



Issue no.38, August 2011

About Forest Cover

Welcome to the thirty-eighth 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

Donate to GFC:
http://www.globalforestcoalition.org/?page_id=70

Follow GFC Facebook:
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Global-Forest-Coalition/313049337000>
and Twitter: <http://twitter.com/#!/gfc123>

CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

About Forest Cover

Rio+20 must Recognize the Role of Civil Society
by Fiu Mataese Elisara/ Chair of the Board, Global Forest Coalition

REDD and the Feeling of Standing Barefoot in a Peat swamp
By Simone Lovera, Sobrevivencia, Paraguay

African Faith Leaders get Organized for Durban COP17
By Nigel Crawhall, Director of the Secretariat of the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee (IPACC) and member of the Western Cape Provincial Religious Leaders Forum

San Mariano Biofuel Project Should be Rejected as CDM Project
By Feny Cosico, Advocates of Science and Technology for the People (AGHAM), the Philippines

Genetically Engineered Tree Developments: GE Cold Tolerant Eucalyptus in the US
By Anne Petermann, Executive Director, Global Justice Ecology Project; North American Focal Point, Global Forest Coalition

Calendar of Forest-related meetings



Logs and trees, US. Photo: Anne Petermann.



Rio+20 must recognize the role of civil society

Fiu Mataese Elisara/ Chair of the Board, Global Forest Coalition

The UN Charter recognizes three major development actors at the intergovernmental and multilateral level: nation states, intergovernmental organizations and - according to paragraph 71 of the UN Charter - non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The key role civil society plays in sustainable development was first recognized by the global UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. It was subsequently supported by the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED or the 'Earth Summit') in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in 2002.



But times are changing, and not for the better. As we travel back to Rio de Janeiro for next year's United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) in June, 40 years after Stockholm and 20 years after the Earth Summit, those same developed countries who contributed to this global agreement endorsing the involvement of civil society, are increasingly ignoring our role as a development partner. Indeed, they appear to have reversed their positions with respect to this particular commitment. This is unacceptable. In the Pacific, for example, the government of New Zealand's approach to civil society has been to slash funding for NGOs. One regional NGO had its budget cut just one year into a three year commitment period; another experienced a cut of committed funds that impacted some ten affiliated country members and thousands of local communities. Civil society is concerned that these changes are being pushed through without adequate investigation into their long-term consequences; we are disappointed at New Zealand's apparent willingness to abandon the partnership process and give up on development.

In Australia, funds are still flowing but vast amounts are being diverted to highly-paid AusAID advisors offering advice to developing nations on everything from law and order to farming. A recent Telegraph/Pacnews editorial¹ pointed to AusAID-funded consultants earning more than the Australian Prime Minister. Some of these individuals earn hundreds of thousands of dollars a year; collectively, they are raking in millions of dollars intended for development.

Rich countries reneging on their commitment to civil society seems to be a global phenomenon. In the Netherlands, for example, a number of big Dutch aid groups have had their government grants slashed, and some will receive no further funds at all according to the country's foreign affairs ministry. According to DutchNews.nl, a total of 22 alliances of aid groups had applied for almost €3bn in grants over the next five years but were given grants of just €2.1bn split between 19 alliances made up of 67 individual charities.² Whilst the biggest grant went to Oxfam Novib, even this was well below the requested amount and the organization's head, Farah Karimi, said, "It is difficult to explain to our partners in developing countries, and the people there who depend on our support... the cuts will have a dramatic affect on the people we reach through our work."

The Global Forest Coalition (GFC), which has a small secretariat in Amsterdam and members scattered around the seven regions of the world, has unfortunately found itself part of these drastic and unreasonable cuts. This means that we will also have to cut deep into our own limited and meager resources, which will ultimately have a dramatic affect on the developing countries, indigenous peoples and local communities we reach through our work.

