

Newsletter

January 2020



Plantations in the Kokstad area of KwaZulu-Natal
Photo: Jenny Duvenage

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PLANTATIONS *are not Forests*

Will 2020 be the year shift happens?

The past year has been incredibly eventful. Major public dissent is taking place and a battle on a global scale is showing signs of developing. Essentially, this is between ordinary people and powerful corporate forces although it may be framed differently by various factions, ideologies and aspiring 'leaders' attempting to dominate and own the new story that is beginning to unfold.

At its core, this battle is the unending struggle for justice; self-determination; and a fair, equitable system for the majority of the Earth's citizens but this time the stakes have never been higher. The final three months of 2019 ended with **waves of civil unrest** erupting around the world in protests against corrupt, self-serving governments pursuing anti-people, anti-democratic and anti-environmental policies on behalf of a neo-feudal, corporate elite.

The elite agenda became abundantly clear in the course of the **failed and utterly discredited** 25th Conference of the Parties held at the last moment in Madrid. Having just been through a year of **record-breaking extreme weather** in the form of heat waves, droughts, hurricanes, floods and unprecedented fires – in addition to massive outpourings of public anger – we might have hoped for sanity to prevail and for those in power to finally face up to the reality of the situation and begin dealing with it. Instead, there was more prevarication and manipulation than ever and those most affected by climate breakdown were forcefully **excluded from participating in the proceedings**.

The term 'paradigm shift' was originally applied by Thomas Kuhn to the scientific establishment but is now widely used in any context where things suddenly change, old dogmas are rejected, and new ideas become widely accepted. At COP25, we saw the old story still dominating, with its blind faith in market-driven 'solutions', pandering to big business, and paying lip-service to the increasingly desperate human and ecological state of the world, despite 2020 marking a mere decade from 2030, the year given in the **seminal 2018 IPCC Special Report** that warns we face accelerated climate impacts if we haven't drastically reduced emissions by then.

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SAVE THE DATE 14 MARCH 2020

Timberwatch Bi-annual General Meeting

Our guest speaker will be Sibongile Mtungwa,
Director of the Women's Leadership Training Programme,
speaking on: 'Community Experiences of Plantations'
Full details to follow

In the wake of this stark warning, throughout 2019, millions of youth in over a hundred countries – many of them too young to vote – have also taken to the streets on a weekly basis to demand governments radically increase efforts to fight climate breakdown. Meanwhile, rural and indigenous communities who, for generations, have been on the frontlines of the battle for survival, are facing ever **greater danger and persecution** as the demand for products like timber, palm oil and minerals continues to grow and governments, in league with companies and criminals gangs, grab community land and destroy habitats in pursuit of profit. Yet despite seemingly insurmountable odds, the ordinary people of Planet Earth are rising up and uniting around a common vision for a better world ... May 2020 be the year we choose the high road and allow the necessary shifts to finally happen!

“A younger generation no longer accepts the assumptions of neoliberalism that have guided and enriched an elite for nearly four decades. Ideas of endless economic growth, inexhaustible oil, and an infinitely adaptable planet no longer make sense to a generation looking to its future rather than glorying in its past. They see an elite with two heads, creating an illusion of choice but enforcing strict conformity ... A paradigm shift doesn’t occur just because the young replace the old. It involves the old coming to accept – however reluctantly – that the young may have found an answer to a question they had forgotten needed answering. Many in the older generation know about solidarity and community. They may have been dazzled by promises of an aspirational lifestyle and the baubles of rampant consumption, but it is slowly dawning on them too that this model has a rapidly approaching sell-by date.” – Journalist, **Jonathan Cook**



Africa is the focus of the New Bioeconomy

Eriel Deranger of **Indigenous Climate Action** summed up what went down at COP25 as follows: *“Colonization and capitalism are at the root of this climate emergency, and global leaders have shown they will continue to prioritize corporate interests over human rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The COP25 has resulted in a push for market-based solutions that only further entrench neo-colonial structures that do nothing to get us closer to climate stabilization while further putting Indigenous peoples at risk.”*

This is no different to what went down eight years earlier at **COP17 in Durban**. Then as now, the objective is to ensure access to the land and natural resources of the south to feed the corporate capitalist machine. Africa is rich in land, raw materials and minerals. As such, it is viewed as a vital component in the roll-out of the so-called bioeconomy. Confronted with social, environmental and economic challenges on a global scale, the **New Bioeconomy** has become industry’s answer to continuing ‘business as usual’ with a green veneer – a supposedly environmentally-friendly alternative to everything previously produced using petroleum.

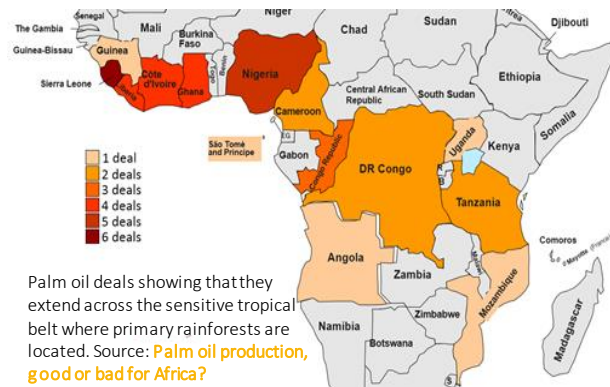
In the bioeconomy, ‘renewable biological resources’ are used not only for fuel but also a variety of other bio-based products. However: *“By prioritising market growth over environmental health and social wellbeing, the bioeconomy agenda ignores the necessity of reducing high levels of consumption, which is the primary cause of resource depletion worldwide. Ultimately, agrofuels appear to have more negative impacts than the fossil fuels they are supposed to replace, particularly in terms of lost land, resource access, livelihoods, and food security in the Global South. It is thus critical that other perspectives are also considered, for example agroecology, which supports the localisation of food and energy production as well as autonomous decision-making by farmers.”* – **The Bioeconomy (TNI)**

*“We see that a lot of countries are coming together under a **Biofutures Platform** saying they’re going to enable a bioeconomy, which will make not only liquid transportation fuels, but also bioplastics and biomaterials and a whole slew of other products out of living biomass, as opposed to fossilised biomass ... One thing people often don’t realise is that what is supported as renewable energy in say, Europe and the United States, out of the entire energy production only about 10-12% is renewables. And of that 10-12%, about half is actually bioenergy.”* – Rachel Smolker co-director of Biofuelwatch. **Watch Video on The Real News: Biofuels: An Eco-Friendly Alternative to Fossil Fuels?**

Traditional Khoisan Leadership Bill: President signs away rural people’s rights On 28 November 2019, Parliament announced that President Cyril Ramaphosa had signed the **Traditional Khoisan Leadership Bill**. The Alliance for Rural Democracy and its partners under ‘Stop the Bantustan Bills’ have campaigned vigorously against the bill, saying it will subject 17 million people, who live in former apartheid homelands, to the edict of unelected, predominantly male, traditional leaders. It also denies people the right to choose whether to have their cases heard in customary or state courts. **Constitutional scholars** say that customary – as opposed to state courts – do not offer the same protection. In addition: *“The bill provides that traditional leaders and councils can sign deals with investment companies without obtaining the consent of those whose land rights are directly affected.”* **For more info see: Press statement** by Land & Accountability Research Centre (LARC) and articles by **Felicia Nkhwashu** and **Mark Heyward**

New frontier of the palm oil industry

The oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) originates from West Africa where its use as a staple food crop dates back 5 000 years. Over the past decade, agribusiness companies have been increasing palm oil production to meet a growing global demand. As a result, community lands in many African countries have been targeted. Between 2000 and 2015, companies signed oil palm plantation concession agreements with African governments covering over 4.7 million hectares. Most of these agreements were signed without the knowledge of the communities concerned.



