A Global Forest Coalition Newsletter on International Forest Policy

Forest Cover

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About Forest Cover

Welcome to the thirty-sixth issue of Forest Cover, newsletter of the Global Forest Coalition (GFC). GFC is a world-wide coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Indigenous Peoples Organizations (IPOs). GFC promotes rights-based, socially just and effective forest policies at international and national level, including through building the capacity of NGOs and IPOs in all regions to influence global forest policy.

Forest Cover is published four times a year. It features reports on important intergovernmental meetings by different NGOs and IPOs and a calendar of future meetings. The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the Global Forest Coalition, its donors or the editors.

For free subscriptions, please contact Yolanda Sikking at:
Yolanda.sikking@globalforestcoalition.org

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Youth joined Global Justice Ecology Project in occupying the Moon Palace site of the UN Climate Negotiations to protest the silencing of civil society voices at COP16 in Cancun. Photo by Langelle/GJEP-GFC.

Ex Silvis: Climate Solutions Needed Do Not Include Biochar!

Fiu Mata'ese Elisara, O le Siosiomaga Society, Samoa and GFC Chairperson

If the next summit on climate change is to succeed, much greater leadership must be shown by developed countries: a huge deficit of trust has now developed, because of rich countries' self-interested refusal to accept further binding obligations and properly fulfill their existing commitments to assist developing countries.

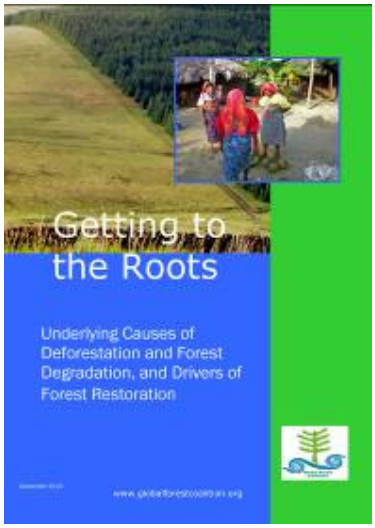
Cancun was the first high level meeting since the 2009 Copenhagen summit, when governments failed to reach agreement on renewing the current legally binding approach to dealing with climate change. Cancun as a critical opportunity to revive chances of reaching a fair, ambitious and legally binding global deal.

Read the report 'Wood-based bioenergy: the green lie', about the impact of wood-based bio-energy on forests and forest dependent people. See www.globalforestcoalition.org

One prerequisite for this will be abandoning the 'biochar' option. Biochar is likely to replicate the problems with biofuels in terms of its impact on people's food sovereignty, forests and even climate change: industrially produced biochar would generate a massive expansion in industrial monocultures, deforestation, land grabs, and evictions of peasant farmers. IIt would inevitably lead to the violation of Indigenous Peoples' rights, as well as undermining the livelihoods of other forest-dependent communities and pastoralists, and exacerbating hunger and human rights abuses – all in the name of climate change.

Biochar advocates want us to believe in a bizarre notion: that complex, locally adapted techniques developed by Indigenous Peoples and local farmers, which are based on biodiverse farming and the use of highly diverse organic residues and charcoal over a very long period of time, can be replicated over-night by stripping the soil of biomass or growing more industrial plantations, and then charring vast amounts of that biomass and plowing it into the soil.

But there is no solid scientific evidence to demonstrate that biochar can be a successful part of the answer to climate change. Nobody knows enough to predict what the impacts on crop production will be if farmers turn to biochar. Communities that used charcoal in agriculture in the past did so with organic fertilizers. But biochar is not a fertilizer and cannot improve fertility on its own. It will necessitate increased dependence on fossil-fuel based fertilizers if all the plant's residue is to be stripped and charred rather than returned to the soil as compost.



The post-Copenhagen Climate talks require a paradigm shift to deliver specific actions that can bridge the divide and deliver a fair, ambitious and legally-binding deal on climate change, based on equity, justice, and trusted science. GFC calls on wealthy parties to stop demanding a deal that will simply address their own domestic concerns, and to put the future of the planet first. It's time to abandon false solutions and unproven initiatives like biochar. There are many other proven solutions available, as demonstrated in GFC's new publication, *"Getting to the Roots: Underlying Causes of Deforestation and Forest Degradation, and Drivers of Forest Restoration."*[1]

[1] *The report can be downloaded here: http://globalforest.dpi.nl/wp-admin/post.php?post=708&action=edit*

It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like…the WTO
How the UN Climate Talks are Turning into WTO-Style Trade Negotiations

Mary Lou Malig, Global Forest Coalition, Philippines.

