF will help the commodity industry respond to the growing attention consumers and producers place on sustainability in food supply chains."*



What neither ISFL nor other REDD+ initiatives will achieve, whether on their own or in combination with certification standards and zero *net* deforestation pledges, is to halt forest loss. And we shouldn't be surprised that they don't because they were never designed to do so, as even staunch REDD supporters like Ecosystem Marketplace have pointed out in relation to REDD+: REDD is no more than a financing mechanism **that might help people who wanted to save the forest**. No more than that, "*because anyone who responded to purely economic incentives would opt for palm oil*", or soy or beef or eucalyptus or sugar cane.

If, however, the objective is to halt deforestation and to strengthen forest peoples' rights, it is time to move beyond certification, end the REDD+ experiment and replace these bright shining lies of the sustainability movement with real commitments to end the destruction of forests. That would involve not only a commitment to ending expansion of industrial agriculture and restoration of areas already destroyed by large-scale monoculture plantations and industrial cattle ranching but also a commitment to leaving oil in the soil and coal and natural gas in their underground deposits. Sadly, the upcoming UN climate summit in Paris will not likely be the place where such commitments will be debated.

Jutta Kill, [jutta@wrm.org.uy](mailto:jutta@wrm.org.uy)

Member of the International Secretariat of the WRM

For further information, see also: WRM (2014): [REDD moves from forests to landscapes: More of the same, just bigger and with bigger risk to cause harm.](#)

(1) Scott Poynton (2015): Beyond Certification.

<http://www.dosustainability.com/shop/beyond-certification-p-64.html?zenid=fec4487347616f9f1a6034f63b8309d0> and REDD Monitor article about the book: <http://www.redd-monitor.org/2015/10/20/scott-poynton-certification-isnt-working-and-is-in-fact-part-of-the-problem/>

(2) For WRM publications and other materials about the problems with voluntary certification standards like FSC and RSPO, see <http://wrm.org.uy/browse-by-subject/international-processes-and-actors/fsc/>

(3) Steve Zwick (2014): Todd Lemons: Ecosystem Entrepreneur.

<http://www.ecosystemmarketplace.com/articles/todd-lemons-ecosystem-entrepreneur/>

(4) <http://www.palmoilpledge.id/>

(5) [http://www.simedarby.com/upload/Sustainable\\_Palm\\_Oil\\_Manifesto.pdf](http://www.simedarby.com/upload/Sustainable_Palm_Oil_Manifesto.pdf)

(6) <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2015/06/13/opinion/021a1eco>

(7)

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/305241/CF\\_BC\\_for\\_DECC\\_investment\\_in\\_BioCF\\_and\\_FCPF\\_CF.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/305241/CF_BC_for_DECC_investment_in_BioCF_and_FCPF_CF.pdf)

## **The Farce of “Smart Forestry”**

### **The Cases of Green Resources in Mozambique and Suzano in Brazil**

"Nobody eats eucalyptus." With this statement farmers expressed their outrage when the company Aracruz Celulose expanded its monoculture eucalyptus plantations several years ago on arable land in Espirito Santo, Brazil. While the objective was to produce and export more pulp, Aracruz and other companies publicly promote their practices as

"smart." They claimed they only plant trees on "degraded" or "abandoned" land, for example. And now with the climate crisis, the FAO suggests adopting "climate-smart forestry" practices. The question that arises: Can we really consider current company practices to be "smart forestry"?

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is the UN entity responsible for promoting agriculture and food, but it is also in charge of forests and tree plantations—the latter being wrongly defined as "planted forests." In its "Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) Sourcebook", the FAO addresses the role of forests and trees, saying that "efforts to make a transition to climate-smart forestry will need to be taken at all levels ... and in all timeframes." (1)

But can we really consider today's forestry practices to be smart? Is it smart practice that a few companies are occupying millions of hectares for monoculture production of eucalyptus, pine, acacia, palm and other species, and causing negative impacts; all in the name of achieving greater productivity?

While the FAO's goal is ostensibly to bolster food production, and while companies claim they are restoring 'degraded' land, in practice these monoculture tree plantations always compete for land suitable for agriculture. The reason is obvious: if companies didn't grow trees on fertile lands, their plantations would not achieve the desired productivity. And so, wherever these plantations expand—usually in large areas of thousands of hectares—food production tends to decrease. This is a disaster for peasant communities, profoundly impacting on their food sovereignty and on that of the local population in general. That's why this is not a smart practice at all. And it's why the business logic that aims to maximize production and profit has been a main target of a criticism, which is summed up in the phrase "We can't eat eucalyptus."

