



Territories in Struggle against Tree Monocultures, Mega Dams and Protected Areas

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This Bulletin articles are written by the following organizations and individuals: The Independent Producers of Piray Cooperative (PIP) ,Misiones, Argentina; Project SEVANA South-East Asia; Small Farmers’ Movement (MPA – Movimento dos Pequenos Agricultores), Pará, Brazil; Forests and Plantations Campaigner of National Friends of The Earth Indonesia/WALHI; Acción Ecológica, Ecuador; the Volta Miúda Quilombola Association and the Southernmost part of Bahia Quilombola Cooperative, Brazil; All India Forum of Forest Movements (AIFFM); and members of the WRM International Secretariat.

OUR VIEWPOINT

Connecting the Climate Crisis (and the so-called 'Solutions') to Historical Injustices and Oppressions

Fossil fuels are at the root of the climate chaos – but the conditions for this crisis have been created by the interconnections and dependencies between colonialism, racism, patriarchy and class exploitation. To address climate chaos, therefore, it is necessary to address the unequal relationships of power upon which a fossil-fuel dependent capitalism is based.

It is undeniable that the burning of fossil fuels is the root cause of today's climate chaos. Most oil, coal and gas companies have been based from the outset in European and North American countries, relying in historical colonial processes for accessing fossil fuel deposits elsewhere. These companies and their colonial powers are still driving the crisis. It was these countries' colonization of land, labour and cultures that enabled a capitalist economy dependent on fossil fuels to thrive. The climate crisis thus evidences the webs of power and oppressions that have been woven since colonization, as the dependency on fossil fuels is based on the interconnections between colonialism, racism, patriarchy and class exploitation.

The UN's International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has at last highlighted in its April 2022 report what grassroots movements have for decades been calling for: a stop to the burning of fossil fuels. Nevertheless, the world's largest oil and gas companies are projected to spend over US 930 billion dollars on new fossil fuel developments in just 9 years. These companies include Shell (Netherlands/UK), Chevron (US), Eni (Italy), TotalEnergies (France) and ExxonMobil (US) as well as state-owned companies such as Russia's Gazprom, Saudi Aramco, PetroChina and Norway's Equinor. (1)

What's more, the UN climate negotiations and their 'solutions', such as 'nature-based solutions' or REDD+, are allowing governments and companies (and conservation NGOs) from the global North to grab and control yet more communities' territories and forests in the global South. (2) The 'renewable' or 'green' economy is thus based on the same webs of power and oppressions that have given rise to the climate crisis.

Several articles in this *Bulletin* address these issues. One article alerts readers to the severe impacts that the on-going construction of large-scale dams along south-east Asia's Mekong River is posing to communities and to all the interconnected lives this river sustains. Another exposes how the planned expansion of industrial oil palm plantations in the

Brazilian Amazon, in particular by Brazil Bio Fuels (BBF), threatens the forests, Indigenous Peoples and peasant communities still further. Another contribution from Ecuador documents not only the impacts on communities of the violence and injustice adopted by oil palm plantation companies but also community resistance.

Tree plantation companies nonetheless are trying to portray themselves as saviours of the climate crisis. The Declaration of the 15th World Forestry Congress, which gathered together most of the tree plantation and cellulose industries on May 2022, stated that these industries “offer major nature-based solutions to climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation, hunger and poverty.” (3) These ‘solutions’, however, are based on expanding the same destructive model of a fossil-fuel-dependent capitalist economy and therefore focus primarily on how to continue rising corporate profits.

An exposé from Indonesia shows how tree plantation companies APP and APRIL continue to follow a model of violence, pollution and dispossession – despite their ‘green’ commitments and targets. This pattern is also evidenced in an article from Brazil’s north-east, where the on-going communities’ resistance focuses on the serious impacts on their lives and territories from the operations of multinational pulp and paper company Suzano in that state of Bahia.

Corporations and their financial allies are enclosing and designating more forests as Protected Areas so as to claim compensation and mitigation for the pollution they have created elsewhere. With the support from many international conservation NGOs and the UN, these Protected Areas are also often labelled as ‘nature-based solutions,’ which renders invisible the history of violence and racism already experienced by forest communities living in and around these areas. (4) Once again, this illustrates how the climate crisis relies on, exacerbates and perpetuates historical oppressions.

In India, the expansion of Protected Areas in the name of ‘conservation’ has been a blunt violation of Indigenous Peoples’ and forest communities’ rights. An article documenting this also exposes the close linkages between Protected Areas and the expansion of mining and large-scale deforestation.

Large scale concessions – whether for the fossil fuel industry itself or an industry dependent on fossil fuels, for a plantation company, a mega-dam or a project claiming to offset fossil fuels’ pollution – invariably destroy communities, forests, water sources and all the interconnected relationships of life, knowledge and histories bound up in specific places. The violence exerted by concession owners in these places is especially high for women and girls, who are often harassed, abused and raped within the territories that are encroached upon.

Connecting the roots of the climate crisis to historical injustices and oppressions is not only an act of recognition; it is also a way of making visible that such injustices and oppressions still operate today and have even deepened in some places. Addressing climate chaos, therefore, requires addressing the unequal relationships of power upon which a fossil-fuel dependent capitalism is based.

As Miriam Samudio, a founding member of an agroecology cooperative in Misiones, Argentina, which reclaimed land from multinational plantation company Arauco, affirms in an interview in this *Bulletin*:

“I know that despite all the challenges we face on a daily basis, we are able to dream, and to believe that what seemed so impossible can be possible, if we all organize and fight together.”

(1) Global Witness, “IPCC clarion call puts spotlight on fossil fuel industry’s hypocrisy”, 2022, <https://www.globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/fossil-gas/ipcc-clarion-call-puts-spotlight-on-fossil-fuel-industrys-hypocrisy/>

(2) See, for example, WRM, “15 Years of REDD: A Mechanism Rotten at the Core”, 2022, <https://www.wrm.org.uy/publications/15-years-of-redd-a-mechanism-rotten-at-the-core> ; and *WRM Bulletin* 255, “Nature-based Solutions: Concealing a massive land robbery”, 2021, <https://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletins/issue-255>

(3) FAO, 15th World Forestry Congress, “The Seoul Forest Declaration”, May 2022, <https://www.fao.org/3/cc0160en/cc0160en.pdf>

(4) WRM, “Press release: Stop the Racist Conservation Model!”, May 2022, <https://www.wrm.org.uy/action-alerts/press-release-stop-the-racist-conservation-model>

Reclaiming land in Misiones, Argentina: A Fight for Social Justice and a Dignified Life

The Independent Producers of Piray (PIP) in Misiones, Argentina was formed in 2005 to stop the advance of multinational Arauco's pine tree monocultures and reclaim the land. WRM spoke with Miriam Samudio, a key member of the PIP family, to reflect on the process of the struggle and the lessons learned.

The Independent Producers of Piray Cooperative in Misiones Argentina (PIP by its Spanish acronym) was formed in 2005 to stop the advance of pine tree monocultures, and to reclaim land, food security, health and a dignified life. Their constant resistance and unity achieved something rarely seen: the expropriation of land from the multinational industrial plantation company, Arauco (previously Alto Paraná). After 18 years of struggle, there is still a lot to do. The members of PIP continue to work together, keeping the pursuit of social justice at the center.

Resistance against industrial monocultures in Puerto Piray (1)

Alto Paraná S.A. (APSA) is the largest plantation company in Argentina, and one of the largest in Latin America. Since 1996 it has belonged to Chilean group, Celulosa Arauco, which is the second largest pulp producer in the world. Since its creation, Arauco has received numerous tax benefits that have facilitated its continued expansion.

Arauco owns 264,000 hectares of land in Argentina, of which more than 131,000 are planted with tree monocultures. In the province of Misiones, the transnational company manages a pulp mill located in Puerto Esperanza, and two nurseries, a remanufacturing plant, a medium-density fiberboard (MDF) plant, and two sawmills—including the largest one in Argentina—in Puerto Piray. Every day this sawmill releases formaldehyde from its chimney, a toxin that residents describe as “a substance that smells like rotten eggs.”

Currently, Arauco owns almost 12 percent of all land in Misiones. In the municipality of Puerto Piray alone, it owns 63 percent of the land. According to Argentinian news agency, Tierra Viva, it is estimated that each planted hectare consumes three liters of agrochemicals per year, which would mean that the company dumps over 70,000 liters of chemicals in Piray per year. The effects on the population's health include cancer, respiratory and skin infections, deformities, and other ailments. In addition to this serious impact, Arauco has taken over lands from indigenous and peasant communities, destroyed their livelihoods and biodiversity, contaminated their water sources, and evicted their inhabitants.

In the year 2000, in a context of profound social and economic crisis in Argentina, the lack of land and work led families in Piray to start to organize. By 2003, four grassroots groups had been formed, each with between eight and ten families. All of them were united by some collective project: production of honey from bees, sugar cane production, raising chickens or canning jams. Two years later in 2005, the neighborhood groups from Unión, Santa Teresa and Kilómetro 18 formed the organization, the Independent Producers of Piray (PIP). Today, PIP is part of the Land Workers Union (UTT, by its Spanish acronym), which brings together organizations in resistance across the whole country.

From the beginning, PIP's main fight was for land. This is why they had to confront Arauco, the biggest land hoarder in Misiones. The multinational company's pine plantations had not only invaded the territory and surrounded the families, but also caused health problems due to the use of agrochemicals.

After many marches, protests, roadblocks and campaigns at different levels, in 2013, the House of Representatives of the Province of Misiones passed a law that declared 600 hectares of Arauco's land in Piray to be of public interest and subject to purchase and expropriation. The transfer of these lands was scheduled in stages, respecting the timeframes to cut the pine trees that the company had established. The first batch of 166 hectares, originally scheduled for 2013, was not transferred until in mid-2017, and only in 2021 was it definitively titled.

Therein, the families of PIP began to plant corn, beans, sweet potatoes, cassava, watermelon, melon, cabbage and dozens of other crops. Upon the expropriation, each member of the cooperative received one hectare of land on the condition that they work it in an agroecological and community manner. Another 45 hectares are worked collectively for annual crops. And there are lands that cannot be planted yet, as they are degraded and contaminated and in a process of recovery.

Its strong commitment to healthy eating meant that in the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, PIP harvested and bagged more than 30,000 kilograms of cassava and sweet potatoes. These were sent to Buenos Aires and distributed in the network of UTT soup kitchens to alleviate the situation of those who were suffering most from the health emergency. Meanwhile in Piray, they prepared and offered bags of fruits and vegetables, which could be paid for through donation—under the motto “PIP feeds you, door to door.” Those who could not afford to pay got to keep the bags anyway.

But the fight goes on. To date, two thirds of the lands promised to be expropriated have still not been transferred. Arauco should have already transferred a second batch of land—

107 more hectares. This has led peasants to once again organize protests, marches and roadblocks to make their just demands visible.

World Rainforest Movement (WRM) spoke with ***Miriam Samudio, one of the key members of the larger PIP family***, to reflect on the process of struggle and the lessons learned.

WRM: Before the fight for expropriation of lands from Alto Paraná (Arauco), had you had other fights or collective actions? Had you had other experiences?

Miriam: Before the fight for land, as an organization and as neighbors, we were organized in neighborhood commissions. We started to fight for the community's rights. We united the three neighborhoods and we formed the Integrating Committee, which was open to all residents' claims. We fought to have the road repaired, for streetlights, for drinking water. We saw the need to have Primary Health Care Centers (CAPS by its Spanish acronym), first-aid clinics. In other words, we succeeded in getting some basic things for our community, and we did it together as a Neighborhood Committee.

That is when we realized that, organized, we could accomplish a lot more. We realized that the health issue meant we all had something to do together, and that something was to stop the use of agrochemicals in the area, and for the pine trees behind our houses to be removed. All of this made it so that after a few years, as neighbors, we were able to organize and form an independent organization like PIP, the Independent Producers of Piray.

We were greatly encouraged by the occupation and settlement that took place in San Pedro (100 km from Piray). The grit that that organization had...they fought together for the land and they got it. We have supported their last struggles, and that has totally encouraged us to fight for what is ours. We also visited a group of 300 families in Paraguay that had occupied a large soybean estate a while back. They occupied 5,000 hectares. It was not easy; they made several attempts until they were able to stay there, even though they were still in conflict. Knowing about that fight was very motivating.

WRM: In previous conversations with PIP we were told that it was the women (who stayed home working while the men looked for jobs) that started to become aware of the importance of having land. How did that happen?

Miriam: From 1999 to 2000—which was the hardest time due to a crisis that affected not only the country but also the individual provinces—we mothers needed to stay home, and the men (fathers, brothers) went far away to work. In that situation, we would get together at school meetings and in the first aid center, and we would all say the same thing. We

were worried that our children had wounds, respiratory problems, conjunctivitis, diarrhea. They all started having the same symptoms, and that was when the women started to realize that all of this was happening during pine tree blooming season. We realized that the pollen released in that period was harming not only the environment but also the health of our children and the elderly. That is when we realized that something was going on and that we—the women—had to do something.