As we move towards Rio+20 next year, civil society will continue to challenge these changes. We cannot fulfil our role in building sustainable development when rich governments are reneging on their commitment to our work and cancelling the funding that supports our activities. It is utterly irresponsible when one considers that

¹ AUSAID foreign advisers raking in millions, Pacific Island News Association, 1 July 2011, <http://www.pina.com.fj/?p=pacnews&m=read&o=1071967294e0cfca0fd06d1c0fc288>

² Government slashes grants to development aid groups, 2 November 2010, http://www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2010/11/government_slashes_grants_to_a.php



the world is suffering an even graver crisis that it was during previous summits. It is essential that the Rio-20 Summit next year revives global commitment to civil society acting as an integral and genuine partner that will help to implement its outcomes.

The central theme of Rio+20 must be poverty alleviation, the well-being of all the people, and securing environmental sustainability through maintaining biodiversity. It must be create an economic system that ensures social justice and equity, protects the ecological balance and creates economic sufficiency. It must avoid the inequity, environmental destruction and greed inherent in the current world economic order, which has kept nearly half the world's population in poverty, and brought the planet to the point of a severe environmental catastrophe through climate change.

Sustainability is a social construct, a definition of our values and aspirations as global citizens to which we must all be committed. It is not a new economic paradigm but a social, political, cultural, and ecological order that CSOs and governments in true partnerships need to recommit themselves to, as a powerful pathway by which sustainable development can be achieved.

REDD and the Feeling of Standing Barefoot in a Peatswamp

Simone Lovera, Sobrevivencia, Paraguay

When Frances Seymour, Director of the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), likened her experience of monitoring carbon for a REDD+³ pilot project in Kalimantan to “standing barefoot in a peatswamp” she probably only intended it as an amusing anecdote. But for other REDD insiders attending the ‘informal’ Oslo REDD Exchange 2011, 23-24 June, her words probably reflected their feelings rather accurately.

The Exchange took place in Oslo, Norway, which is by far the biggest bilateral REDD donor. However, even the Norwegian government seemed rather subdued about the billions of dollars it has so far invested in REDD. In his relatively brief address to the Exchange, for example, the Norwegian Minister of International Development Eric Solheim seemed to excuse his country for having invested so much money. He claimed his government was trying to resolve questions that have arisen about violations of Indigenous Peoples’ rights, corruption, biodiversity impacts, and the large tranches of funding that seem to have been wasted in countries like Brazil and Indonesia.



Kalbar Peatlands. Photo: Peter van Sluijs, ©.

The governments of these two countries have recently implemented policies that work against the spirit of reducing deforestation, meaning that forest loss in their respective territories is most unlikely to be stemmed, despite the Norwegian investments. In the case of Brazil, for example, deforestation rates in the Amazon have recently surged again, yet the government is in discussion about reforming and essentially relaxing the country's Forest Code, with a view to granting immunity to those who have violated deforestation rules, and allowing farmers in the Amazon to cut down a much greater percentage of forests on their lands.

Similarly, although Indonesia did agree to a deforestation moratorium after significant pressure from Norway, the moratorium finally put in place mainly covers areas that were already legally protected, such as national parks. This means that large-scale conversion of often biologically rich and socio-economically valuable secondary forests could still continue.

No wonder Norwegian tax payers and other REDD donors are now starting to question whether spending so much money in countries that are notorious for corruption and/or a lack of law enforcement makes sense.

³ REDD stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation. It is a carbon financing mechanism being promoted by the UNFCCC, the World Bank and others.



At the same time, many REDD recipients may also be starting to wonder whether REDD is worth all the fuss. At the latest meeting of the REDD+ Partnership, an informal partnership of REDD+ funders and REDD+ recipients, which took place on 12 June in Bonn, a presentation on the REDD+ database⁴ was given. This provides an overview of REDD+ funding as reported by REDD funders and recipients. Remarkably, according to the presentation,⁵ recipient countries reported that they had only received a total of 0.7 billion USD in REDD funding from bilateral and multilateral donors so far,⁶ while donors themselves reported that they had committed a total of 7.7 billion USD.⁷

Of course, the institutions hosting the database were quick to explain during the partnership meeting that this 7 billion USD gap did not imply funds were missing. In a reaction to a GJEP blog on these missing 7 billion, they explained that “these are reports on funding agreements for REDD+ up to the year 2015, not on the amount of money that is supposed to have been transferred already.” “Difference in reporting capacity” between funders and recipients was mentioned as another reason for the different figures, and it was stressed that, “The differences do not necessarily indicate that funding commitments are not being fulfilled.”⁸