Palm oil and land grabbing in Cameroon
Center for Environment and Development

"Palm oil is deeply embedded in the culture and history of most countries in the region providing not only an important source of cooking oil to many generations of communities but also beverages, animal feed, textiles, building materials, medicines and all kinds of spiritual and ceremonial uses. The local production of palm oil was thriving until it was brutally interrupted by colonial occupation, in which much of the region's oil palm forest groves were put at the service of foreign companies and huge areas of lands were violently taken over to make way for the world's first large-scale oil palm plantations. The European colonial rulers selected from the diverse African palms and, with the same brutal force, established massive oil palm plantations in Southeast Asia. The cheap palm oil produced on these plantations, with virtual slave labour, would eventually be shipped back to Africa, turning a region that once had no problem to produce surpluses of palm oil, into a major importer. "

Grain: Communities in Africa fight back against the land grab for palm oil

A [recent report](#) by the Alliance Against Industrial Plantations in West and Central Africa finds that resistance against these companies by affected communities and groups supporting them, has slowed this expansion. It also highlights how small-scale oil palm cultivation is thriving, while the corporate model is failing: *"The experience with this latest wave of industrial oil palm plantations in Africa makes it clear that this model of corporate agriculture is totally inappropriate and ineffective for the continent. Villagers in many parts of the region have a long history of cultivating oil palms and producing palm oil without the involvement of big companies, and women are usually the main actors in these small-scale systems."*

Today, smallholders in African countries supplying small-scale mills, account for the vast majority of palm oil that is produced on the continent, and they are far more capable of expanding production to meet the growing local demand, if they have access to lands and markets. They also produce a palm oil that is of higher quality and more suited to local food cultures, whereas the industrial plantations produce a highly-refined palm oil designed for industrial uses, including unhealthy, ultra-processed foods and biofuels." – **Grain: Communities in Africa fight back against the land grab for palm oil.**

OLAM Palm Gabon pretends to use the Forest Definition to implement its 'Zero Deforestation' pledge: The Singapore-based OLAM company has secured access to 500 thousand hectares of land in Gabon to set up large-scale oil palm plantations, a country with 85% of forest coverage. How can OLAM then claim to follow a "zero deforestation" commitment? Read full article: [WRM article 30 Sept. 2019](#) | More articles from WRM on [oil palm plantations in Africa](#)



Ecofeminists fight for Uganda's forests

"Bugoma Forest spans 40 000 hectares along the northern tip of the Albertine Rift Valley, which divides Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Around 500 chimpanzees have made their home here, alongside a species of mangabey monkey found only in Uganda and hundreds of species of birds, trees and shrubs, making the forest one of the most

biodiverse in the country but for decades, Bugoma Forest has been shrinking.

Locals say illegal loggers pay off officials to turn a blind eye to their activities, while tea and timber plantations on the perimeter push the forest's boundary back piece by piece. Across Uganda, forest cover has declined from 24 percent of the country's total land area in 1990 to 9 percent in 2015, according to the Ministry of Water and Environment. Now the forest faces a new and grievous threat. In 2016, the [Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom](#) leased one-fifth of the remaining protected forest to Hoima Sugar Ltd.

The lease was challenged, but a High Court ruling in April 2019 found in favour of Hoima Sugar and the Kingdom, which was once one of the most powerful empires in East and Central Africa and still enjoys significant autonomy under the state. The National Forest Authority has applied for the court order to be suspended and is appealing the decision.

From oil wells springing up along the Albertine Rift Valley, to forested islands on Lake Victoria razed for oil palm plantations, Uganda's government is supporting the rapid growth of extractive industries. But ranged against this is the swift growth of an eco-feminist movement that regards protection of the environment as essential to the protection of human rights. A grassroots network of women is working to raise awareness, share knowledge, and directly resist the destruction of the environment while creating alternative models of development. The movement hopes to strengthen the political and economic power of women in society — and so push back destruction of the natural environment."

From Mongabay: [Read full article](#) | [Watch short video](#)

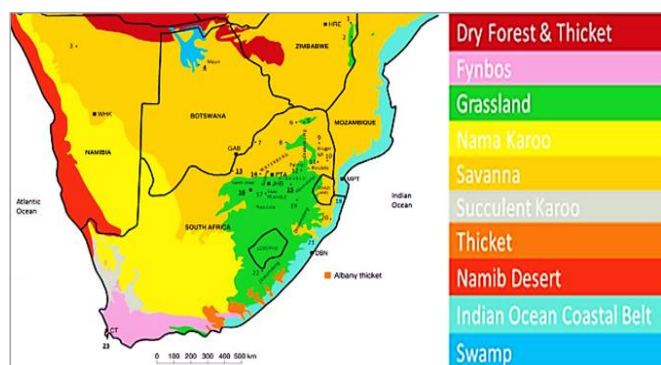


A disaster for water resources in Mpumalanga

By Phillip Owen of GeaSphere. See also [Facebook article](#): GeaSphere, a member of the Timberwatch Coalition based in Mpumalanga, has recently been alerted to plans to convert pine plantations in the Kaapsehoop area to eucalyptus plantations – as well as other local pine plantations – due to an increased demand from the Sappi Ngodwana Mill to feed their new cellulose production line. These changes from pine to eucalyptus plantations could have a catastrophically detrimental impact on the region, primarily because of the much higher water use associated with eucalyptus plantations. Very conservatively, eucalyptus trees use at least 35 percent more water than pines, with a most significant impact in winter 'low flow' conditions.

In addition to the impact on water, eucalyptus plantations have a much higher impact on biodiversity and soil sustainability as the rotations are shorter and the trees spaced closer together. It seems obvious that Mpumalanga is in jeopardy with regards to water availability. Historically, the impact of the timber industry has been severe, with many fountains and streams having dried up completely since the introduction of large-scale timber plantations in the region. We have seen less than average rainfall during the past few years, and even some of the perennial rivers feeding Crocodile River almost stop flowing during October | November 2019. These conditions are being compounded by climate change currently experienced throughout the world, with unknown consequences for the region.

As responsible stewards of our environment, we must manage as much as possible to mitigate potential environmental impacts. Converting pine plantations to eucalyptus in a water scarce region will compound impacts already experienced and could have disastrous effects on our region and society. In GeaSphere's opinion, decisions which can have such a devastating impact on our region need to be very carefully considered by a wide body of stakeholders, and we have asked the relevant Government department to reinstate the SFRA-LAAC (Stream Flow Reduction Activities Licensing Application Advisory Committee) meetings to guide these activities. We also believe that a comprehensive SEA (Strategic Environmental Assessment) needs to be conducted and that all planned conversions to eucalyptus must be halted until such time stakeholder inputs have been obtained and a Strategic Environmental Assessment conducted.



Biomes of Southern Africa: **46 percent are grassland & savanna**

The trouble with mass tree planting

Since the release of a report in July 2019 (headed by Dr Jean-Francois Bastin together with other researchers from the Crowther Lab, ETH-Zürich and the FAO) titled [The Global Tree Restoration Potential](#), hundreds of articles have appeared in the mainstream media declaring we can solve the climate crisis by [planting a trillion trees](#). Mass tree planting is now being widely promoted by [big environmental organisations](#) and adopted by nations around the world, whose governments are pledging to plant millions of trees to absorb carbon dioxide. The key questions are what kind of trees are they and where will they be planted? Often, such planting

projects are more focused on targets such as the numbers of trees planted than on the long-term success and survival of more carefully planned – though possibly less headline grabbing – ecosystem restoration projects. This has led to mass plantings in unsuitable places with no follow-up care and poor long-term outcomes.