We thought it would be easy. Obviously at first one cannot see the whole problem. We lodged formal complaints about the health problem to the municipality, and said the pine trees should be removed and that the use of agrochemicals should cease. Over time we started to realize that it was actually a big fight. And that's how it all started. We are always talking about how to have courage and bravery and continue to resist. We feel that it is a battle that will not end soon. We are always looking for strategies to keep moving forward. And oftentimes it is necessary to stop, in order to come back stronger and with more enthusiasm.

I see that the role of women in this struggle for land has been very important; it has been essential. Because we were the ones who—day to day—have had to see how to put food on the table for our children. And so it was as if we embraced the fight for land, because we understood that on that land we could produce food, and as a first step solve the issue of our families' subsistence.

I also know that despite all the challenges we face on a daily basis, we are able to dream, and to believe that what seemed so impossible can be possible if we all organize and fight together—if men and women and the whole community rise up. And we were the ones who started to talk about it and infect other families with our enthusiasm and encourage them to get involved. The conviction we had when we started to organize in our fight for land was very intense and hopeful. The women had a lot of conviction and commitment, and I don't think that has changed. We are always on the frontlines, and we are always cheering people on. While today the work is mutual, and the commitment is shared by both parts—men and women—it is the women who are always ready for action, just like we were at the beginning.

Balancing taking care of our homes, our children and the resistance is a daily struggle for us. We always say to each other “how are things going, how are you?” And we are always in the fight. We are always prepared, always organized. Despite everything we are doing, we also have time for ourselves. In addition to taking care of our homes, doing the cooperative work, organizing the fight, we always seek balance, you know? Attending to each part as is necessary, without neglecting anything.

WRM: How do you make decisions in PIP today? What have been the main changes in the organization since its inception?

Miriam: Decisions have always been made together. Assemblies and meetings of delegates are held; everyone is consulted and then decisions are made in a general assembly. So if we get it right, we all get it right. And if we get it wrong, well, we all get it wrong.

The changes have always been for the better, in the sense that we evaluate what can be improved; as something is proposed it gets changed and improved. But in decision-making, we continue to use that modality. So that everyone has a say, and everyone has the opportunity to make proposals. And so that we can make corrections so as not to make mistakes. And if we make a mistake, we go back and think about it differently.

WRM: What have been the main obstacles that delayed or weakened the fight? How did you navigate them?

Miriam: The main obstacle that arose at first was the community itself. The very people within our organization were afraid of the company because it is a multinational. Some even looked favorably on the company, saying “but they give us work,” without looking at the other part that is behind the work—which was everything that they were destroying. So it was about convincing them. It was about raising awareness among our own comrades and then among the community. Because at first, the community often saw us as trouble-makers, rabble-rousers, picketers. As if they did not understand that the fight was not just for our organization, but for the community itself. So that the community would not disappear, so that we ourselves would not disappear. This was very hard in the beginning.

Then another obstacle was that we had to prepare ourselves, because who knew we were going to confront a multinational corporation and that we had to know some rights and articles of the Constitution? We began to study some things and train ourselves. Over time we have learned a lot of things. But it was necessary to go through that process first, which was also for our own good. Because we grew in that learning process and in that fight, and today that gives us a great deal of strength.

Another obstacle has been burnout, due to the long amount of time we have been in this process. We have been at it for many years. 14 years of uninterrupted struggle means a lot of burnout, and this is why at times there weren't as many of us, and then later we would rebound. But we have always been fighting for the interests of all families. Many times we have had to draw strength where there was none.

In terms of current obstacles, and I think this applies not only to now but to the whole process: Since the company sees that we are an organization, and we continue organizing to fight for the part of the land that belongs to us, what it always does is get to people within the organization to weaken us. They come around every four years during elections to seek votes, and that is always a headache. It seems like we still have not shaken the bad habit that when a politician comes and sounds convincing...I don't know why, but some people within our organization follow the interests of the company. And they start there and divide the waters, until elections are over and things go back to normal. Therefore one obstacle that, incredibly, we still face to this day, is that every time there are governmental elections, there are differences in opinions about the actions we want to take. It is obvious, it is very felt. And after the elections are over, it's like everything calms down and goes back to normal.

WRM: Has there been a conscious learning process throughout the years?

Miriam: I think that the learning process throughout this year—the awareness that each family, woman, man and delegate has gained—is much stronger than when we first started. When we make a claim, when a strategy is proposed, when an issue or concern is raised, it is clear that the comrades have a lot of consciousness when it comes to going for it and making the commitment and knowing how to defend life and our territories. And especially knowing how to accompany or support other organizations, or other communities that are being threatened with eviction.

PIP's strong commitment to continue supporting and standing in solidarity is very noticeable. We see this with the new people who join, because in a matter of no time they are proposing ideas and issues with a lot more strength.

WRM: At PIP you not only decided to reclaim the land and put it to use for food production, but you also created a School for Adults. How and why did you organize this?

Miriam: Yes, apart from the resistance in the territory and the struggle for land, in PIP we also seek options to be able to enjoy our rights. One of these rights is a school for adults, which entailed a long and persistent effort to get core studies approved—the SIPTEP, which is a comprehensive provincial education system. We were able to make our headquarters a nucleus, and it's open to the whole community.

There are many young people who didn't finish their schooling or high school, and a lot of older people who are doing grade school. And for us it is a source of pride to be able to say that we're not only thinking of ourselves but of the community.

Another thing we continue to do in PIP is try to be protagonists within our community around our demands and the rights that we deserve. We are always fighting for health, for roads, for water. For example, a plan to create a PIP Seed Bank is also moving forward, to preserve and revitalize local biodiversity. We try to be this voice in our community, and that also gives us a lot of strength.

WRM: What are the most important things to keep in mind, in terms of self-organization, to start and maintain a fight? What are some things to avoid or be careful of in the process?

Miriam: Whenever we get the chance to have talks or meetings with communities, or with other groups that are also fighting for their land, we try to share our experience with them. Above all, to tell them that if they have conviction, if they truly believe they have the right, if they really embrace that fight with everything—with their heart, soul and consciousness—then they have the chance to form a good group. And they can get more families involved, and engage not only the people in the group but also the community.

One of the things to be very cautious of is to not resolve things individually. There is always a danger there. Sometimes, in an effort to speed things up or to respond quickly, you can make a mistake. This has happened to us; some of our members went through this. So, always try to make decisions together. Move forward only when there is agreement. It doesn't matter if you lose a few more days or a few more weeks; the important thing is that the majority be in agreement, because that's the only way people are going to embrace that commitment and that fight. And they are going to push until they reach their goal.

WRM: Do you think that outside support or solidarity is important? What kind of solidarity have you received that you consider to have been valuable or useful?

Miriam: Outside support is always, always important, whether it is from institutions, society itself, media outlets, officials, or different blocs. Because that's how it is: you must involve everyone. You must put the issue on the table and involve everyone who makes up our society.

I know that for us this has taken time. We have kept resisting, and little by little we have gotten all of those actors on board, who are important and invaluable when it comes to

sharing opinions, making decisions, standing in solidarity and making our struggles visible.

It is always very important to seek allies, especially allies that can shed light on everything being done and everything we are fighting for, so that the issue is discussed in different spaces. This is very important. This has helped us a great deal.

(1) For more information about PIP's fight, please see the following links (in Spanish):

Tierra Viva, Despiertan tierras dormidas, Argentina, 2020, <https://agenciaterraviva.com.ar/despiertan-tierras-dormidas/>

Tierra Viva, Productores Independientes de Piray: "Donde había solo tierra dura, ahora crecen alimentos sanos", Argentina, 2021,

<https://agenciaterraviva.com.ar/productores-independientes-de-piray-donde-habia-solo-tierra-dura-ahora-crecen-alimentos-sanos/>

Alianza Biodiversidad, Nélica Almeida: "La agroecología es traer al corazón esos valores que están en la comunidad", 2022

<https://www.biodiversidadla.org/Defensoras/Nelida-Almeida-La-agroecologia-es-traer-al-corazon-esos-valores-que-estan-en-la-comunidad>

“Energy Trade or Our Life”: The Struggle Against the Dams in the Mekong River Mainstream

The nearly 5,000 km. of the Mekong River, which crosses six countries and sustains the lives and livelihoods of millions, is under severe threat due to the on-going construction of large scale dams. Communities are resisting what could be the final struggle to save some of the remaining parts of the River... of their lives.

The Mekong River is the longest river in Southeast Asia and one of the world's great rivers. Covering a distance of nearly 5,000 km. from its source on the Tibetan Plateau in China to the Mekong Delta, the river flows through six countries: China, Myanmar, Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam.

The people of the Lower Mekong countries (Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam) have been living with a significant challenge in the past three decades due to the rapid development of large hydropower dams, especially on the Mekong mainstream. Large hydro dams block major fish migrations and disrupt this vitally important river, affecting millions of people who depend upon the Mekong for their livelihoods and survival. Territorial issues of sovereignty and land tenure, plus the lack of governance cooperation among the relevant states, are the main barriers for affected communities and civil society movements to strengthen their networks across borders. Yet, despite these barriers, in tandem with the false argument of solving people's energy needs and benefits from the energy trade, social movements have maintained their unity with hope, still.

The upper part of the Mekong River, or “Lancang River” in the Chinese language, is now entirely controlled by the 11 Chinese-owned large hydropower dams. These large dams are, among other impacts, preventing the Mekong mainstream from filling itself along the Thai-Laos border as well as from filling the Tonle Sap (the Great Lake), the major source of fishes, which provides Cambodians with up to 70 per cent of their protein.

Currently, the government of Lao PDR is going full-speed to push seven dams on the Mekong mainstream, after finishing with the first two dams, which are implemented by Thai and Malaysian companies. The energy trade relationship between the Mekong and other Southeast Asian countries is not only a business matter, but it is also firmly pushed by the political interests of many actors. China is now the leading actor in the business with its engagement in many upcoming projects. It is also the most influential in political

ideology and development direction and the biggest lender for landlocked Laos. At the same time, Thailand remains the biggest buyer of Laos' electricity.

Laos is referred to as the "Battery of Southeast Asia" due to the vast amount of planned dams aimed to feed the energy for neighboring countries.

'Net Zero' Emissions by Damming the Mekong river and its people

Since 1993, Thailand has signed five Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) to buy electricity from Laos. In 2016, Thailand agreed to purchase 9,000 MW from Laos over the following two decades. To date, Laos has sold 5,935 MW to Thailand. On March 2022, the Thai cabinet agreed to sign the latest MOU for buying an additional 1,500 MW, making a total of 10,500 MW. The government's argument for the new MOU was "To get clean energy to support Thailand's Net Zero Green Emissions." Therefore, the agreements make way for the Thai business to continue building dams in Laos and allow the announcement of a distorted logic in claiming that the large-scale hydropower dam is a clean energy source.

It is difficult to know the number of people suffering from these mega dams, because of the multifold changes along the river's 4,880 kilometers that cross six countries. The destruction of the biodiversity in the Mekong mainstream, its tributaries, the Tonle Sap (the Great Lake) in Cambodia and the Mekong delta, took away a promising future and the livelihoods of millions. Studies estimate that the decline in the Mekong's fisheries alone will cost nearly USD 23 billion by 2040. This number is not surprising when we look at Tonle Sap, one of the world's biggest inland lakes, with 70% of fish species migrating from the Mekong into the lake during the wet season. By 2019, the Mekong-Tonle Sap flowing system had changed dramatically, leaving the lake's water warm, shallow and oxygen-starved. In that year, fisheries in Tonle Sap were estimated to decline by 80 to 90%. As a result, many people had to move away from their original thriving communities next to the lake, to face an unknown future with almost no choices.

In the past three decades, the governments from the Mekong region have failed to protect the river and its people. The region, under military and socialist governments, was only able to agree on an open-market economy and cross-border trade. However, the lack of governance in this process has left people behind and far apart from one another. Apart from the weak, unreliable process among the Mekong governments as well as from mechanisms such as the Mekong River Commission (MRC), people in the Lower Mekong have also faced Chinese aggressive investments without much explanations and Chinese hydropower businesses, which have rapidly grow. While insisting on its brotherhood with the Lower Mekong countries, China has never accepted any of the impacts of its dams.

While the evidence of the Mekong River's environmental and social destruction is becoming more prominent, the sharp contrast between the businesses getting benefits and the people and the countries getting pain is also evident. In Thailand, the price of electricity is about to reach its highest rate in the coming May 2022. Yet, Thailand has more than 50 per cent of energy reserve margin, as the Thai Power Development Plans (PDP) was based on an overestimated economic growth. The Thai authority insists on raising hydro's power output from seven per cent in 2015 to 15-20 per cent by 2036, in line with its constant support to the hydro businesses, amidst the oversupply of electricity and the destruction of local environments and livelihoods.