Similarly, there is much concern about whether some of the 100 billion USD promised as annual support for climate mitigation and adaptation (including REDD) during the UNFCCC COP-15 in Copenhagen, in December 2009, consists of “funding commitments” that might not necessarily be fulfilled. An internal working document of the European Commission, for example, reveals that a significant amount of this money is expected to come from potential carbon offsets and other private investments by yet-to-be identified investors.⁹

But whether those carbon traders will ever cough up the funds is increasingly in doubt. Now that the climate change negotiations have turned into perhaps the biggest peatswamp of them all, the chance that a mandatory carbon market will be established any time soon is becoming slimmer by the day. As one panelist remarked during the REDD Exchange, “The dream of carbon markets has faded away”.¹⁰ After all, trade needs caps to work: carbon credits are only worth something if they are in limited supply and eventually turn into something big polluters need to meet legally binding emission reductions commitments. If Northern countries, as seems increasingly the case, refuse to set sufficiently ambitious emission caps, companies will not need to buy credits.

Carbon offsets remain the most volatile, unreliable, inequitable and unstable source of forest finance possible. And as the Costa Rican government rightfully pointed out during the REDD+ Partnership meeting, they need the opposite: stable and reliable sources of funding for stable and reliable forest policies.¹¹ And this is true for other forms of land use like agriculture as well.

Considering this overall REDD-depression, the atmosphere during the formal negotiations on REDD+ itself, which took place earlier, during the meetings of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific and Technical Advice of the UN Framework Climate Convention, 5-17 June in Bonn, seemed remarkably constructive. But the relative speed with which they concluded the agenda for the rest of the year hides deep underlying conflicts. By the time substantive negotiations start on tricky issues such as implementing safeguards and reference levels¹², the forest snakes that seemed to sleep in the undergrowth in Bonn will undoubtedly be slithering all over the negotiating tables again.

⁴ <http://reddplusdatabase.org/>

⁵ REDD+ Partnership Voluntary REDD+Database, Updated Progress Report,

11 June 2011 http://www.theredddesk.org/sites/default/files/doc-attachments/vrd_updated_progress_report_bonn_11-06-2011_1_0.pdf

⁶ Current total can be checked at: http://reddplusdatabase.org/?according_to=recipient

⁷ Current total can be checked at: http://reddplusdatabase.org/?according_to=funder

⁸ Comment by Lera Miles of UNEP-WCMC on the Global Justice Ecology Project blogpost

<http://climate-connections.org/2011/06/13/redd-the-miracle-of-the-missing-7-billion-of-redd-money/> dd. 1 July 2011

⁹ See for example http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/articles/financial_operations/pdf/sec_2011_487_final_en.pdf

¹⁰ Presentation by Victoria Tauli-Corpuz of Tebtebba Foundation on “Indigenous Peoples Perspectives” at plenary session 1 of the REDD Exchange, 23 June 2011

¹¹ Costa Rica made the same observation in Bonn:

http://foris.fao.org/meetings/download/2011/redd_partnership_workshop/presentations/alexandra_senz_redd_partnership_18_june_2011.pdf

¹² Estimations of “normal” forest loss, which make it possible to calculate how much progress is made in reducing forest loss.



It is easy, for example, to make a vague statement that monitoring, reporting and verification methods should be sound as well as flexible. But in reality this means choosing between a system that provides accurate carbon data but could cost up to 60% of the entire REDD budget, or a 'flexible' system that provides little more than wild guesses about reductions in forest carbon loss.

Likewise, it is easy to talk about drivers of forest loss, but negotiations on concrete, binding policies and measures to address those drivers will undoubtedly unearth numerous angry corporate insects with stings in their tails. Indeed, once the proposed expert meetings on these substantive issues take place we will start finding out just how many poisonous animals are hiding in the REDD peatswamp.

African Faith Leaders get Organized for Durban COP17

By Nigel Crawhall, Director of the Secretariat of the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee (IPACC) and member of the Western Cape Provincial Religious Leaders Forum.