In response to such criticism, many companies have developed pilot projects that aim to combine monoculture tree plantations with food production. One of the most widely implemented programs is called "*fomento florestal*" in Portuguese (promoting forestry). In this program, farmers plant eucalyptus trees on their own land. They usually sign a contract with the company, wherein they agree to tend the trees and later sell them to the company, all the while assuming the risks in the event the plantations don't prosper. Companies present this as a "social program" and a way to "help" farmers, suggesting that through "*fomento florestal*" it is possible to harmoniously integrate eucalyptus tree plantations and food production.

### **The company "Green Resources" in Mozambique**

In Mozambique, the African country with the largest expanse of tree plantations for wood, the Norwegian company Green Resources (GR) promotes eucalyptus monoculture in Nampula province. There, it operates under the name Lúrio GR. In a recent field visit to the district of Mecubiri, we heard from villagers of a community directly affected by the company's eucalyptus plantations.

On their webpage, Green Resources claims they only plant eucalyptus on "low-value grassland or degraded forestland." Yet directly affected villagers unanimously affirm that the company is growing on arable land. It's land that families were using or planning to use in the future as food-growing areas, which they call "machamba."

People say that in recent years, coinciding with the arrival of eucalyptus plantations in their community, local food production has decreased.

Villagers also say that some eucalyptus trees have been planted on their lands as part of a "*fomento florestal*" program that is also supported by the European Union. A group of participants in this program told us they joined because of the promises the company made to them: that they would become rich, that they could continue to grow food in between eucalyptus trees, that if 80% of the eucalyptus seedlings would survive, they would receive a solar panel to have access to electricity. Today, however, these people are frustrated. While most of the eucalyptus trees did grow, and many people did receive a solar panel, several panels are no longer working. As for the promise of being able to grow food in between eucalyptus trees, one villager reported that she tried to plant cassava, but it didn't develop well, whereas the eucalyptus kept growing. She observed that the eucalyptus caused the soil to dry out, compromising the growth of the cassava. She wonders how she will be able to grow enough food for her children.

Another villager told us he participated in a program promoting soybean production. In this program, Lúrio GR distributed seeds, only to later charge an additional 20%. The villager who planted soybeans explained that no one in the community eats soy, as it's not part of their traditional diet. Instead, the soy they produce is sold to the poultry industry. However, like the villagers who planted eucalyptus, this farmer is discouraged. He said his income has decreased because the price of soy has dropped significantly in the past three years. Meanwhile, GR is not providing him with support to market his products (2).

### **The company "Suzano" in Brazil**

Another company promoting so-called "*fomento florestal*" is Suzano Papel e Celulose. The company claims to work with 1,000 rural farmers, of whom 80% are small landholders practicing "*fomento florestal*." Suzano is one of the largest companies in Brazil, expanding rapidly and promoting monoculture eucalyptus plantations for pulp and paper. In the future, it plans to export "wood pellets" for generation of power and electricity in Europe. In 2015, it became the first company in Brazil and Latin America to obtain approval to commercially plant transgenic eucalyptus, which is supposedly 20% more productive than "conventional" eucalyptus (see article from WRM's April 2015 Bulletin).

Suzano's expansion in recent years has led to conflicts with traditional communities in the Baixo Parnaíba region, who have organized to defend their territory, where they extract bacuri and other products (3). Nevertheless, Suzano claims that "the majority of land on which plantations are established is degraded agricultural land." Regarding the introduction of transgenic trees, they assert that farmers who practice "*fomento florestal*" would stand to benefit most from this new technology. The company argues that the gains in production would enable small-scale farmers to produce the same amount of wood on less land. According to Suzano, this would free up more land for food production and forest conservation (4).

Yet decades of "success" —the steady increase in eucalyptus productivity in Brazil, thanks to "conventional" methods to improve production—have led to millions *more* hectares of plantations, not fewer. With this expansion, Suzano and other companies

have caused much conflict and displaced local communities from their lands, as well as reduced areas available for food production. According to Brazilian lawyer André Dallagno, of the NGO Terra de Direitos (Land of Rights): “Eucalyptus is an exotic species in Brazil, and has proven to be the enemy of peasant farmers, villages and traditional communities. This is due to the species' consumption of and impact on water resources, which is significant in its non-GM variety and even more severe in its transgenic form. There are cases of entire communities surrounded by intensive eucalyptus monoculture that are now considered to be “green deserts,” with their water resources depleted. Furthermore, eucalyptus production requires the intensive use of aerial pesticide spraying over long distances, which also impacts nearby communities.” (5)