“Africa is the grassiest continent. These grasses support birds, reptiles, plants, insects and the last remaining herds of large animals that lived during the Pleistocene epoch – an invaluable asset for the continent and the world.

Africa’s grasslands were the cradle of our ancestors and today are home to more than 300 million people. But these open landscapes could be transformed if trees-for-carbon projects inappropriately target them for ‘restoration’ “

Planting a trillion trees requires land and lots of it, and although proper restoration of formerly forested areas certainly has its place, planting trees where none previously existed could have serious implications such as: destroying existing ecosystems and the biodiversity they support; drying up water sources; exacerbating drought conditions and making areas more prone to fire. A study, published in the Journal Nature in April 2019, **Restoring natural forests is the best way to remove atmospheric carbon**, analysed the small print of government declarations about what kind of forests they intended to plant and found that 45 percent of these so-called new forests will be monoculture plantations of fast-growing trees like acacia and eucalyptus, destined for harvesting within 10-20 years. As to the question of where to find so much available land, the answer is Africa!

This article in the University of Cape Town News, **The problem with trees-for-carbon** reports on a **recent research paper** ‘The Trouble with Trees: Afforestation Plans for Africa’. The paper takes a critical look at trees-for-carbon projects, and in particular **AFR100** (the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative) which has secured \$1.4-billion in funding from the likes of Germany and the World Bank to pay African leaders to ‘reforest’ 100-million hectares of African land. AFR100 is part of the global Bonn Challenge to plant 150 million hectares by 2020 and 350 million hectares by 2030. To date, 28 African countries have committed to it. Mozambique for example, has committed to planting 1 million hectares, South Africa 3.6 million hectares, while Cameroon and Nigeria’s pledges will respectively convert a quarter and almost one-third of these countries to plantations.

“We found that the benefits of afforestation for reducing atmospheric carbon are paltry while the costs to Africa in lost land for agriculture, livestock, conservation, and in managing vast plantations will have to be borne for the foreseeable future ... What concerns us is that the trees-for-carbon projects distract us from the real issue: the urgent and immediate need to reduce carbon emissions, especially by reducing fossil fuel use.” – Prof. William Bond, University of Cape Town.

In October 2019, 46 scientists from around the world – including many leading scientists from Africa – published a rebuttal of Bastin et al’s methodology, which appeared as a **technical comment in the journal Science**. The rebuttal stated that the original paper had overestimated the global potential for tree restoration by a factor of five as well as ignoring crucial local context that undermined their projections. Two other technical comments were published by Science, both of which raised serious additional flaws in the methodology of the original paper. But despite growing **criticism** from many quarters, the popularity of the notion that we only have to plant trees to become carbon neutral persists. Under the circumstances that prevail, this is hardly surprising: *“AFR100 is a win-win: for foreign donors, who can bolster their green credentials; and for African leaders, who can claim to be fighting climate change while generating a sizeable financial windfall for their governments. That’s why it has been so enthusiastically embraced by the leaders of 28 countries, who together have committed to plant trees on 113-million hectares — comfortably exceeding AFR100’s original target.” – Mail & Guardian: **The trouble with indiscriminate tree-planting in Africa***

About Grasslands and Savanna: **Grasslands** are the most endangered, most altered and yet least protected biome on the planet. They lie between forests and deserts and are found where there is not enough regular rainfall to support the growth of forests. As such, they are the habitat most suited to water-scarce areas. They are characterized by nutrient-rich soil and extensive expanses of open pastures where the dominant vegetation is various grass species. They are also home to a wide range of flora and fauna, making them resilient to natural disasters such as droughts and wildfires. In fact, indigenous grasslands are so well-adapted to extreme weather conditions that in Africa, Australia, South America and India, certain grasslands require regular burning to maintain their biodiversity. The largest vegetation zone in Africa is tropical grassland known as **savanna**. Savanna is grassland with scattered individual trees, whereas true grasslands support few if any woody plants. There are two forms of grasslands. One is natural grassland; the other is grassland created by humans over thousands of years by controlled burning in **Africa, Australia** and **North America** as well as by the grazing of livestock and the cutting back of forests to grow crops. In the modern era, grasslands have become prime targets for human development and as a result of conversion to agricultural or industrial uses, grasslands are now highly threatened. Ironically, the latest and possibly one of the greatest threats is now being promoted as a solution to climate change – mass tree planting in areas where trees did not previously grow, otherwise known as afforestation. Yet grasslands are highly effective carbon sinks in their own right and are possibly **better suited to a warming world** than forests in many cases.



I WILL NOT DANCE TO YOUR BEAT

Nnimmo Bassey

I will not dance to your beat
If you call plantations forests
I will not sing with you
If you privatise my water
I will confront you with my fists
If climate change means death to me
But business to you
I will expose your evil greed

If you don't leave crude oil in the soil
Coal in the hole and tar sands in the land
I will confront and denounce you
If you insist on carbon offsetting
and other do-nothing false solutions
I will make you see red
If you keep talking of REDD
and push forest communities away from their land
I will drag you to the Climate Tribunal.

If you pile up ecological debt
And refuse to pay your climate debt
I will make you drink your own medicine
If you endorse genetically modified crops
And throw dust into the skies to mask the sun
I will not dance to your beat

Unless we walk the sustainable path
And accept real solutions
And respect Mother Earth
Unless you do, I will not, and we will not
dance to your beat

Nnimmo Bassey

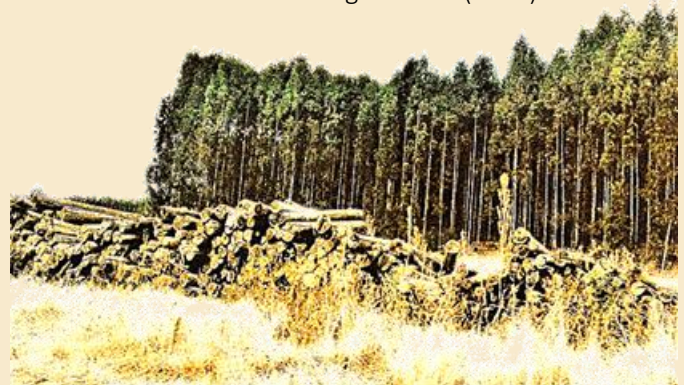
Architect, environmentalist activist, author and poet, Nnimmo Bassey is director of the ecological think tank Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) and a member of the steering committee of Oilwatch International. Previously, he was chair of Friends of the Earth International (2008-2012) and executive director of Nigeria's Environmental Rights Action (1993-2013). He is a fellow of the Nigerian Institute of Architects and has authored books on the environment, architecture and poetry

Awards

2010: co-recipient of the Right Livelihood Award,
2012: Rafto Human Rights Award.
2014: Member of the Federal Republic (MFR),
Nigeria's national honour in recognition of his
environmental activism.

Books

We Thought It Was Oil, But It was Blood (2002)
I Will Not Dance to Your Beat (2011)
To Cook a Continent: Destructive Extraction and
the Climate Crisis in Africa (2012)
Oil Politics: Echoes of Ecological War (2016).