Anyone who has followed the UN's climate change negotiations over the last few years may well feel that our only chance of averting the planet's unfolding climate crisis will be a miracle, ideally ahead of the next Conference of the Parties (COP-17), which will be held in Durban, 28 November – 9 December 2011. However, in the face of the near collapse of the UN negotiations, an alliance of African religious leaders is intending to do its best to catalyze African leadership to unblock the tragically flawed climate convention. African faith leaders affirm that this is a human induced crisis, and its solution will be found in the will and wisdom of humans to take responsibility for our actions.



The religious sector is deeply concerned about the fate of the planet and particularly poor and vulnerable communities. Three major alliances joined forces to hold a pan-African conference of 130 religious leaders from a broad spectrum of traditions. They want to understand what is going so wrong in the climate talks, where Africa stands in this, and what faith communities can do to bring about a shift in thinking and approach and to support Africa's leadership in Durban.

The Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute (SAFCEI), the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), and the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) joined forces to hold a two day conference at the UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, on 7-8 June 2011. Leaders from various Christian, Islamic,

Hindu, Buddhist and Baha'i traditions from 30 countries attended. Maasai elders and leaders from the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee (IPACC) represented the African Traditional Religion at the event.

IPACC and SAFCEI have been working closely with Norwegian Church Aid to plan for maximum civil society impact at COP-17. Both networks feel that the UN process has gone too far down the track of trade agreements and macroeconomics which are the root cause of the current crisis. Indigenous leaders and faith leaders have said that ethics, governance, equity and human rights have to be put back at the centre of the equation. SAFCEI ran an early conference for South Africa, held in Lusaka, which focused more explicitly on South Africa's extremely high CO2 emissions, primarily generated by burning coal for electricity. Religious leaders expressed concern that some political leaders are focusing on short term gains and interests, at the risk of placing Africa's future in jeopardy. Religion tends to take a longer term view, outliving governments, states and even empires.

This view was echoed by most of the speakers in Nairobi. Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP was remarkably frank. UNEP hosted the religious leaders' conference at its headquarters in Nairobi, and Steiner participated extensively. Steiner's most poignant observation is that the UN system is designed for states to try to maximize their interests relative to one another. Climate change requires focusing not only on a higher level



good (i.e. global benefit); it also requires that those with more wealth and power have compassion for those who are more vulnerable. This is evidently not happening. Religion may be able to change this dynamic however, since such concern is at the heart of most world religions – setting the greater good above greed and self-interest, and having compassion and mercy for others.

The inter-religious sector released a statement on climate justice in Africa, which emphasized that the African negotiators need to do more, that the image of Africa as a victim of climate change should be dropped, and that faith communities need to be educated and take action at both congregation and higher levels. In the Francophone working group from Central and West Africa, serious concern was expressed about deforestation and declining agriculture, loss of top soil, water shortages or flooding, and the spread of climate-related diseases. Indeed, though climate denial may still be viable in North America, the African religious leadership were united in their experience at grass roots levels of the appalling cycles of floods and famines, and the generally worsening of vulnerability and loss of biodiversity. There was, however, a difference of views on whether African faith leaders should be calling on American Churches to do their part to put pressure on Washington to act responsibly. These dynamics showed up some differences in organizational style, but came down to the issue of whether the US churches are willing to recognize their duty with regards Africa and speaking 'truth to power' in Washington about the realities of anthropogenic climate change.

The African religious leaders will be meeting with African Heads of State and working with the African Union in an attempt to shift the African negotiating position and strategy ahead of COP-17. SAFCEI and its allies intend to work with civil society groups to hold a major rally and stadium event in Durban, and bring faith leaders from across the continent to make it clear that it is time to take responsibility for our actions. Christians and Muslims are defining the destructive actions behind anthropogenic climate change as an assault on God's creation of life on Earth, and Hindus and Buddhists define it as bad karma through harmful and selfish intentions and actions. The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) was represented by the venerable Kalupahana who came from his monastery in Sri Lanka. INEB, in cooperation with the Sewalanka Foundation, will run a similar conference in Asia in 2012.

Major themes for Durban will include improved energy policies for Africa; more attention to the fragility of the agricultural sector; halting deforestation while protecting the rights of forest-dwelling peoples; greater attention to equity of responsibility and financial commitments (common and differentiated, and now not later); and a push by Africa to move forward with pro-poor adaptation policies and practices that will protect both nature and vulnerable communities.

