

Plantations are not forests!

by Carbon Trade Watch
Friday, 21 September 2012

This 21st of September Carbon Trade Watch joins again in solidarity with the communities and civil society organizations around the world and keeps resisting the expansion of destructive plantations which severely affect territories, peoples and the environment.

Today, we join again with the shout: PLANTATIONS ARE NOT FORESTS!

Monocultures are large areas of land cultivated with a single crop, using methods that imply a high use of inputs such as agrototoxic chemicals, pesticides and machinery. Monocultures include crops (food-based agriculture) and trees (plantations). Crops grown in industrial monocultures are cultivated for both food products (wheat, canola, corn, palm oil, sugar cane), animal feed and oils (soy, corn), and agrofuels (soy, canola, palmoil, jatropha, sugar cane), while tree plantations (eucalyptus, pine and acacia) are largely used for paper pulp, charcoal, timber and, increasingly, biomass (with the possibility that they will be used for agrofuels in future). The UN climate negotiations, disregarding the devastating effects of monocultures around the world, admit plantations as forests, encouraging their expansion in order to increase the 'carbon sinks'.

The takeover of land by monocultures causes rural depopulation, destroying local community life, food sovereignty and local economies. When small-scale farmers are confronted with industrial monocultures in their area, they are faced with water and other resources shortages, contamination from pesticide spraying and from GMO crops. Monoculture plantations usually provide only temporary labour, for which workers are often hired from outside the region and in most of the cases confront long-term health problems due to the application of agrototoxic chemicals. Land grabbing and forced evictions of local populations are directly linked to the expansion of monocultures.

Growing so many homogenous plants in one area requires a lot of artificial chemical and mineral input. In nature, plants and animals feed each other the chemicals and minerals required to thrive. Eliminating these natural cycles from a diverse ecosystem requires artificial fertilizers that are used to boost crop yields at a great expense to local biodiversity. Moreover, monocultures are particularly susceptible to disease, which can spread far more quickly over a large area covered by a single crop than in a biodiverse ecosystem. In order to fight these 'weeds', pests and disease outbreaks, cultivators will apply even more herbicides and pesticides to keep the plants growing.

While the climate crisis has become a business opportunity for polluters, it is often claimed that we need to simply cover the earth with plantations that absorb carbon dioxide. This could not be farther from the truth. The natural carbon cycle between plants, animals, the air, the oceans and the earth maintains a delicate balance. Monocultures are not forests/ecosystems and do not stand long enough to lock-in carbon in the soil. Moreover, monocultures inhibit soil carbon up-take by frequent tilling and pesticide use. The no-till or low-till methods often advocated by biotech companies are not a solution either because of all of the serious problems associated with GM crops. Monocultures take large amounts of lands for private profit devastating biodiversity, water sources, soil health and changing micro-climates.

The Clean Development Mechanism, the biggest offset scheme under the UN climate framework, allows projects that include monoculture plantations under the Afforestation/Reforestation track to sell carbon credits to polluters in the North. These credits allow polluters to keep polluting as long as somewhere else there are some trees 'absorbing' the emissions they will continue to emit. In addition, Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) is a controversial scheme which does not differentiate between industrial plantations and forests. These plantations and land-related

credits are being sold already in voluntary offset markets. Continuing to increase industrial plantations anywhere to “offset” pollution in the North is not a solution to climate change!

Grassroots organisations and movements around the globe have been and still are fighting against the loss of their lands, water, forests and livelihoods as a result of the spread of industrial monoculture models – i.e. eucalyptus, pine, oil palm, rubber trees, soy and jatropha – and challenging this model which has profound impacts on food sovereignty, sustainable agriculture, access to land and water, biodiversity, climate stability, local plant knowledge including medicinal plants as well as Indigenous and local communities rights.

Large-scale monoculture plantations destroy the natural diversity of life.

They are artificial, driven by profit and are environmentally and socially destructive.

More info:

<http://www.carbontradewatch.org/issues/monoculture.html>

<http://noredd.makenoise.org/>

http://wrm.org.uy/plantations/21_set/2012/index.html