Plantations in the Richmond area of KwaZulu-Natal.
Photo: Jenny Duvenage

Climate Resistance and COP25



The protests in Chile were sparked by a 30 pesos increase in metro fares, which then morphed into an insurrection against **thirty years of austerity** for ordinary citizens while the wealth of the few has grown to obscene levels. This same pattern has played out across the world, and people everywhere are taking to the streets in a unified stand against the economic and social injustice that neoliberal policies have inflicted on them. There's a direct connection between these crises and the climate

crisis. All are fuelled and maintained by a global system based on the exploitation of both people and planet in pursuit of profit. The same policies that allow big polluters to rake in returns while passing the costs of 'doing business' on to the rest of society, also enables them to siphon off vast amounts of unearned wealth through privatisation and other schemes whilst the poorest struggle to survive due to: precarious employment; stagnant wages; higher costs; diminishing basic services; and plummeting standards of living. Chile's inability to host COP25 due to large-scale public anger therefore sends a clear message of what needs to be done – with great urgency and political will on a global scale – as both people and planet (reacting with record-breaking fires and extreme weather) rise up to say ENOUGH!

From The New Internationalist: Chile is evading scrutiny on climate justice *"The Chilean government's decision to withdraw Santiago as the host city of COP25 is a desperate attempt to divert the attention of the international community away from the deeply intertwined social inequalities and environmental injustices impacting communities across the country, and the violent repression against the people opposing them ... The social and political crisis unfolding in Chile cannot be isolated from the water crisis, or the broader ecological crisis. COP25 offered the opportunity to shine a critical light on the climate injustices affecting communities in Chile, where resource-extractivist policies have created huge sacrifice zones. The country has been experiencing a historic mega-drought for the last decade caused by the overexploitation of resources by industrial agriculture and mega-mining industries, coupled with a highly privatized water system and aggravated by an increasingly destabilized climate ...*

Neoliberal overexploitation of natural and mineral resources in Chile has had a particularly harsh impact on the lives and livelihoods of indigenous peoples, peasants and workers, with large-scale violations of their human rights, their land and other rights. Indigenous groups have been disproportionately targeted, through draconian terrorism laws, for defending their communities, land and water ... The decision of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Spanish government to let Chile retain the COP25 presidency while relocating the event to Madrid with just a month's notice, carries catastrophic consequences for civil society movements across the world. This is yet one more example of the purposeful isolation of democratic, grass-roots movements from the world's most important decision-making spaces." – Reprinted with the kind permission of New Internationalist. Copyright New Internationalist.

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Neoliberalism began in Chile and will die in Chile

Under the Pinochet dictatorship, Chile became the birthplace of neoliberalism. After the **CIA-backed military coup** that overthrew the democratically-elected, socialist government of Salvador Allende in 1973, the United States had the opportunity to construct a society centred on neoliberal ideology. As such, Chile became the prime testing ground for American economists to roll-out a system based on unfettered 'free' market principles under the direction of the '**Chicago Boys**'. 'Neoliberalism was born in Chile and will die in Chile' has now become a rallying cry of the unprecedented popular uprising of the Chilean people, also being referred to in some cases as the **Chilean Spring**.

The turmoil, which erupted in mid-October, resulted in a brutal crackdown by the state, which left at least 26 dead and over 2 300 injured, of whom more than 1 400 sustained gunshot wounds and 345 suffered eye injuries after being hit by lead pellets fired from anti-riot shotguns. On December 13, the UN Human Rights Office **issued a report** condemning the "fundamentally repressive manner" in which the police and military had responded and the serious human rights violations that were committed, including unlawful killings and torture. By the end of December, Chile's National Human Rights Institute had presented 1 080 judicial actions against Chile's security forces, including allegations of torture, rape and homicide. In reference to the 17-year dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet that ended in 1990, it **concluded in its annual report** that the state's response to the mass protests "produced, as a whole, the most serious and multiple violations of human rights committed since 1989."

Chile has a long history of **struggle and repression**. The recent dramatic turn of events – with over a million taking to the streets – is a response to the ongoing corruption of the political class and its disastrous neoliberal economic and social policies which, despite Chile being the **richest country in Latin America**, have led to deepening poverty, inequality, injustice, and environmental conflict. **Demands by the protestors** include the resignation of President Piñera and a new constitution decided on by a national constituent assembly. The demand for the writing of a new constitution, to be ratified via a referendum, has been agreed to but many on the **Left are critical of the plan** seeing it as “an elite stitch-up” in which none of the forces involved in the protest movement are to be consulted. Solidarity among the protestors with indigenous communities such as the Mapuche is very evident. Mapuche efforts to defend their lands and water against deforestation, agroforestry, other forms of **agribusiness**, and mining are key aspects of the centuries long **Mapuche resistance** against colonialism and neoliberalism.



Photos: Marien González: Tree plantations: old and new forms of dispossession | Chile invokes Pinochet-era anti-terrorism laws against Mapuche activists | New Internationalist: Chile is evading scrutiny on climate justice. | Susana Hidalgo: Chile woke up, says the author of the photo that went viral



In Defence of Life: The resistance of indigenous women

16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence is an international campaign that runs every year from 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to 10 December (Human Rights Day). Much of the violence against women is driven by the same sense of entitlement as patriarchal power structures have towards Nature: a sense of ownership; the right to use and abuse at will; and the objectification and disrespect that women have endured for millennia.

The corporate capitalist assault on the environment perpetuates the marginalisation and oppression of rural and indigenous people, especially women. Women bear the most responsibility for producing food, collecting water and finding fuel sources. When communities are displaced, life-sustaining ecosystems destroyed and water sources depleted – added to the pollution of air, water, and soil, food insecurity, and climate change – women and girls suffer the most. It's therefore not surprising that women in rural and indigenous communities around the world are playing a central role in defending the land and environment against extractive industries, including industrial tree plantations.

This recent article from the **World Rainforest Movement** (WRM) is an inspiring account of the **women-led resistance against tree plantations in Chile**. The article provides context about the Chilean plantation industry and the conflicts that have ensued as a result. The industry was established during the Chilean dictatorship (1973-1990) and is based on the systematic, state-subsidized development of large-scale monocultures of exotic pine and eucalyptus species to supply pulp mills, sawmills and wood products, mainly for export. By implementing the Decree Law 701 for Forestry Promotion, unprecedented incentives were provided by the state to plant monocultures on lands declared suitable for forestry.



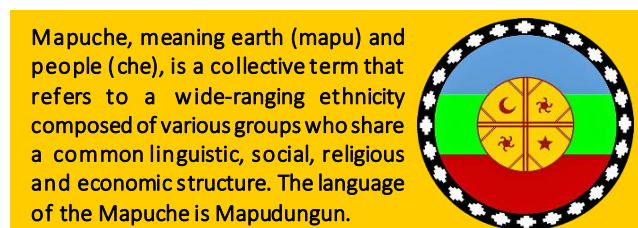
TOP: Network of Women's Organizations of Tirúa Assembly, south central Chile. ABOVE: Areas slowly being recuperated by Mapuche communities. Here, beans are growing in place of Eucalyptus. Photos: Verónica González Correa | Marien González

According to official data from the National Forestry Corporation (CONAF), by 2014 plantations covered 3 316 789 hectares. Several investigations recognize that in the same area, the Chilean State has taken 11 million hectares from the indigenous Mapuche people, who now live on just 300 000 hectares.