The African faith leadership will be supported by a youthful movement working on the theme 'We have Faith – Act for Climate Justice Now', which is an alliance of civil society and faith movements calling for a binding climate agreement in Durban. Indigenous peoples will attend COP-17, and host an indigenous day; they will highlight the importance of traditional knowledge systems, indigenous values, and localized territorial sovereignty and stewardship, to offset the negative impacts of multinational extractive industries.¹³

San Mariano biofuel project should be rejected as CDM project

Feny Cosico, Advocates of Science and Technology for the People (AGHAM), the Philippines

The joint Philippine-Japanese corporate consortium Green Future Innovations Incorporated (GFII), is opening up a large-scale bioethanol and co-generation plant in the northern municipality of San Mariano, Isabela, in the Philippines. Once operational, it will be the biggest agrofuel producer in the country. By partnering with the Filipino-based ECOFUEL Land Development, Inc., Japanese company ITOCHU Inc. is already beginning to transform vast tracks of land into sugarcane plantations. They are aiming to take over 11,000 hectares in an area where there is only approximately 29,000 hectares of agricultural land available, as recorded in official

¹³ <http://en.procmura-prica.org/Climate%20Change%20UNEP%20Sending.pdf>
<http://www.unep.org/climatechange/adaptation/InformationMaterials/News/PressRelease/tabid/6710/Default.aspx?DocumentId=2645&ArticleId=8779>
<http://safcei.org/safceis-groundbreaking-cop17-programme-for-2011/>



government statistics. This project is aiming to attain a production of 125,000 liters of ethanol per day or 54 million liters per year.¹⁴

The project is being promoted through an “environmentally sustainable” corporate portfolio, with the operational area being labelled an “Ecofuel Agro-Industrial Ecozone”, and the project’s stated purpose being to help attain the requirements of the national biofuel program. The “Philippine Energy Renewable Program”’s biofuel production objectives are supposedly meant to break the country’s dependence on imported fossil-based fuels with a view to improving energy security. In reality, however, they undermine any agenda for food security, land reform and genuinely rights-based and ecologically sound development.

One of the ITOCHU Corporation’s most deceptive acts has been its attempt, in April 2011, to register the San Mariano biofuel project as a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) project under the Kyoto Protocol of the UNFCCC, by claiming it will provide net carbon credits. However, despite its projected image as a so-called green and sustainable development, this project is seen very differently by the affected communities of peasants and Indigenous Peoples surrounding it. Even before its target date for full operation (scheduled for the first quarter of 2012), GFII is bent on amassing land resources and is targeting areas currently covered by land reform policies, and Indigenous Peoples’ ancestral domains. Moreover, the declared “idle and marginal lands” also sought for monoculture sugarcane plantations have been actively utilized for subsistence farming for decades, and are not “idle” at all. Farmers and Indigenous Peoples who have established themselves in the area have painstakingly increased the productivity of the land so that high-value crops such as vegetables, bananas, pineapples and food crops such as rice and corn can be grown.



People’s Caravan for Food Sovereignty, Philippines.

Over the past few years, local organizations of peasants, Indigenous Peoples and human rights advocates have been organizing to try to draw attention to numerous concerns in relation to the project. However, local and national politicians have refused to heed their demands to halt the project. As a result those concerned called for an International Fact Finding Mission (IFFM) to be launched. This was convened from 30 May to 3 June 2011, to investigate the ways the company is engaging in land grabbing to obtain the needed fields for sugar cane plantation expansion. Evidence was also gathered regarding the environmental devastation inherent in the development, demonstrating concretely why the application to proceed as a CDM project should be rejected by the governments of the Philippines and Japan as well as the CDM Executive Committee.

Public consultation for affected communities and Free, Prior and Informed Consent for communities of Indigenous Peoples is a legal obligation and social accountability requisite that must be taken seriously by project proponents. However no steps towards genuine community consultation or obtaining non-coercive forms of agreement from the affected communities have been taken. Instead, subsistence farming families have been pressured to accept onerous deals. Farmers are losing their rights to till the land upon which their livelihoods depend through schemes that are tantamount to land grabbing, and made possible through the connivance of corrupt government officials and agencies. Dispossessed of their land, entire families end up as sugar cane laborers working on the lands they once considered their own to till, under conditions that blatantly violate labor laws pertaining to minimum wage standards, and health and safety standards.