## **Conclusion**

These two cases of companies, both of them FSC-certified, support what WRM has been arguing for years: it is not smart to tirelessly promote a forestry model or form of agriculture based on large-scale monocultures. This model of production also has severe impacts on the climate. Considering that this model of production used by forestry companies requires mechanization, the intensive use of fertilizers and pesticides, the transportation of products over long distances, etc., we are talking about a heavily oil and natural gas-dependent activity. To continue following this model will only worsen the climate crisis. The truly smart option, therefore, would be to stop. Until then, it is essential to support and strengthen communities in their struggles against large-scale tree plantations.

Winnie Overbeek, [winnie@wrm.org.uy](mailto:winnie@wrm.org.uy)  
*Member of the International Secretariat of the WRM*

1. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3325e.pdf>
2. WRM Field visit with Justicia Ambiental (Environmental Justice), September 15-23, 2015.
3. <http://wrm.org.uy/pt/livros-e-relatorios/plantacoes-de-eucalipto-para-energia-o-caso-da-suzano-no-baixo-parnaiba-maranhao-brasil/>
4. <http://theforestdialogue.org/publication/company-responses-questionnaire-development-genetically-modified-trees>
5. <http://wrm.org.uy/es/articulos-del-boletin-wrm/seccion1/los-transgenicos-no-son-bienvenidos-entrevista-con-andre-hl-dallagnol-de-la-organizacion-brasilera-tierra-de-derechos/>

## **Trade deals, agribusiness and the climate crisis**

The climate talks in Paris in December this year are viewed as a last chance for the world's governments to commit to binding targets that might halt our march towards climate chaos. But in the countdown to Paris, many of these same governments have signed or are pushing a raft of ambitious trade and investment deals that would preempt measures needed to deal with climate change (the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement - CETA, between the EU and Canada; the Free Trade Area of Asia and the Pacific - FTAAP; the Trade in Service Agreement - TiSA, secretly negotiated among 40 countries outside the World Trade Organisation; the Transatlantic Trade and

Investment Partnership – TTIP or TAFTA, between the EU and the US; the Trans-Pacific Partnership – TTP or TPPA, among 14 countries on both sides of the Pacific; and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership - RCEP, between the ten member Association of Southeast Asia Nations and six neighbours).

What we know of these deals so far, from the few texts that have leaked out of the secretive negotiations, is that they will lead to more production, more trade and more consumption of fossil fuels and that they will be used to reverse popular measures that impinge on the profits of polluting industries (1).

Less has been said about how the provisions dealing with food and agriculture in these deals will affect our climate. But the question is vital, because food and farming figure hugely in climate change (2). We see seven main ways through which the food and agriculture components of today's trade and investment deals will make the climate crisis worse.

### ***1. Increasing production, trade and consumption of foods that are big emitters of greenhouse gases***

In terms of agricultural production, meat and dairy are the biggest contributors to climate change. Only 11% of all meat produced is traded internationally, but globally speaking, meat production and consumption are projected to rise by 17% by 2024 and outright double by 2050 (3). Increased trade is expected to play a role in that growth and some of this will come from the newest trade agreements, which could shift current meat trade dynamics quite a bit (4). Of course, we cannot predict how much trade and consumption will grow as a direct result of these deals, but the tariff cuts and lower standards are expected to lead to increased supplies and therefore consumption in importing countries. That, after all, is what the industry lobbies are aiming for. Markets are also expected to grow for certain agribusiness companies and their investors due to the watering down of food safety regulations and labelling laws as a result of these new deals (5).

### ***2. Promoting industrial farming for export over local farms and food systems***

Expansion of markets for European poultry and milk powder has long been a key facet of the EU's trade liberalisation agendas, as African farmers and livestock keepers know. They have been mobilising to stop the dumping of highly subsidised chicken and excess dairy from Europe since years. These struggles are now more and more connected to climate change. Industrial poultry, after all, are an important source of greenhouse gas emissions. Broilers, which are raised for their meat, produce seven times more GHG emissions than backyard birds. And layers, which are raised for their eggs, produce four times more (6). Chicken consumption is rising in many countries because it is a low-cost meat, and therefore global poultry trade is expected to increase. All of this trade comes from industrial poultry farms, which are higher emitting than backyard or small-scale operations.