For Lao PDR, the most recent news indicates the country's 'debt trap' problem. In 2015, Laos' Gross Domestic Product (GDP) tripled from 2005. It grew as high as 6.3 per cent in 2017. However, it dropped continually to 5.5 in 2019 and 3.3 per cent in 2020. The main driving force for the increased GDP was the foreign investment in large infrastructure projects. However, the Laos government has to invest at least 30 per cent of its GDP to generate six to seven per cent economic growth. Therefore, it turned out that Laos could not generate sufficient high income to pay off its foreign debt. Its debt, especially to China, came from multibillion-dollar projects, such as high-speed rail projects, large hydropower dams, and the energy grid infrastructure. Therefore, the government of Laos does not have many choices than to push further the "Battery of Asia", allowing the private sector and China to design their future development direction.

A Strong Resistance to Save the Mekong River

Since these large dam projects started in the late 1980s, civil society groups and local communities spent the first two decades working to understand the situation and mobilizing to create networks among them, despite all the difficulties due to repression and criminalization. In 2012, a Network of local communities from eight provinces along the Mekong river in Thailand sued the Energy Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) for planning to buy 95 per cent of its electricity from the Xayaboury Dam, the first Lower Mekong dam built by a Thai company. (1) After years of investigation, the administrative court turned down the peoples' attempt to slow down the EGAT. The appeal is still ongoing against this major dam, which operates on a full scale. However, putting the energy authority to court has helped people to understand the energy business more than before. Since then, different communities in the Mekong countries have been trying to deepen the argument of energy needs and benefits from the energy trade with the situation on the ground. NGOs receive more requests to give training workshops on energy and impacts of hydro energy. Many community representatives start to overcome the apparent

complexity of numbers and calculations and come out with their own arguments to support the critical question of “Energy trade or our lives.”

In Thailand, the movements’ momentum has also gained because of the campaign on the upcoming Thai-Laos dams. Among the seven proposed dams, two dams are planned across the two countries' borders, namely Ban Khoum and Pak Chom Dams. Communities can therefore react directly as affected stakeholders.

Recently, the company Energy Absolute Plc asked permission to the Thai Northeastern province to survey the areas affected by the Ban Khoum dam. The 69.6 billion Thai baht (around US 2 billion dollars) project will generate 1,079MW of power, but it would affect about 250,000 people in Thailand and Laos. On Feb 7, 2022, a Mekong conservation group, based in the Ubon Rachathani Province in Northeastern Thailand, submitted a petition to the governor of the Province asking him to reconsider the company’s permission to carry out a survey in the area due to the serious concerns on the project's potential impacts.

On February 13, the governor sent a letter to the conservation group and the company instructing Energy Absolute Plc to suspend its survey because there is no information about a cooperation framework between Thailand and Laos on this project yet.

The Thai communities were able to delay the process in Thailand, at least for a while. However, a similar survey on the Laos side of the border was ongoing, regarding an announcement of a MOU between companies in Laos and Thailand and the Laos government for a feasibility study on these dams from July 29, 2020. According to the MOU, the group planned to finish the feasibility study of the dams within two years.

The movements against the large dams on the Mekong mainstream river could perceive this as the final struggle before the Mekong River becomes too devastated. It is even uncertain if all the seven dams could be built, with the severely drying situation of the river, when all the large dams need the Mekong waters to generate the power. However, in this final turning point, hopefully, the current problems and the knowledge people have gained in the past three decades will enable them to make a more robust mobilization and more comprehensive networking.

It might be the chance for the communities, for once, to lead the mobilization back on track and be able to save some of the remaining parts of the river, of their lives.

Premrudee Daoroung
Project SEVANA South-East Asia

World Rainforest Movement

(1) Video with English subtitles about a fisher community in Thailand in Ubon Rachathani Province, which is the group that submitted the petition against the survey of the company on Ban Khoum Dam. See the video: <https://youtu.be/kCDYwNO7fhk>

Green Deserts: The Advance of Oil Palm Plantations in the Amazonian State of Pará

In Brazil, oil palm plantations are expanding rapidly, mainly in the Amazonian state of Pará. BBF (Brasil BioFuels), the largest oil palm company in Brazil, stands accused of environmental crimes and violence against indigenous, quilombola and peasant communities such as Virgílio Serrão Sacramento, a community linked to the Small Farmers' Movement (MPA).

Violence in rural areas of the Amazonian state of Pará occurred systematically over the course of the 20th century in the name of a certain 'national development' of which the populations that inhabited this territory were not and are not a part. This 'development' continues its advance, in the process killing, poisoning and expelling local populations in a truculent fashion right now in the 21st century. In the lower Tocantins region, this violence presents itself via oil palm (*dendê*, as it is known in Brazil) monoculture, which arrived in the 1980s. Since its arrival, *dendê* and the companies that exploit its cultivation have had a trajectory of murder, labor crimes, human rights violations and various other forms of cruelty brought forth in the name of this 'development'. And despite all this history of violence in peasant, *quilombola* and indigenous territories, the companies in question maintain that they produce 'sustainable' energy and palm oil.

Biopalma da Amazônia SA, a company belonging to the Vale corporation – one of the world's largest mining concerns – in partnership with Grupo MSP, built its first mill to extract palm oil in 2012. The mill is in the municipality of Moju, 150km away from the Pará state capital, Belém. According to Vale, the total investment in the project amounted to US\$ 500 million.

Biopalma was sold to BBF (Brasil BioFuels) in 2020. According to its website, BBF became Latin America's top palm oil producer, and plans to expand oil palm plantations in the states of Roraima and Pará. (1) With the acquisition of Biopalma, BBF took control over an area of 63,000 hectares under cultivation, of which 7,000 hectares belonging to partner family farmers. BBF operates in all the stages of the production process, from the cultivation of *dendê* to electricity generation in thermo-electric power plants.

The purchase process was contested by a suit filed in Rio de Janeiro by a company called Marborges Agroindústria, interested in transparency vis-à-vis an act of business concentration. The company mentions in the suit that as 'reported in the media', BBF

allegedly paid 1 real for Biopalma, despite Marborges having made an unsolicited proposal to pay 20 million reais (more than US\$ 4 million), without the need for Vale to make any financial contribution and with the purchaser taking on all of the palm producer's contingencies.

It was precisely during this period, in the midst of the pandemic, that this company, commanded by foreign investments, brought about an expansion in oil palm plantations, advancing onto areas belonging to peasant communities like Virgílio Serrão Sacramento located in the municipality of Moju, Pará.

Impacts and conflicts

According to the April 5, 2022 issue of *O Liberal* newspaper, BBF, “commanded by Milton Steagall, who is the defendant in dozens of lawsuits, both civil and criminal, has been the object of new accusations. The Federal Public Prosecution Service (MPF) points out a series of irregularities undertaken by BBF in areas that are part of traditional communities, like indigenous peoples and *quilombolas*, without the due legal licensing process for a company in the biodiesel business. Beyond the irregular activities, the company stands accused of environmental crimes, intimidation and violence against communities.” (2) According to the newspaper, the Prosecution Service highlighted the fact that, among other questions, the Turé Mariquita Indigenous Land is being strangled by the company's plantations, without a buffer zone that should exist to keep a distance of at least 10km between the cultivated areas and the indigenous area. There have been several complaints of contamination. (3) The same situation afflicts two *quilombola* communities, also surrounded by oil palm plantations: Alto Acará and Nova Betel. According to the Federal Public Prosecution Service, “Both in the case of the Turé Mariquita Indigenous Land and of the *quilombola* communities, there are also areas bought up by the company that are in fact territories claimed by *quilombolas* and indigenous people”. (4) Along similar lines, in April 2022, the Bujaru and Concórdia *quilombola* communities, also located in Pará, denounced in an open letter the strong contamination and low water levels of the Bujaru River due to BBF and its operations. (5)

It was in this context that the peasants linked to the Small Farmers' Movement (MPA) from Virgílio Serrão Sacramento community (Moju municipality), received a surprise visit on March 23, 2022. A marshal from the agrarian court in Castanhal municipality arrived to serve a preliminary injunction and writ of replevin filed against them by BBF.

Since the end of 2015, the families in question have occupied and lived in the area in peace and quiet, carrying out agricultural activities that respect the environment. Their income comes from the sale of what they produce, like cassava flour and derived

products, Brazil nuts, *açaí*, palm hearts, cocoa, maize, beans, rice, passion fruit, black pepper, chickens, ducks and pigs. In other words, the land guarantees dignity and incomes for the 38 families that live in the community and work the land. The community hosts 13 cassava flour mills where flour is produced collectively. On average, each family produces thirty 60kg sacks of flour per month. The community also has a tree nursery that has produced more than 26,000 *açaí* saplings planted in the families' fields, as well as 30,000 cocoa saplings. All the work is done collectively and with the farmers' own resources.

The families that live in "Assentamento Virgílio Serrão Sacramento" community have a history of struggle for recognition of their land and of demanding that the Pará Lands Institute (ITERPA) inspect the area to go ahead with the regularization of land ownership in favor of the families. According to surveys conducted by the movement, there are no private property deeds for the area occupied, i.e., it is state of Pará public property. This history is borne out by photos, minutes of meetings and occupations of the headquarters of the National Colonization and Land Reform Institute (INCRA) and of ITERPA in Belém (Pará state capital city). The community's families have always denounced the intimidation and threats made by employees of this plantations company, using drones and trucks circulating in the area. They always try to identify community leaders and to scare families into abandoning the area. For this reason, the movement and the families have always asked ITERPA to manifest itself, which had not happened until the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In December 2020, acting in a surreptitious and aggressive fashion, an employee of BioPalma (now BBF) entered the area by car with two security guards, taking photos of people, their homes and fields, and saying that the company owned the area and we should vacate it. This took place when we were experiencing one of the peaks of the pandemic, with several family members feeling ill and frail. It was in this context that the company sought a writ of replevin against the families.

The company uses lies as arguments in an attempt to incriminate the movement and the families that live in the community. They say we are in an area that belongs to them and claim we are committing environmental crimes like the illegal felling and extraction of wood. They also try to accuse us of threatening their employees with machetes.

All of these accusations and lies hurt our dignity, principles and values, for no such things have been done over the years. Never has anyone in the area been charged for this kind of act, a fact borne out by a document of the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) annexed to the suit about deforestation in recent years in the area of the community. On the contrary, we have conducted various

awareness-raising and environmental responsibility activities, with the planting of trees, including fruit-bearing trees, to recover the forest.

We repudiate the criminal and inhumane actions of this company, which has been grabbing land in the state of Pará, committing environmental crimes, violating labor rights and causing irreparable damage to the rivers, streams and springs of our region. (6)

Expansion of the oil palm in the Amazon region: more destruction and land grabbing

The area with oil palm plantations in Brazil has increased in size by some 60% over the last ten years. The largest share of this expansion is in Pará. According to a recent study by Chain Reaction Research, BBF, the biggest palm oil company in Brazil, controls 128,000 hectares of land. Its main customers include Bunge, Cargill, General Mills, Bimbo Group, Hershey, Kellogg's, Mondelez, Nestlé and Unilever. Over the last few years, BBF was considered responsible for the deforestation of 667 hectares, despite the commitments made by industry and the authorities to expand oil palm plantations only in areas cleared prior to 2008. Most of these 667 hectares were deforested between 2019 and 2020. A peak of 165 fire alerts was detected in BBF's oil palm plantations in 2020. (7)

BBF has almost 70,000 hectares planted in the states of Roraima and Pará, but there already exist areas mapped out in Rondônia, Amazonas and Ilha do Marajó (also in Pará), where cultivation plans have international funding guaranteed, according to BBF CEO Milton Steagall. (8)

In December 2021, BBF and Vibra Energia – Brazil's largest biofuel distributor – announced plans to build a 'green diesel' refinery in Manaus, the capital city of Amazonas state. The Manaus refinery still lacks an environmental license, but the intention is to invest R\$1.8 billion (US\$378 million) and begin operations in 2025. In order to reach the necessary production volume, BBF plans to plant 120,000 hectares of oil palm plantations by 2026, in areas yet to be determined. This would increase the amount of land dedicated to this monoculture in Brazil by approximately 60%. (9) Vibra Energia, previously known as Petrobras Distribuidora SA, agreed to sell aviation fuel to be produced at BBF's Manaus bio-refinery, which was already prepared to supply renewable diesel to the company. (10) Steagall has stated that the strategy is to cultivate oil palm in remote areas and transport the oil with the support of Vibra, which has experience in waterborne transport, another source of cost reductions. (11)

The expansion of oil palm plantations in the Brazilian Amazon by companies like BBF has been associated with disrespect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and peasant and *quilombola* communities. Recent allegations include the contamination of rivers and soils,

and damage to peoples' subsistence and health. Numerous conflicts related to land rights have been documented. (12)

The families that live in the Assentamento Virgílio Serrão Sacramento community are living proof that there is a project underway to destroy the Amazon region, and that the justice system often remains blindfolded when crimes are committed by the powerful.

We will continue to fight for land, work and justice, and will not be intimidated by the powerful who try to kill us.

Mateus,

Small Farmers' Movement (MPA – Movimento dos Pequenos Agricultores), Pará, Brazil.