In 2003, Cancun was the venue of the fifth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The dramatic combination of the "protests" by the governments of developing countries and the inside and outside actions and mobilizations by social movements, activists and people's and civil society organizations, resulted in the collapse of the Ministerial Conference. This collapse that was celebrated by people the world over as it prevented an unfair agreement from being pushed through.

Seven years later, Cancun has again been the venue of a global summit. This time however, it was the Conference of the Parties under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (COP16 and CMP6 for short). From the outset it did not seem as if there were many parallels between the WTO and the UN meetings; one was a free trade forum with a focus on markets, the other was a climate forum the main focus of which is preventing the chaos which will be caused by climate change.

However, as the climate talks went on, it became increasingly evident that there were very many disturbing parallels between the WTO Ministerial Conference and the COP16/CMP 6.

Trading the Climate

Many have said that the climate talks have long since turned into a trade negotiation. One of the clearest confirmations of this occurred in 2007 in Bali, Indonesia when Trade Ministers together with WTO Director General Pascal Lamy held a trade meeting on the sidelines of the COP13. One newspaper headline even reported that the WTO was going green, which actually meant that the WTO wanted in on the climate negotiations. Much emphasis began to be placed on coherence between trade and climate policies.

In Cancun though, it became clear that there was not only going to be a drive to link trade and climate, but a push to create a union between them.

Carbon markets were high on the agenda as were other market based mechanisms such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) and Land Use and Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF). Stripping away the fancy names and technical jargon, the negotiations basically centered around the message that the climate is a commodity and that the market will be used to solve climate change.

In addition, developed countries were pushing hard to first get concessions and commitments from developing countries before they would live up to their obligations. This goes against the long-agreed "historic responsibility" of developed countries for greenhouse gas emissions and the obligation that they pay the most and work the hardest to solve the problems. This implies that they should not use their obligations as a negotiating card. However, in Cancun, developed countries were holding back on their commitments to finance and emissions reductions until they gained concessions from developing countries. They couched this in polite language such as wanting a "balanced outcome". The phrase "balanced outcome" is a familiar one to those who had followed the WTO Conference; when decoded it means that concessions are needed from both negotiating parties.

To make matters worse, as can be seen from the final Cancun Accord, even after gaining several concessions from developing countries, in the end, developed countries only set disappointingly low targets for their emission reductions which are not even be mandatory.

Changing the meaning of Consensus

The Cancun Accord, hailed by developed countries as a step forward and said by other analysts to have saved the multilateral process, was also achieved at the expense of the democratic processes of the UN.

The WTO is known for its undemocratic and non-transparent ways, with its infamous "green rooms" where a select number of countries are invited to negotiate a text, which is then presented to the rest of the membership

as a done deal. The UN , which had prided itself for its transparent processes has disturbingly deteriorated into relying on a WTO style “green room” process.

Midway through the COP16 negotiations, Bolivia raised concerns about a secret text being circulated amongst select countries. These concerns were confirmed when in the dying hours of the negotiations, new texts were circulated to the UN membership. Only a select number of countries were included in the negotiations of these new texts, with the rest of the membership presented with them on a take it or leave it basis.

Bolivia raised objections to several aspects of the texts and this, by the definition of decision-making based on consensus, should have been enough to prevent any agreement. However, the Mexican Chair Patricia Espinosa, merely noted the objections and brought the summit to a close saying that it had successfully reached an agreement.

Flashback to the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the WTO in 2005 in Hong Kong: At the closing plenary, Venezuela raised objections to the text, their concern was noted and then the Conference was gavelled to a close and the Ministerial Declaration was adopted. Some developing countries objected that the format of the final plenary session made it difficult for opposition to be heard.

As Pablo Solon, Bolivia’s Ambassador to the UN stated, “concensus is not by majority. There must be an absence of any explicit rejection of a decision.”