### ***3. Boosting global supermarkets and highly processed foods***

The biggest names in food retail are aiming for growth in Asia, as well as Africa and Latin America, through several of today's new trade agreements. The expansion of

global supermarkets brings with it the expansion of processed food production, trade and consumption. For example, under NAFTA, processed food consumption has skyrocketed in Mexico, bringing with it serious public health problems, and the country's retail sector has been taken over by large global chains (7).

Processed foods – produced by Mondelez, Nestle, Pepsico, Danone, Unilever and the like – are important greenhouse gas emitters, not only because of all the energy used in packaging, processing and transporting the foods, but also because of the emissions generated on the farm and the deforestation that comes with the expansion of plantations. Processed foods are constructed out of the cheapest raw materials that companies can source from around the globe. One package of standard supermarket food can contain powdered milk from New Zealand, maize from the US, sugar from Brazil, soybeans from Argentina and palm oil from Indonesia – all foods that are high on the emissions scale.

#### ***4. Climate cheating: the outsourcing of emissions***

Trade agreements favour food production in countries with low cost and/or heavily subsidised production, with high emissions levels. These countries have powerful industrial agriculture lobbies and are often heavily reliant on agriculture exports for their foreign revenues. It is highly unlikely that these countries will implement any measures to reduce emissions that might impinge on the competitiveness of their agricultural commodities. Already we see these countries moving with their companies to head off any international efforts that might make significant emissions cuts to agriculture, for instance by promoting the agribusiness-dominated Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture.

The emissions imported with the foods are not likely to be accounted for by the importing country either. Even if an importing government were to try, measures to reduce imports of certain high greenhouse gas emitting commodities could be challenged as unfair trade restrictions under the new deals.

#### ***5. More biofuels***

Biofuels are another form of polluting energy which, along with fossil fuels, may get a boost from the latest trade deals. This is especially when investment chapters of trade deals try to “level the playing field” for foreign investors by establishing rules on “national treatment” and “most favoured nation”, which makes access to land for the production of biofuels much easier. Already, EU climate policies have bolstered massive land grabbing in Africa for the production of ethanol for European markets.

#### ***6. The promotion of local food economies undermined***

“Buy national” or “buy local” programmes are generally considered discriminatory and trade distorting under so-called free trade doctrine. The World Trade Organisation did little to discourage these initiatives, but new bilateral and regional trade deals could go much further. Food sovereignty advocates and practitioners see this as a potential threat to local food economies that groups have been painstakingly building over the last decades (e.g. food policy council initiatives to support the use of local foods in public services like schools and hospitals) (8). Any moves to make “go local” or “use local”

illegal in the food sector will automatically result in increased climate destabilisation (9). The same is true of initiatives to support “green” purchasing or programmes to require purchasing from small- and medium-sized enterprises in the name of mitigating climate change.

### ***7. Food security measures made illegal***

In 2013, some governments tried to make it a WTO rule that public procurement of food stuffs in times of crisis should be considered a form of trade-distorting farm subsidy. Many governments purchase farm products from farmers to stabilise markets, provide guaranteed prices and run stockpiles or distribution systems in the public interest. The ravages caused by climate change in a world of deregulation and corporate concentration make food shocks more common and more threatening. That means these basic food security measures and strong public procurement programme are more and more needed.

### **Time to stop destabilising the climate!**

Food consumption patterns are shifting. The Western diet is spreading, particularly in the global South, bringing with it problems of health but also increasing climate pressure. Commodity traders, agribusiness firms, retail chains, private equity groups and other kinds of corporations that finance and run the industrial food system have a keen interest in expanding business in those very markets, and trade agreements are a great tool for that.

We have to do the math. If we want to deal with climate change, we have to cut consumption of some foods and that means cutting production and trade as well. Luckily, it is quite do-able. But it does require a structural scaling back of “Big Food” and “Big Retail” and those who finance and profit from them. Instead, small- and medium-sized farms, processing and markets, supported by public procurement and financing, could do the job better. It requires a push, and bringing the different struggles around climate change together with the struggles for food sovereignty and against corporate-driven trade agreements.