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Expansion of Pulp and Paper Companies APP and APRIL in Indonesia: More Deforestation and Violence

More than 10 million hectares in Indonesia are controlled by the pulp and paper industry, mainly by two giant corporations: APP and APRIL. Despite the companies' commitments to protect forests and peatland, both keep being associated with deforestation, forest fires and to a business model of violence, criminalization and dispossession of forest communities.

The track record of pulp and paper companies of massive deforestation, peatland drainage, severe forest fires, agrarian conflicts, and the criminalization and intimidation of grassroots activists in Indonesia has been well documented. The Indonesian NGO WALHI has a long history of campaigning against the expansion of industrial tree plantations, of supporting communities resisting plantation companies to reclaim their land rights and healthy living spaces, as well as of advocating for better national laws for the protection of forests and community lands.

More than 10 million hectares of land in Indonesia are currently controlled by the pulp and paper industry, with two giant corporations as dominant players: Asia Pulp and Paper (APP – the pulp and paper division of the Sinar Mas group) and Asia Pacific Resources International Limited (APRIL). With the support of abundant state facilities and uninterrupted national and multinational funding, the plantation companies' business in Indonesia continues to maintain its economic and political power. (1)

According to the spatial data collected by WALHI in 2018, APP's concessions overlap with 668 villages, while APRIL's concessions with 114 villages. Land conflicts are the most common issue as well as the criminalization of environmental and human rights activists. And problems are not only around the already established industrial plantations.

Despite the companies' 'green' claims to protect forests and peatland, both have been associated with deforestation. Felled trees feed their big pulp mills and the forests get transformed into plantations. An Indonesian coalition of environmental NGOs, evidenced APP's extensive deforestation in 2008 and 2011. In 2018, Greenpeace reported that since APP launched its 'Forest Conservation Policy' in 2013, almost 8,000 hectares have been cleared by APP controlled companies. Another 2019 report showed how APP was sourcing wood from a company involved in large-scale deforestation, which followed a 2020 report exposing the destruction of peatland by APP related companies, even during the Covid-19

outbreak. (2) Likewise, with a similar path, APRIL has been denounced in 2020 to allegedly violate its own 'zero-deforestation' commitment by sourcing wood from a company clearing forests in Indonesian Borneo. (3)

Forest communities not only see their territories seized and destroyed, and their lives violated, but they also bare the impacts of forest fires resulting from the expansion of the pulp and paper and the palm oil industries. APP and APRIL have allegedly contributed to massive-scale forest and land fires, causing residents to experience Acute Respiratory Infections. In Jambi, the victims have reached to 20,471 people, in Central Kalimantan to 15,138, in South Sumatra to 28,000, and West Kalimantan to 10,010 people. (4)

APP's Tree Plantations: Devastation, Violence and Criminalization

The Sinar Mas group is one of the largest conglomerates in Indonesia and is engaged in clearing forests and destroying peatlands for their several businesses, including Sinar Mas' APP, which is Indonesia's largest pulp and paper producer.

APP controls 2.6 million hectares in Indonesia, spread over 5 provinces, namely: Riau, Jambi, South Sumatra, West Kalimantan, and East Kalimantan. (5) It operates via 31 subsidiary companies in the different provinces. These large areas covered with industrial tree plantations, mainly of acacia, create serious social and environmental harms to the people living in and around the concessions - with unimaginable losses.

In the province of Jambi, APP has three subsidiary companies: PT. Wirakarya Sakti (WKS), PT. Rimba Hutani Mas (RHM) and Tebo Multi Agro (TMA). These companies' plantations are located in the five regencies of Tanjung Jabung Barat, Tanjung Jabung Timur, Muaro Jambi, Batanghari, and Tebo. There are 120 villages affected by these companies' activities in Jambi and several active conflicts - most related to land disputes. In South Sumatra, APP manages its second biggest concession area in Indonesia of around 789,000 hectares as well as a large pulp mill, impacting at least 80 villages. (6)

To cover up its violent track record, APP launched campaigns and took on commitments for 'forest restoration' while simply ignoring the social and environmental crimes, the conflicts, and the serious violations of human rights that they are responsible for. Widespread criticism and community opposition pushed APP to launch a Forest Conservation Policy (FCP) on February 2013. This Policy included a commitment to 'zero deforestation', with an immediate moratorium on logging in forests and peatlands extended to all its suppliers. The Policy states that the company should protect high conservation value (HCV) areas and high carbon stock (HCS) forests and recognized that

Indigenous Peoples and local communities may have customary rights to land overlapping with its pulp plantations. (7)

However, a 2019 report by a coalition of Indonesian organizations, including WALHI, and the Environmental Paper Network, found APP to be involved in hundreds of conflicts with communities across the five provinces. (8)

In 2015, only two years after the Policy was launched, Indra Pelani, a local farmer and activist central in the struggle to reclaim land grabbed by APP in the province of Jambi, was tortured and killed by security personnel employed by WKS, a controlled supplier of APP. (9)

On March 2020, WKS used drones to spray herbicides and poison villagers' crops in Sumatra, resulting in big losses for the peasants. Residents from the Lubuk Mandarsah village denounced that the company sent security officials door to door to scare them into leaving the area, as an intimidation tactic. This village is in conflict with the company since 2007 to reclaim back their land. (10) In October 2021, two residents who were clearing the land of a member of the Sekato Jaya peasant union –which was created in 2013 to organize the resistance to get their land back-, were arrested and detained by company security guards.

Apart from the conflicts and criminalization of activists, pulp and paper companies keep destroying forests and peatlands. In West Kalimantan, there are 41 timber companies with an area of 1,901,491 hectares, and 302,498.59 of them are peatlands. Likewise, in Riau, 803,708 hectares of concessions of APP's affiliated companies are located on peatlands.

Based on an assessment done by WALHI West Kalimantan, there are three business patterns of timber plantation companies:

- 1) The granting of permits is oriented toward high natural timber potential areas (forests),
- 2) The granting of permits ignores peatlands and protected animal habitats, and
- 3) There is an indication that companies are doing 'land banking' due to the uneven comparison between the area of given permits and the area of planting. (11)

While the established plantations are amounting to only 45% of the set plans, the pulp mills' capacity is rising up. Forests become then targets to cover for the shortage of raw material to satisfy the demand of the expanding pulp mills.

In South Sumatra, APP's already massive paper mill Ogan Komering Ilir (OKI) is set to grow triple in size, which will certainly create devastating consequences for the people and the environment, particularly peatlands. The escalation of land conflicts, forest fires,

and the threat to forests on a large scale will be certain consequences in the near future. This expansion plan might also put pressure on all subsidiaries of industrial tree plantations, as demand will highly increase. This, in the end, will add pressure for further ignoring social and environmental commitments as well as existing rules and legislations.

Furthermore, 'forest restoration' activities on a wide scale actually prolong the chain of conflicts. It is another way of expropriating forests belonging to Indigenous Peoples and local communities in Indonesia. APP's 'green' and 'sustainable' claims are nothing but a greenwashing agenda and a strategy to improve the image of the company. Restoration of areas with important and critical functions, both within and outside the company's concessions, is the *responsibility* of the permit holders themselves, including APP and APRIL.

APRIL: Greenwashing its Expansion

APRIL is Indonesia's second largest pulp and paper producer and operates one of the world's largest paper mills in Riau Province, Sumatra: Riau Andalan Pulp & Paper (RAPP). Of the 1 million hectares of land APRIL Group manages, 480,000 hectares is used for plantations. Between 2008 and 2011, APRIL suppliers cleared at least 140,000 hectares of forests, mainly to satisfy the wood demand for APRIL's pulp mills. (12)

The Indonesian NGO JIKALAHARI as well as WALHI, contested APRIL's claim of successfully restoring 58.21 hectares and increasing 42 species of flora and fauna with its Riau Ecosystem Restoration (RER) program. APRIL states that the increase in species in the RER concessions, which cover an area of 130,789 hectares, indicates that forests have regained their biodiversity. However, the activities of 11 companies affiliated to APRIL, which cover an area of 242,692 hectares on the Kampar Peninsula, including peatlands, have destroyed more flora and fauna when converting these areas into acacia and eucalyptus plantations. (13)

Since 2002, the Kampar Peninsula has slowly been destroyed due to the activities of APRIL. Nine of the 11 companies affiliated to APRIL in the Peninsula were involved in corruption by bribing the Regent of Pelalawan to obtain permits and cut forests. (14)

APRIL also committed to restore 433.49 hectares of burned peat in 2015, which is in line with the legal requirements. Yet, this was never materialized. Instead, APRIL fought the government in court so that the burned areas would not be considered as having peat protection functions. On top of this, APRIL also plans to expand its pulp mill operations in Sumatra's Riau province for 2025. It is estimated that the mill expansion, if fully

implemented, would increase APRIL's annual wood consumption in Indonesia by more than 50%. (15)

APRIL's campaigns and programs for 'restoration' are thus also an attempt to deceive the public and keep expanding their destruction.

The 'Right to Carbon': Another Land Grabbing Mechanism

In 2021, the Presidential Regulation No. 98 concerning the Implementation of Carbon Economic Values, established that the right to carbon is the authority of the state (*Hak Menguasai Negara* in Bahasa Indonesian). This means that each licensed entity that would like to get involved in carbon trading must be (non-)regulated through a market mechanism. Those having most access to getting and managing the carbon rights are in the corporate sector, amplified by their capital, networking, market knowledge, etc. The classification of the 'right to carbon' as 'the authority of state' is an attack on Indigenous Peoples and local communities who have been coexisting with, protecting, managing, and owning their customary forests for generations. This is a direct threat for land grabbing as more companies will propose Ecosystem Restoration Permits to get 'the right to carbon' and brand their image in the world market, while gaining abundant profits from carbon trading and land control.

Environmental, 'green' and sustainability commitments embraced by the pulp and paper industry, in particular APP and APRIL, are false commitments; are part of a political image branding or *gimmick* of the market, which aims to maximize their profits. Those commitments only aim to satisfy the consumers' and investors' consciousness in order to keep buying and investing. Those same commitments allow the same destructive practices to continue and expand, while allowing various unlawful practices and violations of human rights. We cannot rely on market schemes and voluntary instruments. The impunity for corporate crimes must end now.

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Communities resisting the impunity and impacts of oil palm growers in Ecuador: Cases from Esmeraldas

There are currently 270,000 hectares of oil palm plantations in Ecuador. The resistance processes of the communities of La Chiquita, Guadualito and Barranquilla de San Javier in the region of Esmeraldas continue to generate outrage and solidarity among other communities, and internationally.

Ecuador is the fourth largest producer of crude palm oil in Latin America. Its oil palm plantations cover almost 300,000 hectares. Behind these figures is a tale of territorial appropriation and rights violations.

The first oil palm plantations were established on the central coast of the country. Due to its temperatures and levels of precipitation, the best area for production was between Quinindé and La Concordia. This area is known as the “Western Block,” and in 2005 it accounted for 83% of the total area of oil palm in the country—with the largest production being in Quinindé, Esmeraldas Province.

Meanwhile in 1978, the Ecuadorian Institute of Agrarian Reform and Colonization (IERAC, by its Spanish acronym) granted a title of 10,000 hectares each to two large oil palm growers. This land was in the Ecuadorian Amazon, in the provinces of Orellana and Sucumbíos. The landowners ignored the presence of the indigenous Quichua and Siona-Secoya peoples as well as their uses of the forest. Yet the 2005 palm oil census counted 15,187 hectares of oil palm in this “Western Block” (in the Amazon region). This suggests that, at the time of the census, not all 20,000 hectares that were granted had been cultivated (1).

The major expansion of oil palm plantations began around 1998 in the northernmost part of Esmeraldas Province, in an area called San Lorenzo. This is part of the Chocó bioregion, which stretches from Panama to Ecuador. Investors were attracted to this area because soil was depleted in other areas, and because it was cheaper for palm growers to buy new land than to try to recover lands impoverished by oil palm monoculture. In northern Esmeraldas, they had good land, ideal temperatures and cheap labor (2).

In this expansion process, the state’s role has been to facilitate companies’ access to land—whether by permitting changes in land use, by directly granting companies land or ignoring ancestral land ownership, and, in the last decade, by providing incentives and credits to install plantations. The Agrarian Reform Law of the 1960s encouraged this

process. If a person wanted the state to grant them a piece of property on which they had lived for years, they had to prove that it was productive, or else fallow and potentially productive. This was proven through deforestation of at least 50% of that area. This policy served to incentivize deforestation in the country.

Starting in 2000, incentives and state policies that encouraged the expansion of oil palm appeared. In particular, the 2002 Executive Decree N° 2691 by former president Gustavo Noboa changed the land use, and established that 50,000 hectares of the Chocó forest would be for agricultural purposes (3). This gave logging and palm companies the impetus to install their plantations on indigenous, peasant and Afro-Ecuadorian lands—which the state considered to be “fallow.”

In 2003, the companies, Palmeras del Pacifico and Energy & Palm, began to buy lands within communal territories, violating the 1998 Constitution, the Land Law, ILO Convention 169, and other international treaties on territories and collective rights.

