Letter of Concern about potential GCF support to Monoculture Tree Plantations

The Global Forest Coalition, a coalition of 86 NGOs and Indigenous Peoples' Organizations from 56 countries, and Friends of the Earth International, the world's largest environmental grassroots organization, express their profound concern about the potential inclusion of monoculture tree plantations in Green Climate Fund (GCF) supported projects and programs.

The replacement of forests or other natural ecosystems by monoculture tree plantations forms a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. Due to the often short-rotation processes in which they are operated, plantations take up only a fraction of carbon compared to old-grown trees or restored (natural) ecosystems. If planted on former peatland, the carbon loss is even greater. They also tend to deplete soil carbon, including through the allelopathic effect of especially Eucalyptus, one of the most popular plantations species, which can be a primordial cause of land degradation through jump-starting the process by which the land is exposed to erosion, compaction and excessive solar irradiation.

Especially when planted on a large scale, monoculture tree plantations undermine climate resilience. Evergreen species such as eucalyptus and pine take up water from the ground the whole year leading to extreme dry grounds fuelling wildfires and eventually worsening the effects of climate change. They are more susceptible to fire, pests, and storm damage than natural forests. They also deplete water resources, and when cut as part of the productive cycle, cause significant risks of landslides when planted on slopes.

Tree plantations often replace natural ecosystems, or lands that were in process of ecosystem restoration. The replacement of forests by tree plantations is one of the main threats to the world's biodiversity. Alien invasive species like Eucalyptus (if planted outside its country of origin, Australia) are the second most important cause of global biodiversity loss. Monoculture tree plantations also have a negative impact on water sources, as they tend to require the use of agrochemicals, and often exist of species like Pine and Eucalyptus that require an excessive amount of water.

Monoculture tree plantations are the most labour-extensive form of land use after large-scale cattle ranching. The few jobs they provide per hectare of land tend to be temporary, badly paid, and often they are given to outsiders rather than local workers. As a result, the expansion of tree plantations has been associated with poverty, rural unemployment, rural depopulation, and the decline of rural livelihoods, triggering green deserts that are not only devout of biodiversity, but also of people.

The establishment of monoculture tree plantations is a commercial activity with potential negative social and environmental impacts that should not be supported with climate finance or other public funds. They are a business as usual approach to wood production that does not contribute to climate mitigation or adaptation, or transformative change. For that reason, we call upon the Green Climate Fund to explicitly exclude monoculture tree plantations from its project portfolio in the field of land use and carbon stock enhancement.