GRAIN, <http://grain.org/>

Access the publication here: <https://www.grain.org/article/entries/5317-trade-deals-boosting-climate-change-the-food-factor>

- (1) See forthcoming reports from Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), <http://corporateeurope.org>, as well as previous reports from Sierra Club, the Friends of the Earth network, CEO and others, compiled at <http://www.bilaterals.org/?+-climate-+http://www.bilaterals.org/?+-climate-+>; Peter Rossman, "Against the Trans-Pacific Partnership," Jacobin, 13 May 2015: <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/05/trans-pacific-partnership-obama-fast-track-nafta/>
- (2) See La Via Campesina and GRAIN, “Food sovereignty: 5 steps to cool the planet and feed its people”, 5 December 2014, <https://www.grain.org/e/5102>
- (3) See OECD-FAO, *Agricultural Outlook 2015*, 1 July 2015, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/agr\\_outlook-2015-10-en](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/agr_outlook-2015-10-en). Seafood trade has already doubled in the last five years and become the most widely traded protein. For

more info, see Rabobank, <http://rabobank-food-agribusiness-research.pr.co/98495-seafood-a-myrriad-of-globally-traded-aquatic-products>

- (4) See the “expanded” meat chapter in OECD-FAO, op cit.
- (5) See GRAIN, “Food safety in the EU-US trade agreement: going outside the box”, 10 Dec 2013, <https://www.grain.org/e/4846> and FoEE, GRAIN, IATP and others, “EU-US trade deal threatens food safety”, 5 Feb 2015, <https://www.grain.org/e/5129>
- (6) Data are from FAO Global Livestock Environmental Assessment (GLEAM) report, “Greenhouse gas emissions from pig and chicken supply chains”, 2013, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3460e/i3460e.pdf>
- (7) See GRAIN, “Free trade and Mexico’s junk food epidemic”, 2 March 2015, <https://www.grain.org/e/5170>
- (8) See Karen Hansen-Kuhn, “Local economies on the table: TTIP procurement update”, IATP, 13 November 2014, <http://www.iatp.org/documents/local-economies-on-the-table>
- (9) Not all “go local” initiatives in the food sector are better for the climate. But a lot are.

## PEOPLES IN ACTION

### **La Via Campesina: Call to Action for UN climate talks in Paris**

Climate disruptions cause widespread hunger, migration and the worsening of living conditions for millions of rural families, especially women and youth. The global food system imposed on people by Transnational Corporations (TNCs) is both a total failure and one of the main causes of the human-induced climate crisis – dependent on fossil fuels to produce, process and transport. Peasant agriculture and local food systems, by contrast, have proven themselves capable of sustainably feeding people for centuries. La Via Campesina calls on all social movements, people’s organizations, civil society and activists from all over the world to mobilize ahead of the climate talks in Paris in December, in order to advance our proposals and show our opposition to the false solutions TNCs have inserted into the UN. Read the Call out:

<http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/actions-and-events-mainmenu-26/-climate-change-and-agrofuels-mainmenu-75/1853-peasant-agriculture-is-a-true-solution-to-the-climate-crisis>

### **Civil Society says NO to “Climate Smart Agriculture”**

An international statement signed by over 250 organizations and movements from around the world expresses deep concerns about the growing influence and agenda of so-called “Climate-Smart Agriculture” (CSA) and the Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture (GACSA). In the face of the climate crisis, we need a radical transformation of our food systems away from an industrial model and its false solutions, and toward food sovereignty, local food systems, and comprehensive agrarian reform in order to achieve the full realization of the human right to adequate food and nutrition. The over 250 organizations and movements that endorse the statement urge decision-makers at country and UN levels to reject the dangerous rhetoric of Climate-Smart Agriculture.

Read the statement: <http://www.climatesmartagconcerns.info/cop21-statement.html>

**Together, we can cool the planet!**



A new video by La Vía Campesina and GRAIN is part of a campaign to highlight the key role of the industrialized food system to the climate crisis. The video provides accessible information to understand the six main impacts of the agroindustrial food system that contribute to global warming: deforestation, industrial farming, transport, processing, refrigeration and food waste. In the Americas, Asia, Europe and Africa, for many years, people have been criticizing false solutions to climate change like GMOs, the “green” economy, and “climate-smart” agriculture. The solution to the climate crisis is in the hands of small farmers, along with consumers who choose agroecological products from local markets. This is the message to take to the Paris Climate Change Conference this December. Join the campaign! Share this video!