The strategy of the companies consisted in approaching individual people in the communes to buy their land. A company lawyer would complete the corresponding paperwork at the INDA (National Institute of Agricultural Development) in order to grant individual titles—thus breaking with the collective organization of land. This same strategy was used with collectively-titled territories, because the State has still not created a registry of collective lands to guarantee collective rights—in breach of ILO Convention 169. Those individual agreements, taken together, allowed the companies to acquire large extensions of land.

Similarly, the new law that promotes African oil palm—which was drafted *by* agribusiness *for* palm growing companies—ignores communities and nature.

There are currently 270,000 hectares of oil palm plantations in Ecuador. With 118,000 hectares already, Esmeraldas is the area of greatest expansion. Of the total palm oil produced in Ecuador—around 500,000 tons per year—half is for domestic use and the other half is exported to the European Union and countries in the region, such as Mexico and Colombia.

Plans for future expansion are focused on the Amazon, where deforestation has been preparing the ground for the entry of oil palm growers.

Impacts on territories and communities

The impacts of oil palm monoculture occur throughout the process: they begin with deforestation and land dispossession, continue with the establishment of large-scale oil palm monoculture plantations, and increase with the installation of oil extractors.

The contamination of soil and water due to the use of large amounts of agrochemicals on plantations affects not only the environment, but also populations who depend on those water sources for their survival.

In order to process the palm fruit, it is necessary to install extractive plants close to the plantation, since the fruit must be processed shortly after cultivation. The extractive plants emit pollutants and pestilent gases into the environment. On a visit to the community of El Guineo in the province of Guayas, we felt as if we could not breathe. The extractive plant was installed in the village, next to the school. As is often the case, nobody keeps official statistics on the health impacts of these operations. But we found that the children had low academic performance, because the stench is unbearable to the point of affecting health.

Furthermore, the extractive plants emit liquid waste—which, in some cases, is dumped untreated into rivers and streams. After research and visits to these extractive plants in Ecuador by the NGO Acción Ecológica, not a single case is known in which nearby watercourses are not contaminated. Fish die or decrease in number, and those that remain are contaminated.

Solid waste from the extractive plants is sometimes placed around the crown of the palm trees in the field, but other times it is left piled up in the fields. This produces blowflies that are very bothersome; they bite cattle and people, and they also travel long distances and affect neighboring populations.

Another impact has to do with the rights of workers. Infractions are common. There is no safety for women at work. On one visit, a woman talked about a sexual violation that occurred within the plantation. There was no investigation or police report. The only measure the company took was to fire the woman who had been assaulted, and thereafter to no longer hire women. These cases are very shameful for women to talk about, and they also know in advance that nothing will be done to protect them; so many times they decide not to talk about it at all. Another accusation is that when the company fires employees, it does not always pay them the corresponding settlement. In April 2022, the Energy & Palm company faced a strike by its workers, who denounced infractions and unlawful wages. In response, the company agreed to increase wages somewhat, but it ordered labor sanctions for the workers who led the strike.

On the other hand, the way in which the companies obtained the lands involved the creation of a corrupt system promoted by these large oil palm companies—both at the governmental level and within the communities.

Whenever a company shows an interest in acquiring their territories, community leaders fear for their lives. It has gotten to such an extreme, that one community leader—fearing for his life—made a public statement that he had no enemies or debts, and that if anything happened to him or his family, the only responsible party would be the company.

A bad deal for peasants

During the former government of Rafael Correa, the National Finance Corporation launched a policy to give incentives to small palm producers. Credits were given directly to producers who had a minimum of 20 hectares; of the 20 hectares, 10 would be used for palm and the other 10 for complementary tasks. The companies hired negotiators who went to the territories to convince the peasants, telling them that the State was offering loans and incentives. This was how they convinced families to plant palm on their land.

It was a perverse system based on mortgage credits, wherein the land was used as collateral for payment. With this credit, the producers obtained the seedlings, the technological package and the training—which the palm company sold. Therefore, the loan never ended up in the hands of the peasants; it went directly to the company. Five years later, at the time of harvest, the company had exclusive rights to buy the peasants' production. If a peasant found they could sell for a higher price somewhere else, or if they suspected that the palm company's scale to weigh the fruits had been tampered with, they had no recourse. Peasants were obligated to sell to the company under the company's conditions. Although these kinds of credits no longer exist, the peasants that received them continue to be chained to the same oil palm company.

It is always the peasants who lose. Around 2015, when bud rot disease appeared—affecting thousands of hectares of oil palm—it was the indebted small farmers who lost everything. They were the ones who had obtained the loan, used their land as collateral, and now could not sell the product. While the big companies also lost part of their production, they did not lose their land, and they have other economic support.

So far, there is no cure for bud rot disease; the only thing that can be done is to cut down the tree and plant again. The plantations in Quinindé in southern Esmeraldas were completely destroyed. Those who had some extra capital after cutting down the palm trees could seek other alternatives—such as planting ginger, cardamom, cacao, vanilla, cinnamon, etc. Small farmers lost everything.

Large palm growers like to talk about how oil palm promotes development and supports peasants. But they do not say that it is just a few entrepreneurs who have most of the land. There are many small farmers, but the land is concentrated in the hands of giant oil palm companies.

Cases of resistance in Esmeraldas Province

There are two large areas in Esmeraldas Province where oil palm monoculture has been expanded in recent years: in Quinindé in the south, and in the cantons of Eloy Alfaro and San Lorenzo in the north—where there have been emblematic resistance movements in the communities of La Chiquita, Guadualito and Barranquilla de San Javier.

The case of the communities of La Chiquita and Guadualito

The resistance of La Chiquita, an Afro-Ecuadorian community, and Guadualito, an indigenous Awa community, began in the 1990s. These communities began to have problems when the government opened the highway, and timber began to be extracted from the forest. Immediately afterwards, the same company from the Peña Durini forestry group (which also had shares in palm companies) installed oil palm plantations. This violated the rights of these communities, in particular their collective rights to territory, environment, health, food and access to clean water (4).

From the beginning, the communities filed lawsuits against the state for contamination produced by the palm oil company. And they won all their cases, since they easily demonstrated how their rights had been violated. Despite this fact, the rulings never ended up being enforced. Nobody made the companies comply. The justice system gave in to pressure from big agribusiness powers, and reparations never reached La Chiquita and Guadualito. One of the 2018 lawsuits included the violation of the rights of nature, and once again the communities won; but so far, no remedial actions have been implemented. Some of these actions are to be carried out by the company, and others by the state—as part of its responsibility for allowing these rights violations to occur.

The ruling included actions such as building a health center, building a bicultural school, restoration of forests with native species, and removal of palm trees over water sources. Communities denounce the fact that these actions have not been carried out.

And despite the fact that there was a general feeling in society that justice had been served, in reality it had not for the families and for these two communities. Dividing responsibilities between the state and the company diluted the issue, and nobody complied. Many people ended up with serious health problems, and this was neither recognized nor compensated. But despite the disillusionment with the process and the

fact that the Courts of Justice turned a deaf ear to the claims of community members, La Chiquita and Guadualito continue to demand justice and compliance with this ruling.

It was the state that facilitated the company's access to the territory. And now the state is also responsible for not having properly monitored the company's obligations, for having allowed the felling of primary forest, and for having abandoned environmental control over the pollution generated by this agro-industry. Now, it is also responsible for having allowed the sentence not to be carried out yet, because several of its ministries have direct sanctions to comply with.

As a result, oil palm continues to advance. Oil palm oil companies have a lot of power at the national level. Organizations such as Acción Ecológica, as well as the community itself, have filed complaints with the Ministry of the Environment and Water (MAAT), but there has been no effective response. MAAT has not conducted water or soil studies; it has not spoken with affected people. Their only dialogue is with the company.

The case of Barranquilla de San Javier commune

On June 2, 2000, the Barranquilla de San Javier commune obtained a community territorial title to 1430 hectares. However, it is being gradually surrounded by advancing oil palm plantations owned by Energy & Palm of the La Fabril group, and these plantations are even infiltrating their territory.

In 2017, the Ministry of Agriculture carried out a multi-temporal study of land ownership in communal territories in Barranquilla de San Javier, which determined that the community's territory is 1518 hectares, and that Energy & Palm's land overlaps this land on 251 hectares.

Based on this report, the commune began to demand their territorial, collective, labor, and environmental rights from the company. Roundtable discussions were established but ended up failing, due to the ongoing deception and lack of compliance on the part of Energy & Palm. Then, exercising its legitimate right to resist as guaranteed by the constitution of Ecuador, the commune blocked one of the plantation access roads.

The company's reaction was to request precautionary measures—which are reserved to prevent human rights violations. In another aberrant act, the San Lorenzo court granted these precautionary measures to the company; military and police then came in helicopters and used excessive force to evict the community members.

Thereafter, the commune began a legal strategy to recover their territory. However, this information was leaked, and the company—which knew about the Ministry of

Agriculture's report—filed a civil lawsuit for losses and damages in the amount of \$321,000. The lawsuit was against the commune's leaders, regardless of whether they had been present in the direct action or not. The company alleged losses because it had not been able to harvest during the direct action.

The appeal hearing, which took place in April 2022, was suspended shortly after it began—for unclear reasons—following the defense attorney's arguments. There was no doubt that the community was empowered with the support of the Ombudsman's Office, Ecuadorian organizations and international observers. Suspending the hearing after the community's arguments was nothing more than a maneuver to make it easier for the company to prepare its defense.

The community is waiting for a new date to resume the process. It is important to bear in mind that this wears on the communities. It is very exhausting and hopeless to organize, leave their work to travel to the capital and participate in these legal matters, and see it come to nothing. The state, which should be watching over the interests of its inhabitants, is taking the side of the companies.

The racism against these Afro-descendent communities and their vulnerability with the company is also evident. But the judges who have never faced consequences and have always ruled in favor of the companies, now know that the national and international community is alert—so that there are no new violations of communities' rights for resisting the invasion of oil palm into their territories. The Barranquilla case has awoken solidarity among peoples and provoked international outrage. The United Nations special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mary Lawlor, has expressed concern about the situation of these communities defending their rights; and she has expressed indignation about Energy & Palm/La Fabril's lawsuit against the commune. Similarly, a coalition of organizations sent a letter to Nestle denouncing these facts, and demanding that Nestle make sure that the company that supplies its palm oil does not violate collective and territorial rights. Among those who signed this letter is Michael Forst, former UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders (5).

Certification: another tool used against communities

The palm industry in Ecuador tries to market itself as sustainable and differentiate itself from Asian palm oil. One way to achieve this is through certification, in particular through the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). But certification does nothing more than silence the complaints of communities.

It is difficult for communities to understand the logic of certification. When a community learns that a company invading its territory is certified, it does not have the necessary information or means to file a formal complaint. The system is not designed for communities to file complaints. In many of these communities, there is no electricity or internet access. How does the RSPO expect a community in these conditions to file a complaint through an online form, and attach their complaint digitally? Knowing that this is not feasible in most cases, certifying companies transfer the reporting responsibility onto communities.

Another tactic certifying agencies use to weaken resistance is to schedule meetings in the city. Or if the certifier goes to the region, they only meet with people who they know in advance are going to give a favorable opinion about the company. The RSPO is responsible for denying certification to companies that are in conflict with local communities, or that have a history of deforestation and pollution. If this really were the guideline, certification of palm monocultures would not exist.

The company, Energy & Palm of the La Fabril group, exemplifies this. The RSPO is well aware of the devastating impacts of oil palm plantations, and yet it continues to give the “green” stamp to companies that do nothing but destroy territories. When a journalist explained the situation in Barranquilla to the RSPO, detailing the impacts that communities had reported, the RSPO representative simply replied that they had not received any complaints via their website.

Organized resistance

Despite the fact that communities feel there are no laws to protect them, and that the state is complicit with companies, there are always resistance processes and alternatives to the industrial monoculture model within the territories. In the ways they can, communities resist the plunder and contamination caused by oil palm companies.

In 2018, the Ecuadorian Network on Alternatives to Palm Oil was formed, following a national meeting with affected communities. Its purpose is to exchange information and coordinate actions.

The resistance is getting stronger and is generating solidarity within regional and international organizations, which are shedding light on cases like the ones of communities in Esmeraldas.

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- (3) Ecuador: palma africana y madereras en la Bio-región del Chocó. WRM 2003. <https://www.wrm.org.uy/es/articulos-del-boletin/ecuador-palma-africana-y-madereras-en-la-bio-region-del-choco>
- (4) On the page that shows Superintendence of Companies, <https://www.supercias.gob.ec/portalscvv/> one can see the same names of shareholders in the two company groups.
- (5) Open letter from civil society to consumer goods companies re: concerns over Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation by palm oil company in Ecuador <https://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/default/files/documents/Open%20letter%20to%20consumer%20goods%20companies%20re%20concerns%20over%20SLAPP%20by%20palm%20oil%20company%20in%20Ecuador.pdf>

Quilombola Communities' Resistance Against Suzano Company in the Southernmost part of Bahia, Brazil

A conversation with the president of the Volta Miúda Quilombola Association and of the Southernmost part of Bahia Quilombola Cooperative revealed how Suzano, the world's largest paper and cellulose corporation, continues to operate with serious violations and illegalities. Communities keep fighting to reclaim their lands back.