A Thousand Cancuns

The deterioration of the UN climate talks into WTO-style trade negotiations does not bode well for the people or the planet. If climate chaos is to be prevented, there need to be more mobilizations against market-based solutions and a stronger push for peoples’ solutions. The Cochabamba Peoples Agreement from April 2010 enshrines many such proposals and alternatives that prioritize the rights of people and of Mother Earth.

In the run up to the COP16, La Via Campesina called for worldwide mobilizations under the common banner of “A Thousand Cancuns” to make the voices of the people heard and to show that the people have a thousand solutions to the climate crisis. These mobilizations were widely successful and need to be continued and intensified in the months leading up to COP 17 in Durban, South Africa in order to prevent an even worse deal emerging.

"Contrary to popular thinking, forests are dependent on the availability of land, not money,"
said Simone Lovera, Executive Director of the Global Forest Coalition at the press conference.
"The most effective policies to conserve and restore forests are those that reduce demand for land."
Photo: Langelle/GJEP-GFC

Commodifying Biodiversity at COP 10

Larissa Packer, lawyer, Terra de Direitos

COP 10 and MOP 5 of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), held in Nagoya, Japan, 11 - 29 October, ended with an apparently positive result: the signing of two new environmental protocols and the approval of a new strategic global plan to halt the soaring rate of loss and erosion of biological diversity by 2020. A superficial analysis of these results could lead us to believe that the parties to the CBD agreed an ambitious response to their acknowledged collective failure to fulfill the Strategic Plan provided for the period 2002-2010 (as the "Global Biodiversity Outlook 3" report from the Secretariat of the CBD has pointed out[2]).

However, despite approving the much longed for "Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits," now known as the Nagoya Protocol (which fills a historical gap concerning one of the main goals of the CBD, that has been outstanding since the CBD was first signed at Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992), COP 10's approach seems to rely on putting compliance with the objectives of the CBD into the hands of the business sector, and setting up systems that give biodiversity an economic value.

Mimicking the market-based framework developed in the UNFCCC, that relies on the 'carbon metrics' approach, the CBD is weakening its role as a multilateral forum for negotiating and implementing public policies for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Instead, the CBD is rapidly turning into a global platform promoting the commodification of biodiversity and boosting the green economy. This 'new green deal' seems to be designed to help pull the financial system out of its current crisis rather than deal with the devastating worldwide effects of biodiversity loss.

The impressive reception of the study led by Indian economist Pavan Sukhdev "The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity" (TEEB) is visible throughout the wording of the operational texts of the CBD, especially in the Strategic Plan 2010 – 2020. It is emblematic of this paradigm shift, as it is being applied to conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity.

Under the TEEB's agreed categories of valuation, multiple ecosystem functions - such as 'pollination services' done by the bees and bats for example, or 'climate regulation services' provided by forests, are transformed into new business opportunities.

The TEEB logic proposes that developed countries - historically responsible for the erosion of biodiversity and with an outstanding ecological debt to developing countries – can actually maintain current rates of deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions by allowing those engaged in biodiversity destruction to purchase 'credits for environmental services' from the mega-diverse countries.

A framework for such 'biodiversity offsets' schemes was presented in many side events, supported by pilot projets, demonstrative methodology and voluntary guidelines. Corporations, financial actors and governments where excited about pushing forward the 'innovative' idea of buying permits to compensate for biodiversity destruction in areas where infrastructure is being developed, for example, or where mining and tar sands operations are underway. All those involved will have to do is make monetary payments to 'offset' the protection of biodiversity.

In validating this new economic 'thinking' which prioritizes the value of 'natural capital' and considers it to be strategic to the emerging green economy, the CBD is supporting the idea of price-tagging biodiversity and its 'services'. Consequently, the CBD is becoming little more than a forum for negotiating the exchange of these services, products and 'green' assets, little more than a trading floor for transnational corporations in search of new markets.

With the withdrawal of the Precautionary Approach with respect, for example, to biofuels and biodiversity, Parties to the CBD have agreed to open international markets for commodities such as ethanol, advertising them as alternative 'clean' energy sources that will mitigate climate change, even if this involves expanding

[2] *gbo3.cbd.int*

monocultures and relying on GMOs and other dangerous and unregulated new technologies, such as synthetic biology.