See the video: <https://vimeo.com/140434969>

### **Leave fossil fuels in the ground! A call for an “Annex 0” group, supported up by the Shuar Nationality of Pastaza in Ecuador**

The Oilwatch network has issued an international call for creating an “Annex 0” group at the UN climate negotiations. This would mean a group of peoples or nations acknowledged for their contributions to prevent further climatic changes, for example, with the commitment of leaving fossil fuels in the ground. Initiatives under “Annex 0” include, among others, the rejection of mechanisms such as carbon markets, REDD+, and other false solutions against climate change. The Shuar Nation of Pastaza, in the community of Tsurakú, Ecuador, decided in October 2015 to sign up to this call, hoping that many other peoples and nations will follow. The Shuar maintain territorial control of 443,000 hectares of forests, which since 1975, are under constant threat from oil companies and the Ecuadorian Government. Read the decision of the Shuar [here](#). And read Oilwatch’s call for the creation of an “Annex 0” group [here](#).

## **RECOMMENDED**

### **Palawan: Stop blaming indigenous peoples’ farming practices for deforestation – look at boom crops, oil palm plantations and mining!**

Traditional upland farming implemented through swidden (‘slash-and-burn’) technology (*kaingin*) in The Philippines is demonized and antagonized through restrictive legislation. In Palawan forests are being destroyed by agribusiness (mainly oil palm and rubber), mining enterprises and various forms of land grabbing. Yet, state agencies as well as some Palawan NGOs still view indigenous *kaingin* as ‘illegitimate agriculture’ and as the primary cause of deforestation. However, traditional *kaingin* does not only provide for sustainable livelihoods, but it also benefits Palawan’s indigenous peoples by offering a variety of timber and non-timber goods for subsistence and to diversify production. A ‘ban on *kaingin*’ has nonetheless been imposed with vigor by many municipalities and is being implemented and spread under the current administration. Read the joint press release by CALG (Coalition against Land Grabbing) and NATRIPAL (United Tribes of Palawan) in English [here](#).

### **Seed laws that criminalize farmers: resistance**

Peasant seeds – the pillar of food production – are under attack everywhere. Under corporate pressure, laws in many countries increasingly limit what farmers can do with their seeds. Seed saving, which has been the basis of farming for thousands of years, is quickly being criminalised. A new booklet and poster from La Via Campesina and GRAIN document how big business and governments are moving to stop farmers from saving and exchanging their seeds, and shows how farmers are fighting back.

Access the materials: <http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/main-issues-mainmenu-27/biodiversity-and-genetic-resources-mainmenu-37/1783-new-publication-seed-laws-that-criminalise-farmers-resistance-and-fightback>

### **Brazil: Quilombola communities' planting method preserves vegetation and soil nutrients**

In the middle of the biggest continuous area of Brazil's Atlantic Forest, southwest of Sao Paulo, researchers of the University of Sao Paulo and the State University of Campinas accompany the changes in the region's quilombola communities since 2003. Recent studies of this group strengthened the idea that the planting method adopted by the quilombola communities – generally seen as aggressive due to the slash and burn of native vegetation - has low impacts over forests and animals, just like the farmers were already saying. Through sensors buried in the soil, it was confirmed that the fire used to open an area for agriculture burns mainly the leaves and thin branches. This means that 85% of the vegetation resists and the nutrients remain in the soil. This method, criticised for supposedly harming forest biodiversity, could even serve as a food source for some forest animals. See the article in Operamundi (in Portuguese) at:

<http://operamundi.uol.com.br/conteudo/samuel/40910/sem+abandonar+tradicoes+comunidades+quilombolas+transformam+relacao+com+territorio+no+vale+do+ribeira.shtml>

### **Community Forest Management: elements for its defense and strengthening**

The publication recently launched by the Mexican organization *Otros Mundos Chiapas* is an effort to share many elements and experiences of community forest management. Facing a vast quantity of information disseminated by governmental and non-governmental organizations that side with the mercantilization of nature policies, many forest communities and peoples must confront new processes to defend their land and territory. This informative material seeks to help those who need to go deeper into these knowledges and to contribute through advising on these processes. Moreover, it seeks to help distinguishing between projects that help community forest management and those that only legitimize “green economy” strategies.

You can access the publication (in Spanish) here:

<http://otrosmundoschiapas.org/index.php/temas-analisis/34-34-biodiversidad/2112-manual-gestion-comunitaria-de-bosques-elementos-para-su-defensa-y-fortalecimiento>

---

### **Monthly Bulletin of the World Rainforest Movement**

This Bulletin is also available in French, Spanish and Portuguese

Editor-in-Chief: Winfridus Overbeek

Managing Editor: Joanna Cabello

Editorial Assistants: Elizabeth Díaz, Jutta Kill, Flavio Pazos, Teresa Perez

### **WRM International Secretariat**

Maldonado 1858 - 11200 Montevideo - Uruguay

Phone/Fax: 598 2413 2989

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