In the southernmost part of Bahia, Brazil, the advance of industrial monoculture plantations of eucalyptus has occurred in indigenous and quilombola lands, among others. These traditional peoples and populations have fought for decades for recognition of their lands and for the right to remain on them.

In 2019, Suzano Papel e Celulose became one of the world's largest corporations in the pulp sector through the acquisition of Fibria, itself the result of a merger between Votorantim Celulose e Papel and Aracruz Celulose, in 2009. Currently, it holds 2.1 million hectares in seven states in Brazil (Espírito Santo, Bahia, Maranhão, Ceará, Pará, Mato Grosso do Sul and São Paulo) and owns a 50% stake in Veracel Celulose in Bahia. Suzano has 1.3 million hectares of eucalyptus plantations and operates 10 pulp factories.

As a result of having absorbed many other companies, Suzano has accumulated immense social and environmental liabilities, a large history of violations and illegalities, as a result of its promotion of a nefarious model of large-scale industrial eucalyptus monoculture over the course of several decades. The *quilombola* communities of the southernmost part of Bahia know this reality well, for they are part of this history.

On March 29, 2022, a public hearing was held during which the Federal Public Prosecution Office (MPF) and the Public Defense of the Union Office (DPU) for the first time opened up a space for *quilombola* communities to give testimonies on the social, environmental, economic and cultural impacts they face as a consequence of eucalyptus monoculture in the southernmost part of Bahia.

WRM talked to **Célio Pinheiro Leocádio – president of the Volta Miúda Quilombola Association, in the municipality of Caravelas, and of the Southernmost part of Bahia Quilombola Cooperative** – about communities' incessant struggle in defense of their territory and to preserve what still remains of their culture in a region where the pulp industry has caused immense damage.

WRM: What is the greatest challenge currently facing the *quilombola* communities of the southernmost part of Bahia in terms of their territory and, more broadly, in terms of their struggle for their rights?

Célio: In the southernmost part of Bahia there are just eight *quilombola* communities certified as such by the Palmares Cultural Foundation, the agency that recognizes *quilombola* communities. (1) They are: Candido Mariano, Rio do Sul and Helvécia, in Nova Viçosa municipality; Volta Miúda, Mutum and Naiá, in Caravelas municipality; Vila Juazeiro in Ibirapuã and Mota in Itanhém. But we know there exist many other communities that are uncertified.

Out of the eight, only five communities have managed to open territorial demarcation processes with INCRA [National Colonization and Land Reform Institute], and that was over ten years ago. The only one with the report already published and with people contesting it is Mota community. Despite the fact that INCRA is advancing the rights of this community, it is a curious situation: in the area surrounding Mota community, the activity is agriculture and livestock rearing, not eucalyptus monoculture; it does not affect Suzano. The other communities have everything ready, but we know that at present, INCRA is holding back the communities' reports for them not to be published, and we don't know the reason. On account of this, Volta Miúda community has a public civil suit ongoing since 2019 with the Federal Public Prosecution Office.

Almost all the *quilombola* communities in this territory live surrounded by eucalyptus. The communities of Mutum and Naiá were practically made extinct by eucalyptus monoculture.

All the *quilombola* communities of the region are being violated and massacred by eucalyptus monoculture. Not a single community is living, so to speak, in "comfort". Today, all of them are vulnerable to the same question and, to make matters worse, the public policies to which we are entitled are not carried out.

Volta Miúda, Rio do Sul and Vila Juazeiro are the three communities that are most exposed to eucalyptus, because the eucalyptus is on top of people's properties and homes. They are exposed to the poisons they put onto the eucalyptus and to the loss of their springs. We no longer have any living springs inside the communities.

The community of Helvécia, which is more compact, does not have eucalyptus very near it, but we do know that even in the cemetery the eucalyptus is right on top, leaving no room for the community to say: "Look, we need an area here to enlarge the cemetery".

Because many people are dying in their community, and most people, including from other communities of ours, are buried in the Helvécia cemetery.

WRM: What is the link like between the *quilombola* communities of the southernmost part of Bahia and their territory, and how did this change with the arrival of eucalyptus monoculture?

Célio: Look, to tell the truth, my age, I'm 44, is practically the time since when eucalyptus arrived here in the region. But I remember that we've had much better days, that we've had our natural habitat, when we lived with plentiful production of everything. Today, the degradation that was brought about with this monoculture of eucalyptus has in fact changed the lives of all of us.

The river that is on the border of Caravelas municipality with Nova Viçosa municipality, which is my community's river, used to be full of fish. Every year during flood season, we'd put a net where the water flowed. Next day we'd go there with donkeys and baskets and we'd come back with our baskets full of freshwater fish, back when we had flood seasons. Nowadays, none of that exists any longer. This river, which was hard to cross because of how deep it was, today we walk in it with water up to our knees or even below our knees. Now, 95% of the springs have died, and the lagoons don't exist any more.

So this is something we can see that has changed. We look forward to having our territory in our hands so that these degraded areas are rehabilitated once again. Maybe not for me to enjoy, given my age. But our thinking relates to the people yet to come, to the new generation, so that they may enjoy what we enjoyed in the past. But this won't happen if the State continues to approve environmental licenses for more plantations.

From the land, we've had plenty of food. Our seasons of the year were regular, there was the right time to plant things that go under the ground, like peanuts, potatoes. There was the season to plant maize. In the months of February and March the time begins – used to begin – to plant all else, beans, maize, pumpkin. The time of year to plant the maroon cucumber and okra is more from September onward. Today, we no longer manage to do this, many people irrigate their crops, but we didn't have this custom of irrigating, and if we were to try that today we wouldn't manage, because there's no water. Our production was plentiful, of all crops, we didn't use to buy these things, none of these we're talking about. That was the way my parents and grandparents did it. I remember my grandfather leaving here, my community, to go to the Nanuque market. He would take his produce and barter it for things they didn't have here in the territory. So I say to you, today there's none of that any more. Can you imagine someone who lives in the countryside having to buy cassava flour? Buying maize to feed chickens, buying beans to eat?

WRM: At the public hearing you gave your testimonies about the impacts of eucalyptus monoculture. Beyond that, what demands did you present to the Federal Public Prosecution Office?

Célio: The Public Prosecution Office made available five seats for each community. We registered five people from each community, which meant 55 people were present at the hearing, plus others who had been interested in registering separately. The communities that attended represented about 8800 *quilombolas* from the eight communities. (2)

On the day, each community took a certain number of issues to raise at the hearing. In other words, each community spoke on behalf of all eight communities. One example: Volta Miúda, my community, had three issues to raise. One of them was the demarcation of our territories, and we made this demand to the Public Prosecution Office about the process of demarcation on behalf of all the communities. And beyond the demarcation process, also considering everything I've been reporting to you, we questioned something. We argued that since communities have their certification as *quilombolas*, and their territories have been studied with an official map drawn up by INCRA, then why don't the Public Prosecution Office and the Public Defense of the Union Office file a lawsuit to make Suzano start vacating the communities' territory?

And furthermore, Suzano has to pay compensation for the use of our territory. And since we have all this ready, it is not necessary for us to wait for demarcation to be finalized for us to have rights of use of our territory. We also said that over the course of this whole period, the communities were not able to produce their own food as they had always done. So what the corporations would have to do is to vacate our territories so that the communities may restart their production, as they used to do.

The third point we raised is the question of the water crisis that the communities face at present, with the impacts on springs and animal deaths that harm the communities. And we also raised the question of why INEMA (Institute of the Environment and Water Resources), which is the state agency that grants the environmental license for the company to do all of its disaster, grants a water concession for the company to make use of what is left of our rivers and fill gigantic trucks with water for their plantation, while the communities can't use it because INEMA won't grant us a concession! What kind of distortion is that, you see?

We also raised the fact that currently the communities of the southernmost part don't have access to electricity. Today, there are a number of families surrounded by eucalyptus where children and adults need to use nebulizers. They have to walk 15 to 20 kilometers

for people to get their nebulization because they have no electricity to be able to use a nebulizer at home!

Another super-important point was that the communities that weren't in attendance could watch the proceedings on YouTube, because these communities were interested in taking part in the hearing. Only we don't have that opportunity, because the eucalyptus gets in the way. Even this medium of communication the eucalyptus hinders because the plantations interfere with the mobile telephone and internet signals, leaving communities isolated.

We raised the question that when the companies arrived in this region, they said they'd bring many jobs to the communities, and this hasn't happened. In one community, out of more than a thousand people, there are four or five who are working. We also raised the expulsion of people, of the young people from the communities, the rural exodus. Day after day, this emptying is taking place, people going to the peripheries of major urban areas.

We raised the right to come and go that communities today don't have. The roads all blocked by eucalyptus. During felling season, the roads are taken over, people from the communities cannot pass, neighbors have to wait half an hour to pass sometimes. Furthermore, there are many other hazards people experience. There is the armed militia of the Suzano corporation, that prevents free circulation in the territory. Also, owing to the fact that the eucalyptus grows over the roads, blocking the view, a child was beaten to death by criminals. In case of a health emergency, not one community has a quality road to ensure that help arrives quickly. We mentioned all of this at the hearing.

WRM: You talked about the promises that the company made when it arrived. Could you tell us more about the arrival of Suzano in this region? What was this process like?

Célio: A company called FLONIBRA was the first to arrive on our territory, I'm talking about Volta Miúda in particular. Then, FLONIBRA became Bahia Sul, and after Bahia Sul it named itself Suzano. During this period of Bahia Sul, Aracruz Celulose also arrived, which later became Fibria. And later the two became a single company, which is today's Suzano.

When these companies arrived in this region, the *quilombola* communities were already here. The communities had no deeds to their land, while the companies illegally appropriated these lands through land grabs and fraudulent deeds, as was the case almost all over the country. (3) They even disrespected legitimate and good faith possessions, the 20-year chain of succession etc. And throughout the process of the arrival of eucalyptus, of the arrival of Suzano later, many *quilombolas* had to leave their lands, either because of

the eucalyptus plantation or because they had no way of working any more owing to lack of land.

Later, some people started working for these companies, including my father, my uncle and many of my cousins. So when FLONIBRA got here, it had a certain level of care toward the communities. This I tell you in all certainty, despite the fact that it didn't let anyone enter its area, I remember this well. Just under 10 years ago, FIBRIA poisoned isolated oil palm and jack fruit trees in the forest reservations. We believe this was meant to prevent the circulation of harvesters from the communities. They even used a pretext: the law of the biodiversity convention. But their interest was in preventing the circulation of people. Father José and João Luiz from the Center for the Defense of Human Rights (CDDH for its Portuguese acronym) even denounced this at the time.

But after it became Suzano, it turned into this demon that you're seeing. Today the communities are disrespected in every sense of the word. As well as the impacts already mentioned, there is a lawsuit ongoing in federal court against us, a possessory action. This was a reaction by the company when we started to denounce it. It alleges that we were preventing it from conducting its activities, so through this suit the company and its lawyers are trying to intimidate us.

In general terms, we see that since eucalyptus arrived, practically 50% of the population of these communities is no longer in their territories for lack of means to live. Many of these people are spread out, but are interested in returning if the territory is in the hands of the community. I firmly believe that, and we hear people talk; if there were a possibility of returning, they would. And we believe they really would come back because many are struggling in the peripheries of cities because they don't have the opportunity to return. They don't have the opportunity of being in their territory.

WRM: What are your hopes, based on the public hearing?

Célio: The Federal Public Prosecution Office and the Public Defense of the Union Office have already created a WhatsApp group and asked us to choose two participants from each community, and they have been put into the group. And they also asked for participants from Espírito Santo who also came here for the hearing to join the group and take part. In fact, one of them represents CONAQ (National Coordination of Quilombola Communities). And since then what happened was that an inquiry was opened. They gave us 15 days for us to present a list of all the springs, rivers, lakes, lagoons that we saw dry up or degrade due to the eucalyptus monoculture. Five of the eight communities have this material ready, but we couldn't leave the other three behind. So this list is being drawn up with the help of satellite images to present to the Federal Public Prosecution Office.

So this was one of the demands immediately put forward in the group, which included the need for this list for the company to recover these springs and lagoons, and necessarily it'll have to pull back. That was one of our demands. Furthermore, there is a very old promise, which is the question of the company creating many jobs for the communities. At present it's farcical for the company to claim it creates jobs in the region, because it doesn't. Especially not for the affected communities.

These two points drew the attention of the Federal Public Prosecution Office and the Public Defense of the Union Office, and will be looked into by them after the hearing. They also asked him [the public defender] to visit the first community on June 6, Volta Miúda community, so that he could see up close what can be done about the question of developing public policies and production. He is talking a lot to Volta Miúda because Volta Miúda has a Public Civil Action ongoing with the Federal Public Prosecution Office and they need to make decisions about these questions. But he said he would like to visit all the communities.