Green Future Innovation’s claim of complying with the obligatory environmental impact assessment (EIA) requirements is also contentious because there was only a simple EIA conducted for the planned ethanol

¹⁴ <http://greenfutureinnovations.com/>



processing facility, rather than an overall EIA covering the intended 11,000 hectare project. Plantations have already encroached on productive farm areas, and forest lands that are under protection as restoration areas under Socialized Industrial Forestry Management Agreements. Furthermore, the project seriously threatens environmentally critical areas in the vicinity such as the interconnected watershed river systems of the Northern Sierra Madre Protected National Park. Landslides and erosion caused by seasonal typhoons are prevalent in many areas of San Mariano, and vast monocrop plantations of sugar cane will serve to exacerbate these conditions.

Hence, there is an urgent need to listen to the voices of the affected communities of peasants and Indigenous Peoples calling for the project to be withdrawn, ultimately respecting their welfare as well as the gains of the greater majority of stakeholders, rather than advancing the profits and interests of foreign corporations along with a few national accomplices.

Genetically Engineered Tree Developments: GE Cold Tolerant Eucalyptus in the US **Anne Petermann, Executive Director, Global Justice Ecology Project; North American Focal Point, Global Forest Coalition**

In Arraial D' Ajuda in the state of Bahia in Brazil, from 26 June to 2 July, the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) joined timber companies Embrapa and Veracel to host a conference called 'Tree Biotechnology 2011'. Much of the conference was devoted to genetically engineered trees, especially genetically engineered eucalyptus, modified to express particular profitable traits by inserting genes from other species into them.

The dominant use for these fast-growing eucalyptus trees that mature in just seven years is for pulp. With 27% of the global total, the US currently leads the world in pulp exports, mainly from pine plantations in the Southeast. Brazil comes in a distant fourth with 8%, and Canada and China are currently second and third with 12% and 10% respectively, but Brazil plans to triple its eucalyptus pulp production in the next 10 years. To 'stay competitive,' companies in the US are working to develop cold-tolerant genetically engineered eucalyptus trees to be grown in massive plantations from Texas to Florida and up into Arkansas and South Carolina.



Expanse of seedlings, US. Photo: Anne Petermann/GJEP.



Massive chip pile, US. Photo: Anne Petermann/GJEP.

This expansion will require vast acreages of land. International Paper was quoted as estimating that use of genetically engineered (GE) eucalyptus will double the acreage of land in plantations in the US from 42 million acres to 84 million. In other words, millions of acres of land will need to be converted from its current form (native forests, agricultural lands and ranch lands) into industrial-scale GE eucalyptus plantations.

Industry calls these 'planted forests.' But there is no such thing as a 'planted forest'. There are forests, and there are timber plantations, and one bears no resemblance to the other - not ecologically; not in terms of carbon storage



capacity (forests are rich in carbon, plantations are not); not in terms of biodiversity; and not with respect to their ability to provide for the needs of forest dependent communities. Saying a plantation is a forest is like saying a cornfield is a prairie.

The confusion between the two is intentional. It allows the expansion of industrial timber plantations to be called reforestation 'afforestation' or even 'sustainable forest management,' and clouds the ability to determine exactly how much forest is being lost every year. With the global focus on reducing deforestation as a means of curbing climate change, these inaccurate definitions are incredibly detrimental to forests and climate change mitigation.

In addition to increasing production, GE eucalyptus trees are also being engineered for higher wood quality and wood density, and for freeze tolerance. Freeze tolerance is particularly important because at present, eucalyptus cannot tolerate freezing temperatures, which severely limits their range. With the freeze tolerance gene, eucalyptus can be grown in temperatures as low as -9°C, which expands the regions where they can be grown significantly.

Why grow GE trees? Here are some of the industry's arguments:

1) Increasing the productivity of eucalyptus or poplar trees will grow more wood on less land and therefore protect native forests. However, because faster growing GE trees are even more profitable than non-genetically modified (non-GMO) plantation trees, they will actually increase existing incentives for landowners to convert their native forests to plantations. Most plantations already grow where native ecosystems once stood - whether forest or grassland. As demand for wood increases (for ethanol, electricity, heat and bio-products), the forests will be cut down and replaced with 'high productivity' plantations.