Another article, from **Undisciplined Environments** by Marien González, gives further background to the expansion of tree plantations in Chile and elsewhere, and examines the different strategies being employed by rural and indigenous people in Southern Chile to resist the extractivist forestry model. The Mapuche – who have traditionally inhabited south-central Chile, southwestern Argentina and parts of present-day **Patagonia** – are at the forefront of this struggle. They see the arrival of the forestry companies as “the third wave of colonisation” of their territory, after the 16th century **Spanish conquest** and the **Chileans in 1861**.

From Undisciplined Environments: Struggling for land and water: resistances to tree plantations in Southern Chile by Marien González: *“In their historic struggle for the recuperation of ancestral territory and sovereignty, Mapuche communities have performed what they call ‘land recuperations’ since the 1990s. These land occupations of corporate forestry plots are effective exercises in retrieving territory by means outside of formal proceedings and state-defined legality.*

These actions have been accompanied by other strategies to regain control of indigenous territory, including: claims for the restitution of ancestral lands filed under Convention 169 of the UN's International Labour Organisation; negotiating with state representatives and forestry enterprises to reach agreements where the state buys privately held land then hands it over to the Mapuche; road blockades and/or material damages to corporate properties.



Mapuche, meaning earth (mapu) and people (che), is a collective term that refers to a wide-ranging ethnicity composed of various groups who share a common linguistic, social, religious and economic structure. The language of the Mapuche is Mapudungun.

In performing territorial recuperations, Mapuche express their spiritual worldview of connection to the land: they are socialising through customary and traditional forms of community-making, based on kinship and friendship. When a plot is recovered, communities organise themselves – either collectively or by household – and plant potatoes, wheat, beans and peas; recuperate their extensive livestock practices; collect fruit from the remaining native forest; and decide to what extent they want to engage with tree plantations.

The process is both physically and emotionally exhausting, especially as they are often exposed to violence and criminalisation. Sustaining recuperated lands is not easy, given the precarious environmental conditions in terms of water availability, soil fertility, and loss of biodiversity after conversion into tree monocultures. Impoverished Mapuche communities also face the difficulty of fully expressing their own worldviews which depend on spiritual, emotional and livelihood relationships with native forests. Yet, the active resistance of Mapuche communities in certain areas of Southern Chile has been discouraging private corporations to continue or expand their extractivist activities.”

From the World Rainforest Movement: The resistance struggle of indigenous women in defence of life by Millaray Painemal Morales of **ANAMURI**: *“In Chile today, peasant and indigenous women continue fighting different problems such as the serious drought that is affecting springs and wetlands, or the disappearance of medicinal plants, which impacts upon the role of the ‘machi’ (traditional Mapuche healers, usually women.)*

Most of these situations have been caused by forestry companies and their industrial plantations of eucalyptus and pine trees ... Further problems include land scarcity, impoverishment of communities, migration of women and young people to the big cities, and seasonal migration of farm workers to the centre-south of the country as wage labour for transnational companies. Here they are exposed to pesticides and endure appalling working conditions. Meanwhile, the country prides itself on exporting the best wine and fruit to European markets but does not promote public policies to protect peasant and indigenous women and put a stop to their exploitation.”

“A number of women's assemblies and meetings are demanding a new society without capitalism, free from both oppression and machismo.

They are calling for a new and more equitable society in which diversity in all its forms is respected and there is full harmony with Mother Nature.”

Lonko Alberto Curamil acquitted: Mapuche traditional leader, Lonko Alberto Curamil, was arrested in April 2018 on charges that were clearly politically motivated after he successfully stopped two hydro-electric dams. In May 2019, he was awarded the prestigious **Goldman Environmental Prize**.

After being postponed due to the political unrest, his trial took place during COP25. Potentially, he was facing up to fifty years in prison. However, on 13 December, after more than a year in pre-trial detention, he was **acquitted by a unanimous decision** of the three judges of the court. Photo: Orin Langelles/GJEP



COP25 and Cumbre de los Pueblos | **The People's Summit**



Hunger for your land, thirst for your water:

In Chile **avocados grown for export** to the EU are sucking the rivers and aquifers dry as the 10-year drought continues and climate change worsens. In Brazil, President Jair Bolsonaro's anti-environmental agenda has led to massive illegal deforestation of the Amazon Basin. As a result, 2019 saw the highest rate of deforestation in 11 years and the third highest on record. **Read full article in Mongabay: Bolsonaro's Brazil: 2019 brings death by 1,000 cuts to Amazon** by Sue Branford and Thais Borges 30 Dec. 2019

The last-minute decision to move COP25 from Santiago to Madrid was detrimental to the participation of groups from the global south, and especially side-lined voices from the region due to the additional cost of travelling to Europe. This was the second time the venue for COP25 changed. It was originally set to take place in Brazil but was moved to Chile after Bolsonaro's far right, climate-denying government was elected and **cancelled the event**.

Latin American civil society had hoped this would be an opportunity to draw worldwide attention to the ecological and human calamity taking place in Chile and other South American countries. The withdrawal was therefore regarded as an effort by the Chilean government to avoid the spotlight of world attention that would have helped to expose the extent of these iniquities, to which Chile's people – especially the indigenous, poor, rural, and working classes – are being subjected. The election in November 2018, of a right-wing government with a hard-line neoliberal agenda and headed by a billionaire president, only served to underscore and inflame an already volatile situation.

With its abysmal '**sacrifice zones**' – areas where communities suffer horrendous environmental impacts from unregulated industries – there was some scepticism about the Piñera government hosting the COP in the first place. It's therefore possible that the popular uprising at this time will prove to have been serendipitous. Many are beginning to connect the dots between climate justice and the massive inequality that exists between a small elite and the majority of the world's citizens. Everywhere in the world, the basic rights and needs of ordinary people are overridden in favour of huge corporations, ruthlessly extracting diminishing natural resources and pocketing the profits, while passing on the pollution and environmental destruction they cause to local communities and society as a whole.

Corporate capture of the COP: Following through on this opportunity, while the **annual Conference of the Parties** took place in Madrid, the **People's Summit** took place in Santiago. This was a space where frontline communities, environmental defenders and civil society had a voice, while symbolically turning the tables by marginalising the big polluters. The UN Conference is often referred to as the '**Conference of the Polluters**' due the huge corporate sponsorship it receives.

"Sponsorship is a symptom of a larger problem of corporate capture at the UNFCCC. Inside the talks, trade associations representing the interests of the fossil fuel industry and other Big Polluters stalk the halls and push their members' agenda.

The result of this corporate omnipresence is clear. The negotiations move at a snail's pace and more often than not reflect the interests of global corporations, not people and the planet." – From Common Dreams: Meet the Big Polluters

The People's Summit highlighted the flaws in the Paris Agreement while advocating for more ambitious targets and real, enforceable actions. It also demanded that Chile be stripped of the Presidency of COP25 due to its human rights abuses.