Brazil is a key culprit. Hiding its long history of human rights violations, including the violation of the human right to a clean and healthy environment that is associated with its sugar cane monocultures, Brazil has been a key actor responsible for favoring corporate and commercial interests to the detriment of the environment in the CBD's negotiations.

However, despite the inclusion of market solutions, important victories were achieved, including the adoption of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing and the agreed moratorium on geo-engineering and activities that use synthetic life forms. Another success was the adoption of a Protocol of Liability for damages caused by GMO, which was agreed at the Fifth Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol (MOP 5), a week before COP 10 started.

International Conference on Indigenous Peoples, Climate Change, Alternatives and Solutions

Sandy Gauntlett, Pacific Indigenous Peoples Environment Coalition, Aotearoa/New Zealand

The International conference on Indigenous Peoples, climate change, alternatives and solutions was held 5-9 November, in Baguio City in the Philippines.

Land slip after the typhoon made worse by erosion, Luzon, Philippines.
Photos: Sandy Gauntlett, PIPEC/GFC

Build up of debris and mud and silt leading to the actual spillway of the dam, Luzon, Philippines.

The conference started with a field trip to a village that had been devastated by a recent cyclone with houses lower down either being washed away or damaged beyond repair. The people were wonderful and amazingly full of determination to rebuild and sustain their community, considering how recently the event had occurred. Conference participants subsequently visited a large hydro-electric dam near Baguio City.

The dam itself was huge, and the water behind the dam had been allowed to stagnate and pollute. The area approaching the spillway was so full of debris it was almost possible to walk on the water itself. Apart from the impacts on biodiversity and the contribution to climate emissions (methane), the pollution to the catchment area for most of the fish supply was visible to the naked eye and the erosion of the hillside from deforestation added to the problems of the dam itself. Most of the electricity in this country is provided by hydroelectric generation, and it was

Sandy Gauntlett presenting on self determination (Tino Rangatiratanga).

shocking to see the lack of environmental safeguards in this particular scheme.

The Pacific delegation at the Conference included 8 people. It was a larger delegation than usual at most international conferences as the powers that be often seek to ignore the reality of the diverse and dispersed countries of the Pacific region.

The next morning the conference proper started with a discussion on REDD and carbon trading within the context of the UNFCCC. The following morning a workshop on REDD, carbon trading, the Kyoto Protocol and the UNFCCC took place. Recommendations from the workshop included a total rejection of market mechanisms and other false solutions to climate change. The workshop participants also called on the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in the climate science being used by the UNFCCC, the full and equal participation of Indigenous Peoples within the process, and the legal solidification of indigenous land rights. All recommendations were passed by the conference unanimously and included in the statement of solidarity produced by the conference. I would like to single out the Asia Pacific Indigenous Youth Network for special mention for their clear grasp of the political situation in the UNFCCC and their opposition to market mechanisms. The rest of the day was spent looking at land rights and indigenous rights in general, and at particular examples of these situations.

The next day was dedicated to individual testimonies on particular situations and again I presented on self-determination (*Tino Rangatiratanga* in my language) and the situation here with regard to the *Waitangi* process (on legal land resettlement). Earlier, there had been a very moving presentation from the Ogoni peoples of Nigeria which highlighted the anniversary of the death of Ken Saro Wiwa at the hands of the Nigerian Government. In the late afternoon, we joined an international march commemorating the deaths of various martyrs in defence of indigenous rights and I had the honour of being the closing speaker for the March.

All in all, it was a highly successful conference.

This used to be a rice field but with erosion and silt drifting down from the dam it has become like this, Luzon, Philippines.

People from people from the Cordillera, Luzon, Philippines.
Photos: Sandy Gauntlett, PIPEC/GFC.

Reports on other meetings:

REDD Skepticism at FAO's World Forest Week

The 20th session of the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO) took place in Rome, Italy, 4 - 8 October. The formal discussions of COFO were pretty uneventful, unless one considers a dispute over the venue for the next World Forestry Congress in 2015 as an issue that is of utmost importance for the world's forests. The agenda covered issues such as the role of forests in water management; the links between forest biodiversity, sustainable forest management and climate change; forest finance and governance; and the timing and contents of the next Global Forest Resources Assessment, which will be published in 2015. The meeting also discussed REDD+, but mainly focused on the technical support FAO could provide in terms of supporting forest monitoring and assessment efforts by countries. Other priorities for the FAO forest program that were identified included social and community forest management and innovative approaches to forest governance; forest genetic resources; and communication work highlighting the socio-economic role of forests, especially as part of the UN Year of Forests activities in 2011.