2) Industry argues that GE insect-resistant trees (like Bt poplars) will not need to be sprayed with pesticides, hence reducing chemical use. However, the entire tree is a pesticide, from the leaves to the roots to the pollen. This insecticide then enters and wreaks havoc in the soils, contaminates water, and blows around in pollen, so that wildlife and people inhale the pesticide, which enters their bloodstream by way of their lungs. In addition, GE trees that are engineered to be 'RoundUp Ready' will have the exact same result as RoundUp Ready GMO crops - the amount of herbicide used on them will massively increase, water will be contaminated, and the threat of herbicide resistant weeds will spread.

3) GMO trees will help us with climate adaptation. Wrong. Nothing will help our forests with climate adaptation except halting climate disruption by curtailing the emission of greenhouse gases, and ensuring that native forests are maintained in large interconnected tracts so that species can migrate and adapt as needed. Plantations store only about one quarter of the carbon that native forests do, so expanding plantations actually worsens climate change. In addition, eucalyptus trees are explosively flammable, due to the highly volatile compounds they contain. So in addition to sequestering less carbon, they threaten forests and the climate by increasing the threat of firestorms.

In addition to the problems listed above, eucalyptus trees are highly invasive. Making them cold-tolerant means they can escape and colonize new ecosystems in colder climates. Rapidly increasing their productivity increases their need for fertilizers (which are petroleum-based and contribute to climate change) and ground water, causing even more severe impacts, especially in drought-prone areas. Engineering them to be cold tolerant means conversion of forests in colder climates to eucalyptus plantations at exactly the time when forests need to be protected. For more information on the threat of genetically engineered eucalyptus trees (as well as GE poplar and GE pine) in the US and what you can do to stop them, visit www.stopgetrees.org.



*Veracel pulp mill, US.
Photo: Anne Petermann/GJEP.*



Calendar of Forest-Related Meetings & Events

August

- 8-10th Second Regional Forum for People and Forests: Community Forestry: Key to Solving Current and Emerging Challenges, The Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC). Bangkok, Thailand.
- 9th International Day of the World's Indigenous People.
- 22 – 24th Thirty-third meeting of the Clean Development Mechanism Afforestation/Reforestation Working Group. August, 2011. Bonn, Germany.

September

- 21-23rd Seventh Ministerial Conference "Environment For Europe", Astana, Kazakhstan.
- 21ST International Day against Monoculture Tree Plantations.

October

- 1 - 7th The third part of the sixteenth session of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex I Parties under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP 16) and the third part of the fourteenth session of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention (AWG-LCA 14), Panama City. <http://unfccc.int/2860.php>
- 10-21st. The tenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 10) to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Changwon City, Gyeongnam Province, Republic of Korea. <http://www.unccd.int/>.
- 10 – 14th Joint Session of the UNECE Timber Committee and the FAO European Forestry Commission. Antalya, Turkey. <http://www.fao.org/forestry/efc/31913/en/>
- 15th International Day for Rural Women.
- 16th World Food Day.
- 17th International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.
- 17 – 19th. Thirty-fourth meeting of the Clean Development Mechanism Afforestation/Reforestation Working Group. Bonn, Germany.
- 18 – 21st - Fifth Latin American Forestry Congress (CONFLAT V). Lima, Peru.
- 28th World Paper Free Day.
- 31st – November 4th Seventh meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions (WG8J 7), Montreal, Canada.

November

- 7th – 11th Fifteenth meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biodiversity, Montreal, Canada.
- 28th – December 10th Seventeenth Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and related meetings, Durban, South Africa.

Editorial Team:

- *Isis Alvarez, Colombia*
- *Yolanda Sikking, the Netherlands*
- *Simone Lovera, Paraguay*
- *Ronnie Hall, UK*
- *Swati Shresth, India*
- *Wally Menne, South Africa*

This newsletter was made possible through financial contributions from Swedbio and the Isvara Foundation. The views expressed are not necessarily those of our donors.