FINAL DECLARATION

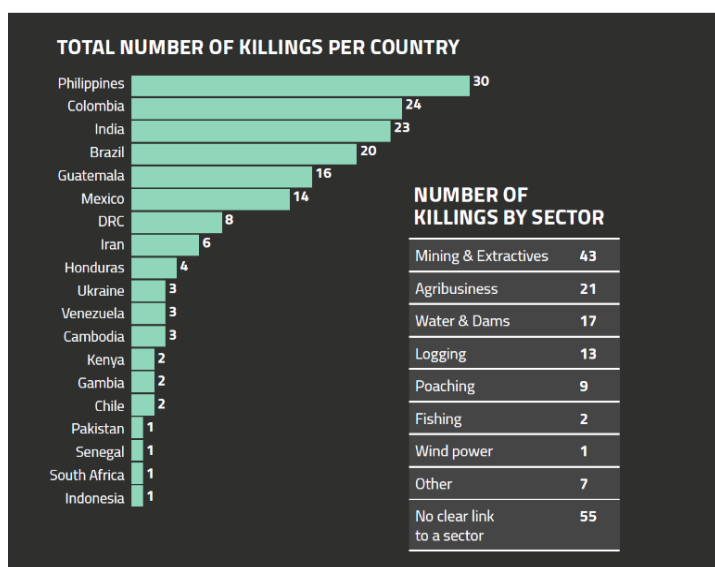
CUMBRE DE LOS PUEBLOS 2019

PEOPLES' SUMMIT 2019
SAVE THE EARTH, CHANGE THE SYSTEM

The allegations of grave human rights violations – both during the recent protest action and on an ongoing basis against indigenous and rural communities, with environmental defenders being **killed, criminalised or labelled as terrorists** – have damaged Chile's reputation. As a result, Piñera did not attend the Madrid conference, where a strong contingent of civil society was also present.

In Santiago, the Peoples' Summit welcomed the active participation of approximately 1 500 registered participants to imagine together the possibility of another world. **See: [Final Declaration of the Peoples Summit](#)**

From COP 25 in Madrid, 'The Coming Green Colonialism' by Nnimmo Bassey: *"Climate activists outside the plenary hall on Wednesday 11 December voiced the critical need for rich, polluting nations, to remove their heads from the sands and take real climate action. They were urged to quit their push for carbon markets and tricks to aid double counting when it comes to climate finance. They were reminded that there is a climate debt that has neither been acknowledged nor paid. The investment of \$1.9 trillion in fossil fuel projects and the expenditure of close to \$2 trillion in warfare annually were held up as obscene reminders that contributing a mere \$100 billion for climate finance ought not to give the world sleepless nights if there is any seriousness to use the hours spent at the COP to tackle the root causes of global warming, cut emissions at source, help build resilience and pull the vulnerable from their miseries."* **Read [full article](#)**



From: Global Witness Report July 2019 **[Enemies of the State?](#)**

calculates the death toll as almost half that of US troops killed in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001. The rate of deaths in this period increased from two to four a week, which the authors attribute to rising environmental stress as the global demand for resources pushes mining, agribusiness and other extractive industries into ever more remote regions. Only 10 percent of defender murders result in a conviction, compared with an average of 43 percent for all global homicides.

According to Global Witness' annual report released 30 July 2019 and titled: **'[Enemies of the State?](#)** How governments and businesses silence land and environmental defenders' 164 environmental defenders were murdered in 2018 and thousands more were criminalised and hounded: *"As demand for products like timber, palm oil and minerals continue to grow, governments, companies and criminal gangs are routinely stealing land and trashing habitats in pursuit of profit,"* write Global Witness. *"When the ordinary people who live on these lands take a stand, they come up against companies' private security, state forces, contract killers, or in less violent confrontations, teams of aggressive lawyers."* Another report, **[Dangerous Work: Reprisals against Environmental Defenders](#)** published by Crude Accountability in October 2019, focuses on environmental defenders in countries of the former Soviet Union and the United States.



Report of Golfrid Siregar's death on the cover of in the Indonesian newspaper Koran Tempo

Stand with the Defenders of Life

In October, Indonesian lawyer and activist Golfrid Siregar died under suspicious circumstances and two forest rangers – Liviu Pop and Raducu Gorcioaia – were brutally murdered in Romania. Between 1st November and 7th December, **three indigenous activists were assassinated** in the Brazilian Amazon. Defending the land and the environment against the companies that steal land and destroy the environment has never been more deadly. Killings of environmental defenders have doubled over the past 15 years and according to **a study** published in Nature Sustainability, have reached levels usually associated with war zones, occurring most often in countries with the worst corruption and weakest laws.

At least 1 558 people in 50 states have been killed between 2002 and 2017 while trying to protect their land, water or local wildlife says the analysis, which

Death of courageous Indonesian eco-activist Golfrid Siregar: On the 6th October 2019, Indonesia lawyer and activist Golfrid Siregar died of injuries he had received under suspicious circumstances, amidst a growing climate of hostility towards environmental activists in Indonesia. Golfrid's death has prompted an international outcry, with groups such as **Human Rights Watch** calling for a thorough and transparent investigation into his death. Golfrid provided legal assistance for local communities caught up in land conflicts with oil palm companies, and at the time of his death was involved in a lawsuit over alleged fraud in the permitting process for a hydropower project that would threaten the only known habitat of the Tapanuli orangutan (*Pongo tapanuliensis*), a critically endangered species: *"Golfrid worked with WALHI North Sumatra and represented WALHI in a number of environmental lawsuits – his most recent work involved a legal case against the Batang Toru Dam, which if built, would cause a cascade of environmental and social problems, including the extinction of a newly discovered orangutan species."*

Just last month, he was involved in alerting the national police of potential illegal activity involving the North Sumatran regional police, as they had suddenly terminated the investigation of a forged signature in the Batang Toru case. In light of Golfrid's suspicious death, and in the context of growing threats facing environmental human rights defenders in Indonesia, we are asking organisations to please sign on to this [international solidarity statement](#) calling on the Indonesian government to fully investigate his death and to enact stronger protections for environmental human rights defenders." – Excerpt from letter: Friends of the Earth USA and WALHI, Friends of the Earth Indonesia

The human and environmental costs of palm oil

"Palm oil plantation expansion is one of the main contributors to the destruction of the rainforest and wildlife of Southeast Asia. Eighty-five percent of the world's palm oil is produced in plantations in Indonesia and Malaysia. According to local government plans, Indonesia alone intends establishing a further 20 million hectares of plantations by 2020 – an area the size of England, Holland and Switzerland combined.

The oil palm industry says that plantation expansion is vital for economic development and that the methods used are both environmentally sustainable and benefit the local people. However, in the resulting vast monoculture plantations little survives and the deforestation and drainage of peat swamps for palm oil production has made Indonesia the third highest emitter of greenhouse gases after the USA and China. Half the loss of orangutans' habitat in the last decade has been linked to oil palm plantation expansion.

Previously self-reliant families, who were able to meet their own needs from the forest around them, complain of being tricked into giving up their land with the promise of jobs and new development. Instead they end up locked into debt and poorly paid work. Pollution from pesticides, fertilisers and the pressing process is also leaving some villages without clean water." – from 'Losing Ground' a Report by [LifeMosaic](#) in partnership with Friends of the Earth and Sawit

Watch short documentaries: [Palmed Off](#): Part 1 of a film by LifeMosaic showing testimonies from indigenous peoples affected by oil palm plantations in Indonesia. It explores the impacts of oil palm plantations on their local economies; on the local environment; on their culture; and on the prospects for the future generations. [Fruits of their Labour](#) is a short film by Amnesty International on human rights abuses in the Indonesian palm oil plantations.



Poor working conditions, unethical labour practices and exploitation of workers: In its report [The great palm oil scandal: Labour abuses behind big brand names](#), Amnesty International investigated palm oil plantations in Indonesia run by the world's biggest palm oil grower, Singapore-based agribusiness Wilmar and traced palm oil supplied to nine global firms that claim to use 'sustainable' palm oil in their products. The report documents how children aged from 8 to 14 years-old are employed on plantations. Some drop out of school to work with their parents, while others work after attending school or at weekends and over holidays. In many cases they do strenuous, hazardous work carrying heavy sacks of palm fruit and being exposed to toxic pesticides. The report also highlights a discriminatory pattern of hiring women as casual daily labourers, denying them permanent employment and social security benefits such as health insurance and pensions, and cases of forced labour with threats of not being paid or having pay deducted in order to exact more work from them.