Many countries also highlighted national achievements, including the Democratic Republic of Congo's 'achievement' of expanding roads into primary forest areas and elaborating plans for 1 million hectares of new monoculture tree plantations. As usual, the meeting did not make any distinction between forests and monoculture tree plantations during its discussions on the blessings of trees, despite an attempt by Ethiopia to highlight the need to review forest definitions. When it was reported during the meeting that 4 million hectares of primary forest per year are being lost, it was quickly added that, happily, 5 million hectares of tree plantations were also being planted every year. Obviously, for the FAO, any tree is still fine, as long as you can cut it.

Rather more heated discussions took place during the many events that were organized as part of the second World Forest Week, which was held in Rome at the same time as COFO. It was remarkable that panelists and other participants, participating in their personal capacity and including academics and UN agencies, were openly worried, if not skeptical about REDD+. For example, it was emphasized there was a need to review the impacts of REDD+ on broader forest finance, and to ensure that REDD+ does not replace such broader forest finance. Panelists also cautioned that REDD+ is unlikely to address poverty-related forest degradation, and highlighted the social tensions caused by REDD-financed monoculture tree plantations. It was also observed that REDD will cause winners and losers, and that it will be the climate that may lose if all countries "win" from REDD.

It was also stressed that several important issues are yet to be resolved, including the impermanence of forests, equity and effectiveness in compensation systems, and the fact that no system is able to address 'leakage' (meaning forest loss will shift from one place to another under REDD if overall demand for wood and land is not addressed).

It was also stated that REDD was based on an "overly simplistic theory of motivation" and that so far, REDD has triggered a lot of trade, but no caps, as there is no limit to the credits generated. According to the representative from the Centre for International Forestry Research, the question was not whether REDD can be made more effective, but whether it can be effective at all, considering the flaws in its design. Panellists also pointed out there was a significant risk that REDD will be shaped by vested interests that are resistant to change and that focusing on carbon emissions will lead to a costly technocentric approach that will trigger outside "expert control" and a possible recentralization of forest policy. Moreover, the role of contradictory incentives driving the expansion of crops like oil palm was highlighted.

While these concerns were not reflected in the official report, it is clear that social movements, Indigenous Peoples and NGOs are no longer alone in their REDD-skepticism – representatives of research institutions and UN agencies are openly worried about this new mechanism as well.

For more information please visit http://www.fao.org/forestry/en/ or
http://www.iisd.ca/download/pdf/enb13175e.pdf

Calendar of Forest-Related Meetings

More information on these and other intergovernmental meetings can be found at: www.iisd.ca

2011 has been declared International Year of Forests. *For more information please visit: http://www.un.org/esa/forests/2011/2011.html*

The Expert Group Meeting on Indigenous People and Forests will take place 12 to 14 January 2011 at the UN Headquarters in New York, US. *For more information visit: http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/workshops.html*

The 9th session of the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF 9) will be held 24 January to 4 February 2011 in New York, US. *For more information visit:* http://www.un.org/esa/forests

The UNFCCC Subsidiary Bodies will take place 6 to 17 June 2011 in Bonn, Germany. *For more information please visit: www: http://www.unfccc.int*

The Second World Biodiversity Congress will be held 8 to 12 September 2011 in Kuching (Sarawak), Malaysia. *For more information please visit: http://www.worldbiodiversity2011.com/*

The 10th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 10) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) will be held 10 to 21 October 2011 in Changwon City, Gyeongnam Province, Republic of Korea. *For more information please visit: http://www.unccd.int/*

The 17th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP 17) and 7th Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (COP/MOP 7) will take place 28 November to 9 December 2011 in Durban (Kwazulu-Natal), South Africa. *For more information please visit: http://unfccc.int/meetings/unfccc_calendar/items/2655.php?year=2011*

Editorial Team:

- *Yolanda Sikking, the Netherlands*
- *Simone Lovera, Paraguay*
- *Ronnie Hall, UK*
- *Sandy Gauntlett, Aotearoa/New Zealand*
- *Swati Shresth, India*
- *Wally Menne, South Africa*

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