On our YouTube channel we have managed to put material that was filmed during the hearing, with each community's words, each leader, each person, for people to have a clear picture of what was dealt with at the hearing. (4)

We drew up a letter that was presented at the hearing. (5) This letter talks about many highly important points that the customers, shareholders and financial backers of Suzano should know about. They need to know that this corporation that seems so pretty, so kind from the outside, creates a lot of misery here. For the shareholders to have so many resources, so much money, many lives are being cut down here, and we don't have direct access to these people for the information to get out. To the customers I'd say: if you knew that to be able to sell you a product from here, many lives are being sacrificed, then, would you still want to buy it? I think not. That's it.

Eucalyptus monoculture makes the most of discriminatory public policies that evince environmental racism. It makes invisible the demands of the *quilombola* communities of the southernmost part of Bahia; it threatens their memories and rights. Without the land, we have nothing. The *quilombola* struggle is for our ancestral territory, for our culture and for our social, economic and political well being. We don't want money, but as well as the *quilombola* territory, the company owes us a compensation payment, as a legal right, just what it says in the Constitution, which is all fair and good, but it's not complied with!

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(1) Government agency that has the attribution of issuing the certificate to the *quilombola* communities and of entering them into the general registry. This recognizes communities' rights and gives them access to government programs. But it does not recognize the right to the land; it is much more about the recognition of the community as a *quilombola* community.

(2) MPF, DPU e comunidades quilombolas articularam medidas para mitigar prejuízos causados pela monocultura de eucalipto no sul da Bahia: <http://www.mpf.mp.br/ba/sala-de-imprensa/noticias-ba/mpf-dpu-e-comunidades-quilombolas-articularam-medidas-para-mitigar-prejuizos-causados-pela-monocultura-de-eucalipto-no-sul-da-bahia>

(3) Grilagem terceirizada, by Teoney Araújo Guerra:

<https://acervo.racismoambiental.net.br/2014/01/22/grilagem-terceirizada-por-teoney-araujo-guerra/>

(4) Extremo Quilombo WebTV - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCj9IC6j0Z7Y40ZZzwFg4eQw>

(5) Carta Pública das Comunidades Quilombolas do Extremo Sul da Bahia

Portuguese: <https://alertacontradesertosverdes.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Carta-Publica-Comunidades-Quilombolas-Extremo-sul-da-Bahia-03-2022.pdf>

English: <https://alertacontradesertosverdes.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Carta-Publica-Comunidades-Quilombolas-Extremo-sul-da-Bahia-03-2022-EN.pdf>

India: Whither Fortress Conservation

The 'conservation' model in India continues to enclose forests and evict communities in a deliberate attempt to undermine and scuttle the Forest Rights Act (FRA) - a landmark legislation that strengthens the authority of communities over their forests. Meanwhile, companies are allowed to destroy forests, even inside the conservation areas.

The Forest Rights Act (FRA), the landmark conservation legislation enacted in 2006 in India, was meant to put an end to top-down conservation policies and laws often dating back to the colonial era and discriminating against forest communities. It was also meant to strengthen the authority of communities and their institutions, such as the *Gram Sabhas*, over their forests. In order to radically departure from the colonial and exploitative model, the FRA declares the *Gram Sabhas* as the main entity for deciding how to use, manage, and conserve the forests that communities traditionally use, as well as for protecting them against internal and external threats. The Act also requires free, prior and informed consent of the *Gram Sabhas* before any customary forest can be handed over for any other use. However, instead of a paradigm shift, the process of 'conservation' in India continues to enclose the forest commons rightfully belonging to the people. This happens through the systematic violation of the FRA, following a deliberate and prolonged attempt by India's forest bureaucracy, corporate actors as well as many conservation NGOs to undermine and, if possible, scuttle the FRA.

In the past few decades, much forested land has been unilaterally declared as National Parks and Tiger Reserves, without the consent of the communities living in those areas. These violations of the FRA are widespread, and hundreds of communities living in the so-called Protected Areas (PA) have become increasingly vulnerable. Several communities have been forced to leave their territories under the euphemism of 'voluntary relocation'. One needs to remember that in February 2019, the Supreme Court of India ordered the eviction of the communities whose claims for various forest rights had been 'finally rejected' as inadmissible under the FRA. Yet, so far as it could be ascertained, communities inside PAs claiming forest rights have been by and large completely ignored across India, more so if the claimants have already been marked for relocation by the Park authorities and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), in abject violation of the FRA.

Protected Areas in India: long trail of eviction and displacement

As of 2019, according to NTCA official data, 56,247 families in 751 villages across 50 Tiger Reserves have been evicted, since the inception of Project Tiger in 1972, which aims to

protect the tiger population in India. Out of these, around 12,327 families in 173 villages have been ‘relocated/resettled’ until now, which means that more than 44,000 families, approximately 220,000 people, remain without relocation. According to the FRA, forest dwelling people evicted without relocation packages and adequate compensation prior to the enactment of the law, could go back and reclaim their lands. But PA managers and the NTCA are busy devising ‘relocation’ strategies so that the PAs—in particular the Tiger Reserves—can become human-free. Yet, not completely. These Tiger Reserves will be open for wealthy tourists and NGO staff, safari operators and scientific groups paying much money to see the preserved tigers and forests. The racist conservation paradigm in fact aims to get these areas ‘free-of-forest-dwelling-people’.

The threat of displacement also reaches to communities who do not live inside the PAs but need unhindered access to those forests for their livelihood and a host of other needs. Exact figures on how many people living in and around PAs are affected by India’s conservation policies and actions are not available, as it is reasonable to assume that all claims for forest rights in the ‘core’ areas of the Tiger Reserves and other PAs are being rejected, paving the way for legalised evictions.

Conservation groups such as WWF, Conservation International, Wild Life Protection Society of India, Wild Life Trust of India and Satpura Foundation, who, among others, continue to pursue a conservation model that invokes the complete banishment of forest communities from their forest spaces, have systematically attacked the FRA.

While all forest communities in India are threatened, people who live in the central uplands are particularly at risk: not only has the area several famous tiger tourist zones, such as Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Pench, Tadoba and Achanakmar, but the tiger-bearing forests also have significant overlaps with mining areas. To understand the relevance of this, it is important to note that NTCA’s relocation programme is increasingly being financed from the CAMPA fund – which is money that mining companies and other ‘development’ project promoters pay to compensate for the forests they use and destroy. The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act (CAFA) of 2016 legitimised this process (1). The CAFA specifies that the use of the CAMPA money should be subjected to the consultation of the *Gram Sabhas*, however, this is generally ignored.

The close linkages between the expansion of ‘fortress conservation’ (parks without people) on the one hand, and the expansion of mining and large-scale deforestation on the other, need to be urgently exposed. Both entail displacement and dispossession of forest communities and they feed each other.

Forest communities living in the central Indian uplands, mainly Indigenous Peoples such as the Gonds and the Baiga, are nonetheless the true custodians of the forests. They and their institutions could protect the forests from wanton destruction and enclosures; they and only they could continue keeping alive their forests - not only as tiger habitats but also as intricate life support systems. The FRA could play a pivotal role because it stands for a decentralised, bottom-up and autonomous process of conservation.

Unfortunately, the FRA has been largely projected and perhaps also perceived as more of a land and tribal rights law rather than a conservation legislation. Due to the clear corporate and governmental interests at play, foregrounding the conservation aspects in the FRA becomes imperative. This means letting the FRA emerge as what it really is: an intrinsically social and political process that supports communities to defend, preserve and reclaim their forest commons. Forest dwelling people in India have been doing this for generations and it makes no environmental sense that they would be deliberately excluded from any conservation programme. So the question arises, are the PAs and Tiger Reserves really for conservation purposes?

An intensive campaign to highlight the FRA as an environmental legislation was initiated in September 2020 by the groups and activists associated with the All India Forum of Forest Movements (AIFFM) and other organisational processes with a presence in the tiger-bearing forests in Central India. This campaign tries to actively involve various segments of civil society, including the legal community and the media, and adequately present the voices of the forest dwelling people being threatened with imminent eviction.

First, three groups of activists and researchers were formed to visit communities living in and around various PA and potential/proposed wildlife corridors in the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The aim of each group involved the collection of state-level data on the ground situation, including attempts of eviction by the state Forest Department (or district administration), instances of FRA violations, CAFA, and other related legislations, and cases of community-initiated conservation activities. However, the Covid-19 pandemic delayed the mission. Nonetheless, some data was collected and a report on the realities of communities living in the Central Indian uplands has been prepared (2). Yet, much more needs to be done.

Findings in Brief: Persecution Continues in the Name of 'Conservation'

The report clearly shows that the official prejudice against the tribal and non-tribal forest dwelling communities remains to be dominant. In the PAs covered by each group, it became clear that the forest administration continues to treat communities as mere 'disturbances', and considers that they should be removed in the interest of wildlife

conservation. It also became clear that the so-called conservation actions in the PAs, in explicit violation of the FRA, only alienate forest communities further, instead of acknowledging their historic and lawful role in conservation.

The major issue in the PAs is the lack of proper livelihood opportunities for communities, something that is relentlessly aggravated by often illegal restrictions on their use of the forest and land, forced/involuntary relocation and displacement without rehabilitation and compensation. Communities also face extractive industries and other 'developmental' activities taking place in the vicinity of PAs, as well as illegal logging and unrestricted tourism. This all happens in violation of the FRA.

The next section highlights some of the innumerable illegalities and misdeeds of the Forest Department in the PAs visited by the groups of activists in the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (3).

Tadoba Andheri Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra)

Located in the Chandrapur district of Maharashtra, the Tadoba Andheri Tiger Reserve (TATR) comprises the Tadoba National Park and the Andheri Wildlife Sanctuary and adjoining forests. The National Park and the Andheri Wildlife Sanctuary were notified as Critical Tiger Habitat in 2007, just days before the FRA came into force. The category of Critical Tiger Habitat is marked for tiger conservation and allows relocation of humans, only with the prior and informed consent of the communities. Five of the 6 villages in the Tiger Reserve -Kolsa, Botezari, Palasgaon, Jamni and Ramdegi- have already been either partially or fully 'relocated'.

The village of Rantalodhi and some remaining families of the Kolsa village are still inside the reserve, defying persistent 'relocation' efforts of the Forest Department, which have included various kinds of threats and punitive measures. The entry to the villages was fenced, access to food and other provisions distributed under the Public Distribution System was denied, the electricity connection to the villagers' homes was cut, and a number of criminal cases was slapped on community activists demanding recognition of rights under the FRA. The villages outside the reserve were not exempted either, without consulting them, a 'buffer zone' was unilaterally created and affected 90 villages. A string of new resorts has sprung up since the promotion of 'tiger' tourism begun. Meanwhile, new and old coal mines continue to operate just adjacent to the forests of the reserve.

Bor Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra)

Located in the Wardha District of Maharashtra, the Bor Tiger Reserve does not have any village in its core area anymore, but there are 36 villages in the buffer zone.

The village of Nawargaon was the last to be relocated in 2017, making it human-free. Because most of the villagers living in and around the Bor forests are pastoralists, the creation of a Tiger Reserve severely restricted the access to pastures traditionally used and resulted in great misery. During meetings in 2020, villagers confirmed that the FRA has not been implemented in the Bor Tiger Reserve and many villagers noted that Gram Sabhas had not been convened in the course of what the Forest Department called as ‘voluntary relocation’. Meanwhile, the compensation for the buffer villages in cases of human wildlife conflicts is grossly inadequate and mostly delayed. A couple of days before the group’s visit, a 15-year-old boy was killed by a tiger in Jungli Amgaon village. The Forest Department refused to pay compensation and instead, arrested some of the victim’s family members for ‘creating unrest in the village’.

The Bor Water Reservoir inside the core area of the Reserve (declared also as a Critical Tiger Habitat) acts as a control to wildlife protection, while providing very little livelihood opportunities to communities. The Reservoir has been opened up for tourism.

Pench Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra)

The Pench Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra shares its northern boundary with the Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh.

Of the two villages in the core area of the Tiger Reserve, the Totladoh village was displaced to the buffer zone through a violent eviction in 2002, while the village of Fulzari remains living inside. According to the villagers now staying in the New Totladoh village at the buffer zone, their eviction happened without any notice or compensation. The villagers, whose main livelihood was fishing at the Pench Reservoir —now recognized as a community right under FRA-, continue to be hounded by the park authorities. Subject to untold atrocities, including summary arrests, physical abuse, and attacks with sticks and pellet-guns, the villagers live under severe economic pressure, without any source of livelihood; only a few families practice agriculture in the village as many do not have land and even for those who do, the land is not tillable.

After the Totladoh villagers’ claim for community forest right for fishing in the reservoir was formally processed at the concerned District Level Committee for FRA, and the District Collector had formally informed the villagers that their claim has been recognized, the process was suddenly put on hold. It was later revealed that the NTCA had issued a directive that such claims cannot be processed in Critical Tiger Habitat (CTH) areas, following aggressive lobbying by local conservation NGOs. In vain the villagers and activist groups pointed out that NTCA has no legal jurisdiction to arbitrate in matters related to claims admitted under the FRA, and the withholding of community forest rights was manifestly illegal. The conservation lobby has been using the media in maligning and

vilifying the villagers—it has been alleged that the Totladoh people are poachers, many of whom are involved in killing tigers. Protests by villagers were met with repression by the authorities, a number of villagers were arrested, beaten up and falsely incriminated.