Indonesia's forest fires: An environmental disaster of global proportions: Every year since the 1990s, parts of Indonesia are blanketed in what has become known as **The Haze**. The problem has accelerated in recent years with this year being the worst on record, El Nino having caused drier than usual conditions. Most of the fires are started due to the deliberate burning of the rainforest to make way for palm oil plantations. Canals dug to drain the swampy land so it can be farmed, lower the water table and drain the peatland upon which much of Indonesia's rainforest grows. Peat is made up of decomposing plant matter built up over thousands of years. Once the trees have been cut down and the land drained, the dry, exposed peat fuels the remnants of the fires, releasing tonnes of stored carbon into the atmosphere.

Over past decades, this has made Indonesia among the biggest emitters of carbon dioxide in the world. This year, the fires daily released more CO₂ into the atmosphere than the entire United States economy does in a day, and cumulatively surpassed Germany's annual emissions. As a result of The Haze, around half a million people were struck by acute respiratory infections and at least 10 died. Indications are that exposure to the haze is causing **long-term health problems**.

Various researchers have analysed data from population surveys taken during and after the fires and found that the smoke generated by the fires harmed adult health and child survival rates at the time while in the longer-term, it has led to lower health and educational achievements. It has also had a devastating impact on plants and animals. In 1997, another El Nino year – insect species were killed off and bees were unable to navigate, with a damaging domino effect on plants that rely on insects for pollination. The fires are also hastening the extinction of the fewer than 400 remaining Sumatran tigers, the Bornean orangutan, and the Sumatran rhino, which is down to less than 100 surviving animals.

A forest mafia is threatening Europe's last great forests



More than 4.000 people in Bucharest, as well as several thousand from other cities in Romania and also in Europe, protested against illegal logging and criminal violence on forest rangers in Romania. The march was organized by NGOs Declic, Agent Green and Greenpeace. Photo: Catalin Georgescu/Greenpeace Romania Facebook Page.

Forest ranger Liviu Pop was killed in Maramures, Romania on 17th October when responding to a tip-off about illegal logging. His colleague, Raducu Gorgioaia, was beaten to death in Pascani barely a month earlier under similar circumstances. Romsilva (the state forest management company) says 185 rangers have been attacked since 2014 and that these latest killings bring the total to six rangers who have lost their lives in recent years. According to Silva Trade Union Federation (Romania's forestry union), more than **650 violent incidents** have occurred, including physical assaults, death threats and destruction of property.

In reaction to the murders, thousands of Romanians – many of them wearing green – marched in Bucharest and other cities demanding justice for the rangers, and that strong measures be taken to put an end to the activities of the 'forest mafia'. **Read full article on The Forest March by Save Paradise Forests.** Includes a live

video from the protests, links to other media, and a letter condemning the killing of forest defenders, which was sent to President Klaus Iohannis of Romania and signed by forty-two organisations.

PRIMARY FORESTS: These are naturally regenerated forests of native species where there are no clearly visible indications of human activities and the ecological processes are not significantly disturbed. Human impacts in such forest areas have been limited to low levels of hunting, fishing and harvesting of forest products, and in some cases (historical or pre-historical), low intensity agriculture.

PRIMEVAL FORESTS: These are forests that are unmodified by modern humans, even indirectly, and where the degree of impact by indigenous people has not been significantly higher than the impacts of natural wildfire and large wild animals.

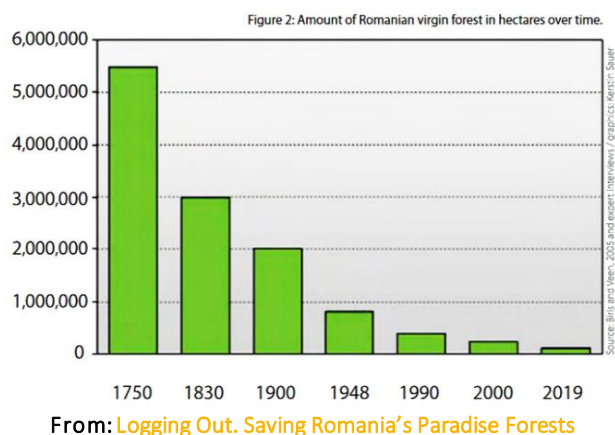


Romania's old growth forests
Photo: Janinka Lutze/EuroNatur

With around **525 000 hectares** of primary and virgin forests, Romania has more than half of Europe's last remaining forests – valuable ecosystems with high biodiversity that are also home **to bears, wolves, lynx, and wildcat**. These forests include 24 000 hectares of ancient and primeval beech forests, and at least 115 000 hectares of virgin forests and ecologically mature forest stands where the impacts of humans are negligible.

Tragically, these vast tracts of forests are being logged at an alarming rate to become chipboard for mass produced furniture or wood pellets to supply the growing demand for so-called green energy. Research by Greenpeace Romania estimates that Romania is losing as much as three hectares of its total forest cover every hour as a result of degradation, illegal and legal logging — including swathes of its pristine old-growth forests

Short film by Agent Green Romania: *Out of Control: Episode 1 Domogled-Valea Cernei National Park* Most of the EU's last primeval forests are still to be found in Romania. But they are under immediate threat from ongoing commercial logging. 'Out of Control' is the first episode of an investigative online documentary series in which NGOs EuroNatur and Agent Green show evidence of fresh and brutal logging of primeval forests within the Domogled-Valea Cernei National Park. The eradication of primeval forests in Romania is Europe's biggest and most pressing nature conservation drama today. But almost nobody is taking notice. If no action is taken, many of these valuable forests will be gone within the next 2 to 3 years.



"Romania's forests are being over-exploited to supply demand for biomass both within the country and across Europe. While the logging business remains dominated by the state company Romsilva, its markets are increasingly international, with Austrian companies in particular driving an orgy of forest destruction. Three-quarters of the 300 000 tonnes of wood pellets manufactured annually in Romania are exported. And there is growing concern that a combination of government subsidies and foreign markets is feeding the growth of a timber mafia in the country. Biomass burning has become a cause of corruption and conflict in Romania." — From Fern's Case Study Report 'Up in flames: How biomass burning wrecks Europe's forests'.

Real solutions for a low-carbon, fossil-free world



"The 'ambition' claimed by developed country governments is a false one. They are serving the interests of corporations aiming to profit from the crisis and secure capital accumulation. The voices of people defending the rights of Indigenous Peoples, women and Southern communities were aggressively pushed out of the COP in a clear attempt to silence them.

But peoples — in Madrid, Santiago, and around the world — are rising up and will continue to fight for environmental, social, gender and economic justice and system change. We will continue to demand that governments be accountable to people, not to corporate polluters." — Karin Nansen, Chair of Friends of the Earth International commenting on COP25

We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking that has **landed us in this mess**. To create an energy system which is fossil free by 2030, we must invest in real solutions to the climate crisis and work to transform the energy system to one that consumes much less energy, with goods that are produced and sold locally, using energy that is genuinely clean, sustainable and people-centred.

The manufacture of huge quantities of largely unnecessary goods requiring the extraction of diminishing, natural resources — which produce every kind of waste and pollution and are transported around the planet by air, rail, road and sea — are simply no longer an option if we are serious about averting irreversible climate breakdown and a global catastrophe for the great majority of people.

