

Monoculture Tree Plantations Fuelling the Climate Fire

Background photo: Stuart Rankin/Flickr

Plantations undermine climate resilience

In January 2017, a prolonged period of drought triggered extensive fires in the widespread monoculture pine plantations in Chile. No less than 600,000 hectares of tree plantations, native forests and other lands went up in flames, causing eleven fatalities and massive social and economic harm. The Chilean fires provided yet more evidence that monoculture tree plantations undermine countries' climate resilience. They are highly susceptible to fire, pests, and storm damage, erode soils, deplete water resources, and increase risks of land slides when planted on slopes.

Plantations contribute to climate change

The replacement of forests or other natural ecosystems by monoculture tree plantations forms a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. They also tend to deplete soil carbon, including through the allelopathic effect of species such as Eucalyptus. If planted on former peatland, the carbon loss is even greater.

Plantations destroy biodiversity and water sources

Tree plantations almost always replace natural ecosystems, or lands that were in process of ecosystem restoration, and often consist of alien invasive species, which are a major cause of biodiversity loss. Monoculture tree plantations also tend to 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.

Plantations destroy communities

Monoculture tree plantations constitute a very labour-extensive form of land use that provides few and usually temporary and badly paid jobs, and even these are often 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 devoid of biodiversity, but also of people. The Community Conservation Resilience Initiative assessments in countries like Chile, South Africa, Malaysia, India and Uganda identified tree plantations as a major threat to communities and their conservation initiatives. [1] Women are particularly hard-hit as they are often responsible for gathering fuelwood and other natural resources that are privatised or depleted when ecosystems are replaced by plantations.

Plantations are a false solution to climate change

Despite their many negative impacts on climate resilience and climate change, tree plantations are increasingly subsidised through climate finance, including within the framework of REDD+, mainly due to the growing dependency of climate policies on private investments, through public private partnerships and other forms of blended finance. For private investors, a commercial tree plantation is a more profitable investment than forest conservation or restoration, despite the benefits of the latter for local communities, Indigenous Peoples and women. Offsets for highly polluting industries like the airline industry, subsidies for bioenergy (which is wrongly considered a renewable source of energy despite often causing more emissions than fossil fuels [2]) and ill-considered proposals like Bioenergy and Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS), along with associated flawed accounting mechanisms, all support the expansion of commercial monoculture tree plantations.

Paraguay: Plantations to produce biomass for the soy sector

The PROEZA project, which has been submitted to the Green Climate Fund (GCF), includes a component that aims to subsidise at least 32,500 hectares of monoculture tree plantations to produce additional bioenergy for the soy sector, which is one of the main causes of deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions in Paraguay. The project will be discussed at the July 2017 GCF Board meeting.

Ghana: Public-private partnerships for the restoration of degraded forest reserve through VCS and FSC certified plantations [3]

This project was approved by the World Bank's Forest Investment Program (FIP) in February 2015 and consists of a USD 10 million concessional loan aimed at catalysing private sector involvement so as to expand a large-scale commercial teak plantation in Ghana, that has only 10% indigenous trees species and 90% teak, from 5,000 ha to 11,700 ha.

Brazil: Commercial reforestation of modified lands in the Cerrado

This project proposal, which was part of Brazil's FIP Investment Plan, was endorsed in 2013 for a total of USD 15 million of non-grant investment. The project aimed to subsidise a private Brazilian corporation to plant 18,000 ha of teak monocultures.

Uganda: Green Resources' plantation

In 2011, the Swedish Energy Agency entered into a 20-year contract agreement with Green Resources, a Norwegian company, to buy so-called 'carbon credits' from a tree plantation in Kachung, Uganda that has been plagued by forced evictions of farmers, the pollution of adjacent watercourses with pesticides, and the violation of indigenous peoples' rights. [4]

Mozambique: Emissions reductions in the forest sector through planted forests with major investors

This project was approved by the FIP in April 2017, for a total of USD 1.85 million of grant funding. One of the main goals of the project is to facilitate the afforestation of over 200,000 hectares, mainly with Eucalyptus. [5]



A plantation destroyed by fire near Concepcion, Chile. Sergio/Flickr



Green Resources pine plantation in Uganda - communities are excluded from these areas. Carbon Violence

Monoculture tree plantations should not be defined as forests and have no place in climate change policies. They are commercial enterprises, and should not be subsidised with climate finance.

PLANTATIONS ARE NOT FORESTS!

Monoculture tree plantations increase the risk of forest fires substantially. USDA/Flickr



Community of Mundé in Brazil is completely surrounded by eucalyptus plantations. Ivonete Gonçalves de Souza



Logging operations at an Arauco tree plantation in Chile. Simone Lovera



Eucalyptus plantations cause significant harm to communities and biodiversity in many parts of the world. Ivonete Gonçalves de Souza



References

- [1] <http://globalforestcoalition.org/resources/supporting-community-conservation/>
- [2] <http://biomasspower.gov.in/document/Reports/bioenergy-report.pdf>
- [3] https://www.cif.climateinvestmentfunds.org/sites/default/files/meeting-documents/fip_-_form_ghana_project_proposal_-_public_document_-_august_2016.pdf
- [4] <http://www.swedwatch.org/en/2015/11/05/lessons-learned-kachung>
- [5] https://www.cif.climateinvestmentfunds.org/sites/default/files/meeting-documents/mozambique_fip_investment_plan.pdf



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