The restriction to access the forests and the Reservoir for fishing continues to make their lives extremely difficult.

Panna Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh)

The core of the Panna Tiger Reserve, located in the two districts of Panna and Chhatarpur, Madhya Pradesh, includes the Panna National Park and the Panna (Gangua) Wildlife Sanctuary. The area was declared a Critical Tiger Habitat in 2007. The villagers of Kota Gunjapur, mostly indigenous Gond, and the families in the Umrawan village, refused to leave during the relocation drive in 2017. Yet, they have been facing the anger of the forest officials. The villages were barricaded and there were restrictions for their entry and exit. In 2015, 61 out of the 70 families in the Umrawan village were relocated. The remaining families filed a legal case in the Jabalpur High Court, citing poor implementation of the FRA. In October 2019, the Forest Department sent a notice to the remaining families to move out. Villagers allege that the families who were already ‘relocated’ are now living in poorer and harsher conditions, with inadequate housing, water and electricity facilities, and no proper source of income.

Achanakmar Wildlife Sanctuary, Chattisgarh

This Wildlife Sanctuary was declared as a Critical Tiger Habitat and brought under the Project Tiger in 2009. Achanakmar is also the habitat of the Baiga, one of the oldest indigenous groups in this region. According to the Project Tiger’s revised guidelines, the Forest Departments have to identify inviolate spaces and relocate villages from Critical Tiger Habitats within a time frame, through providing a better relocation package. Forest Departments are also required to settle the forest rights of communities living in these villages. These guidelines were strongly contested by grassroots groups who pointed out that relocation from Critical Tiger Habitats is subject to the *Gram Sabha*’s consent. But the Chhattisgarh Forest Department has consistently violated these guidelines in the Achanakmar Tiger Reserve.

Out of 25 villages in the core area of the Reserve, six villages were displaced in December 2009. These ‘relocations’ were done unilaterally and without complying with the FRA. Villagers were promised a fixed compensation package of Rs 10 lakhs (1 million Rupees or approx.13,000 US dollars) and basic amenities in the new settlements: 5 acres of agriculture land for each household (approx. 2 hectares), houses, school, better healthcare and livelihood opportunities. However, when the ‘relocation’ process was over, the new locations were not ready and each household was given only a meagre Rs. 5,000 in

cash (approx. 68 US dollars) and Rs. 45,000 in their bank accounts (approx. 616 US dollars). The 'relocated' families now living at the edge of the forest have been strictly restricted from collecting anything from it, including fuelwood. The agricultural land they were given is of poor quality, and don't really support farming. The indigenous Baiga and other forest communities say that they have no other livelihood options outside the forests and are now being forced to work as construction labour in urban areas.

Whither Fortress Conservation?

These cases are but typical examples of how the dominant conservation paradigm works against forest communities.

Why is the Indian Government and its forest bureaucracy so relentless on displacing forest communities from their homes and forest commons, in manifest violation of their own law? Why do some of the big conservation NGOs keep on promoting a racist conservation paradigm that discriminates against forest communities?

These questions get accentuated when development agencies and big businesses such as road and dam builders and mining corporations are routinely allowed to destroy forests, even inside the officially designated wildlife conservation areas. A look at the recently released minutes of the National Wild Life Board, the nodal organisation for wildlife conservation in India, shows that forests in Indian PAs are being sent to the slaughterhouse at alarmingly frequent intervals. (4)

For instance, the Board permitted a coal mine on the fringe of a Wildlife Sanctuary in Telengana, 'diverting' about 3,300 hectares of forests in an eco-sensitive zone (areas surrounding PAs where development activities are not permitted) as late as 7th in August 2021. Likewise, a four-lane highway was permitted on 5th January 2021, in the eco-sensitive zone outside the Rajaji Tiger Reserve in Uttarakhand, where forest officials keep persecuting the indigenous semi-nomadic Van-Gujjar community, ignoring all claims filed under the FRA. (5) Another road project was also accepted involving the destruction of about 60 hectares of forests inside the Dibang Wild Life Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh, in the mountainous Northeast. More felling of forests was allowed in Arunachal, for the construction of transmission lines inside the Namdapha Tiger Reserve. Furthermore, in the Trans-Himalayan Changthang Sanctuary in Ladakh, where, among other endangered animals, the elusive snow-leopard and the Kiyang (Himalayan wild horse) live, 188 hectares were given away for road-building. More highways and speed-rail projects got final approvals in Rajasthan (Greenfield eight-lane highway in the Mukundra Tiger Reserve) and in Maharashtra (Mumbai-Ahmedabad speed-rail project in the Sanjay

Gandhi National Park). Besides, more road-building proposals were allowed in the Himalayan state of Sikkim.

The park authorities of the Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan - the infamous Protected Area with no tigers (tigers were introduced since they were extinct in 2004) (6) - started to relocate a whole village on April 27, 2022, while many mines are running by powerful mafia groups. (7) Six more communities are expected to be relocated in 2022, according to the authorities. (8) A recent estimate by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) counts up to 46,000 families residing in Tiger Reserves (9), and approximately Rupees 60 billion crores (more than 744 million dollars) would put them out of their forests and lands.

For the NTCA, the Forest Department and their allied NGOs, this is the path to follow because, for them, there can be no 'conservation' unless forest communities are excluded and displaced – in one way or the other. That is the basis of this deeply racist 'fortress conservation' model - with total ignorance of the FRA and even the country's constitution!

Recognizing the forest rights of communities that have lived in and with the forests for generations is clearly a threat to the interests of big conservation NGOs, forest officials, local politicians, a section of media and the NTCA.

Soumitra Ghosh

All India Forum of Forest Movements (AIFFM)

- (1) See for further information: WRM Bulletin 217, Deforestation funds more plantations: The new Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill in India, 2015, <https://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin-articles/deforestation-funds-more-plantations-the-new-compensatory-afforestation-fund-bill-in-india> ; and WRM Bulletin 250, The Pandemic in Forests in India: Escalated Attacks on Communities, 2020, <https://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin-articles/the-pandemic-in-forests-in-india-escalated-attacks-on-communities> ; and WRM Bulletin 246, India: Mining, Deforestation and Conservation Money, 2019, <https://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin-articles/india-mining-deforestation-and-conservation-money>
- (2) Struggles for the right to live in forests declared Protected Areas in India, <https://www.wrm.org.uy/publications/struggles-for-the-right-to-live-in-forests-declared-protected-areas-in-india>
- (3) Idem (2)
- (4) Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Minutes of 66th Meeting of the Standing Committee of National Board for Wild Life-reg, 2022, http://forestclearance.nic.in/writereaddata/Order_and_Release/211312301212166THMinutesofMeeting.pdf
- (5) Counter Currents, Covid becomes excuse to attempt eviction of Rajaji National Park forest dwellers, 2022, <https://countercurrents.org/2022/04/covid-becomes-excuse-to-attempt-eviction-of-rajaji-national-park-forest-dwellers/>

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- (6) Hindustan times, Sariska's tiger population goes up to 20 with three new cubs, 2022, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/sariska-s-tiger-population-goes-up-to-20-with-three-new-cubs/story-Ei0gIzhglyiTAo4B58MkSN.html>
- (7) Down to Earth, Despite ban, mines thrive in Sariska reserve, <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/coverage/despite-ban-mines-thrive-in-sariska-reserve-30946>, also SCC Blog, Forest Guard mowed down by mining mafia in Sariska: Tribunal asks authorities to take further remedial measures to enforce law of land, 2021, <https://www.sconline.com/blog/post/2021/04/09/forest-guard/>, and Down to Earth, Order of the National Green Tribunal regarding illegal mining in Sariska, Rajasthan, 2021, <http://www.indiaenvironmentportal.org.in/content/470211/order-of-the-national-green-tribunal-regarding-illegal-mining-in-sariska-rajasthan-06042021/>
- (8) The Times of India, Rajasthan: Villagers leave their homes so tigers can live, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/videos/toi-original/rajasthan-villagers-leave-their-homes-so-tigers-can-live/videoshow/91121435.cms>
- (9) Government of india, Minutes of the 18th Meeting of the NTCA, 2020, https://ntca.gov.in/assets/uploads/Meeting/Minutes/18th_NTCA_meeting_minutes.pdf

RECOMMENDED

Open Letter Denouncing Suzano Papel e Celulose's glyphosate-resistant Genetically Engineered (GE) Eucalyptus

More than 50 organizations, networks and movements from Brazil and around the world denounce the release into the environment and the commercial use of a new transgenic eucalyptus from the Brazilian company Suzano Papel e Celulose.

Organizations demand the immediate revocation of the license granted for the use of Suzano GE eucalyptus 751KO32, as well as the action and intervention of the Federal Public Prosecution Service to revoke the decision made by the National Technical Commission on Biosafety (CTNBio), a decision made without a full public debate, especially in regions of Brazil that have been exposed for many years to eucalyptus monoculture.

Read the complete letter in Spanish here <https://alertacontradesertosverdes.org/noticias/carta-publica-de-denuncia-do-eucalipto-transgenico-da-suzano-papel-e-celulose/>

And in Portuguese here <https://alertacontradesertosverdes.org/noticias/carta-publica-de-denuncia-do-eucalipto-transgenico-da-suzano-papel-e-celulose/>

“Flames of Dispossession.” Fires caused by the plantation business in Chile

A documentary produced by the audiovisual collective, Ojo de Treile, shows how industrial monoculture plantations in southern Chile have been causing mega-droughts and voracious forest fires. The industrial model of monoculture brings with it a legacy of violence, dispossession and destruction. The plantation and pulp industries have been supported by government policies in Chile, and they continue to expand their detrimental impacts. Watch the video in Spanish here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-kVhdavxDw>

Indigenous Munduruku women protect their territory with cameras and phones
The Munduruku People in Brazil say the anti-Indigenous rhetoric of the Jair Bolsonaro administration has emboldened illegal loggers and miners, and put them under greater risk. As a response, three young Munduruku women run an audiovisual collective that uses social media to raise awareness about illegal invasions of their territory. The collective does essential work in relaying the community's complaints to the outside world. Read an article and see some video on Mongabay in English here:

<https://news.mongabay.com/2022/03/to-fight-invaders-munduruku-women-wield-drone-cameras-and-cellphones/>

And in Portuguese here: <https://reporterbrasil.org.br/2022/02/camera-drone-e-celular-as-armas-das-jovens-munduruku-para-resistir-a-escalada-de-invasoes-e-ameacas/>

RSPO Certification despite land conflicts, violence and criminalization

Almost 1,500 members of MALOA (Malen of Affected Land Owners and Users Association) in Sierra Leona released a petition to object the RSPO (The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil) certification of SOCFIN subsidiary in that country. They raised several points that evidence the numerous land conflicts, violence and grievances from affected communities. This certification is next in line of a number of highly controversial certifications of the SOCFIN group in Nigeria,

Cameroon and Ivory Coast. RSPO is totally biased in favor of the industry and is not fit for purpose to guarantee sustainability and respect for human rights in palm oil supply chains.

Furthermore, MALOA members who signed the petition in March 2022 have been target of arbitrary harassment and criminalization

Read the petition here: <http://greenscenery.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/220321-MALOA-RSPO-petition.pdf>

Read further information on the case here: <http://www.fian.be/RSPO-certificate-for-Socfin-in-Sierra-Leone-despite-blatant-land-conflict?lang=fr>

And in French here: <http://www.fian.be/Le-label-durable-RSPO-octroye-a-Socfin-en-Sierra-Leone-malgre-un-conflit?lang=fr>

Read a Press Release on the Intimidation of MALOA members here: <http://greenscenery.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/220506-Green-Scenery-Harassment-of-Land-Rights-Activist-in-Malen-Chiefdom.pdf>

“Unpacking Jargon” Webinar Series

The overarching goal of this series coordinated by the Swift foundation and the First Nations Development Institute is the search of new ways of pleading for clarity and using appropriate language to ensure respectful and positive relationships with indigenous peoples and marginalized groups and avoid terms that may be discriminatory or offensive or the source of strategies that misuse their heritage and turn into another means of assimilation and displacement. There were three webinars carried out in English and Spanish:

1. Agroecology, Restorative Agriculture, and 10,000 Year-Old Indigenous Food Knowledge
<https://www.swiftfoundation.org/agroecology-restorative-agriculture-and-10000-year-old-indigenous-food-knowledge/>

2. Conservation, Protected Areas and Indigenous Homelands PART 1: Voices from Turtle Island/North America
<https://www.swiftfoundation.org/unpacking-jargon-turtle-island/>

3. Conservation, Protected Areas and Indigenous Homelands PART 2: Voices from Abya Yala
<https://www.swiftfoundation.org/unpacking-jargon-3-voices-from-abya-yala/>

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"Land Concessions: An Underlying Cause of Forest Destruction"?
[You can access all the past issues of the WRM bulletin at this link](#)

World Rainforest Movement

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