We have a global climate emergency and are facing irreversible climate breakdown if meaningful solutions — centred on human rights, equity, and justice — are not urgently implemented on an international scale. Developed countries must stop serving the interests of the corporations that have caused the climate crisis.



COP25 has failed to come up with any tangible action to deal with climate breakdown. Photo: Victor Barro/Amigos de la Tierra España and Babawale Obayanju | Friends of the Earth Nigeria

This means they will:

- Honour climate finance obligations to developing countries
- End corporate interference in and capture of the climate talks
- Ensure developed countries honour their 'Fair Shares' for largely fuelling the climate crisis for the past 40 years
- Stop funding and promoting fossil fuels
- Retire all existing fossil fuel power plants and stop all new coal, oil and gas projects
- Reject false solutions and commit to real, people-based solutions
- Ensure a **Just Transition** for workers, and end energy poverty

The longest meeting in 25-years of annual climate talks has failed:

*"#COP25 negotiations are finally over, after going into extra time. The good news is NO DEAL on destructive Carbon Markets, our biggest battle at the talks. The bad news is virtually everything else, especially #LossAndDamage and #ClimateFinance. An attempt by developed and some big developing countries to push through a terrible deal on carbon markets – which would have flooded the system with old carbon credits and opened the door to huge new trading mechanisms – has been blocked ... until #COP26 that is. The fight goes on. On loss and damage – for countries already hit by climate change there is no new climate finance, just an expert group with no deadline to feedback, the Santiago Network agreed and there was no resolution on governance of the **Warsaw International Mechanism**. US attempts to add text removing liability have gone, for now. No long-term climate finance was agreed at COP25. The streets of Chile and Madrid saw a surge of people power, and disruptive action inside the COP itself, which was aggressively shut down and ejected. Frustration with lack of action is at boiling point given the climate breakdown. We must mobilize to tackle #ClimateChange. Don't expect a solution from UNFCCC."* **From Friends of the Earth International Facebook**

In some quarters, the lack of progress at COP25 has been attributed to the current state of the world since many countries are experiencing wide-scale civil unrest '**back home**' as if this were some chance, unrelated coincidence. Yet these uprisings are largely linked to the imposition of neoliberal policies over the past 30 years, corruption, authoritarianism, and a lack of true democracy – exactly the same issues that have beset COP25, and all the previous COPs that have taken place over the past quarter of a century! Every year, those most affected by climate breakdown – who have contributed the least to it yet are the most exploited by those driving it with the resources that supply the capitalist economy brutally stripped from their lands – are excluded from participating in the conference to any meaningful degree. Instead, those who are the main culprits dominate the proceedings and either stall real action or find ways to further capitalise on it by advocating for and instituting dangerous, false solutions. Added to this, was the **fiasco of the UK elections**, another telling example of the corporate capture of the media and other institutions that are supposed to protect and defend democracy in developed western countries. The UK – where COP26 will be held in Glasgow in 2020 – now has a right-wing, climate-denying administration, as does the USA and Australia.

2019 has been a Year of Fire, environmentally and politically, with fires blazing across the planet in **Australia; Indonesia; Africa; Alaska; California; Mexico**; the Amazon basin, both in **Brazil** and **Bolivia; Europe; Greenland** and **Siberia** while ordinary people – united in anger and desperation – are rising up against the corporate-sponsored political elites that have taken over governments around the world. These are surely the clearest possible signs that the governments and corporations responsible for this dire situation need to wake-up and seriously apply their minds to honestly, fairly and democratically negotiating and implementing just and workable solutions to the climate crisis.

It is truly incredible therefore, that COP25 has **failed** so spectacularly despite: multiple **alarm warnings** from science since the release of the **IPCC's Special Report** in October 2018; continuing deadly and destructive **extreme weather** across the planet throughout 2019; weekly climate strikes by millions of young people with the **largest climate strike** in world history taking place in September, just before the United Nations Climate Summit in New York; and finally, in the last quarter of the year, mass uprisings of ordinary citizens who have had enough: *"The commonalities of why there are so many movements in disparate parts of the world are quite striking. Free-market capitalism has proved time and again to be a failure. The promised riches are distributed far too unequally, and for most they never transpire. The only way to preserve the current social and economic order is by force. And when people have had enough, they meet force with resistance and resilience. These are lessons not just for ordinary people suffering economic injustices, but for the governments that oversee them."* – **From Truthdig: Governments Beware: People Are Rising Up All Over the World**

Network News

Rural Women's Assembly: 10th Anniversary Conference:



500 women from almost every corner of Southern Africa gathered in Johannesburg to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Southern Africa **Rural Women's Assembly**.

Travelling by caravan, they came from Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Lesotho and South Africa stopping off at rural villages en route to raise awareness about climate breakdown, which is having a profound impact in southern Africa.



26–28 November 2019: The Rural Women's Assembly
Celebrating 10 Years of Political Struggle for Land, Life, Seeds and Love. Photo: Ayanda Mthethwa

The climate emergency was a key issue discussed at the conference, together with prevailing economic issues, especially austerity, privatisation, and other neoliberal policies that are marginalising and dispossessing rural women and heightening the climate emergency. Twenty-five years of UN climate change talks were condemned as being largely a waste of time, with greenhouse gas emissions increasing and the resources needed to adapt to climate change not forthcoming. As such, the RWA is demanding that the big polluters pay the debt they owe to the people of Southern Africa and elsewhere in the global south. **See also, Daily Maverick article by Ayanda Mthethwa: A safe space for rural women, by rural women.**



Catalysing the transition to agroecology in KZN

On 3 December, Timberwatch Coalition member, **Biowatch South Africa**, held a workshop at the **Vuleka Centre**, situated in the Valley of a Thousand Hills. The objective of the workshop was to link with groups and organisations working in rural communities; build awareness and knowledge of sustainable agroecological practices; strategize ways to support each other and grow a unified

agroecology movement in KZN. The workshop was well attended with around thirty participants. The programme opened with a presentation on agroecology, how this is defined, and progress (nationally and internationally) towards a unified agroecology movement. Thereafter, each organisation presented on its work and its links to agroecology. After lunch, breakaway groups brainstormed: strategic interventions and opportunities for the transition to agroecology in KZN; short-term and longer-term priorities and organisational interests; next steps in moving forward together.

In its presentation, Timberwatch focused on the impact of plantations on rural communities, which affect their potential to develop food sovereignty and self-sufficiency due to: Displacement of communities and the expropriation of community land; Afforestation, when trees are planted in grasslands – South Africa's primary biome – where they do not belong. Destruction of habitats such as grasslands, wetlands and natural forests that provide vital resources to rural communities; Increasing numbers of deadly and highly destructive wildfires due to intensified dryness and the heavy fuel load of plantations; and finally – under the 'sustainable development' and 'social forestry' mantras, communities are encouraged to use their land for 'cash crops' and instead of growing food, grow trees to supply timber companies. This poses a number of risks such as: the length of time before the trees are ready for harvesting (generally 7 to 10 years); fluctuations in prices and market demand; the ecological impact of invasive alien trees such as depletion of water sources and soil nutrients. These schemes are promoted as being in line with 'Green Growth' and transitioning to a low-carbon economy. They enable the plantation industry to present itself as socially and environmentally responsible by: claiming to combat climate change by planting monocultures of invasive alien trees; purporting to uplift poor communities; supplying the raw material for a wide range of bio-based products.