

Women raise their voices against tree plantations

**The role of the European Union in
disempowering women in the South**

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Forests and Biodiversity Program - Friends of the Earth International
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Introduction

The European Union has signed a number of treaties and conventions and developed a major body of legislation aimed at achieving gender equality.¹

For the European Union (EU), “Equality between women and men is a fundamental right, a common value of the EU, and a necessary condition for the achievement of the EU objectives of growth, employment and social cohesion.” While inequalities between men and women still persist in EU member states, at least some conditions have been created to advance towards making gender equality a reality.

However, the issue of the equality of rights between men and women seems to lose –in practice- its importance for the EU outside its borders².

As the concrete cases analyzed in this document show, European Union *consumption levels*, *policies* and *corporations* are playing a major role in disempowering women in countries of the South. This is being done through the conversion of local ecosystems and farmlands used to grow food crops into monoculture plantations of different species of trees, such as eucalyptus, oil palm and rubber trees.

High levels of *consumption* among inhabitants of the EU are based on a range of raw materials supplied largely by Southern countries (oil, minerals, pulp for paper making, palm oil, rubber, meat, grains, fruit, shrimp, wood, flowers, etc.).

The extraction of these raw materials is done by *corporations* and carries an extremely high social and environmental cost, especially for the populations of the countries of the South.

In order for these raw materials and the products made from them to be produced and made available to the European public, a series of *trade policies* are formulated to promote the “development” of different corporations in the South.

Trade policies and agreements establish the legal framework for big corporations to operate in the South by setting a series of trade promotion mechanisms that facilitate and protect their investments opening the way for their business.

The European Union’s “*Global Europe: Competing in the World*” trade policy has been strongly criticized by social movements in a declaration stating that it “pushes for the deepening of policies of competition and economic growth, the implementation of multinational companies’ agenda and the entrenchment of neoliberal policies, all of which are incompatible with the discourse of climate change, poverty reduction and social cohesion. Despite trying to hide its true nature by including themes such as international aid and political dialogue, the core of the proposal is to open up capital, goods and services markets, to protect foreign investment and to reduce the state’s capacity to promote economic and social development.”³ According to a report by Friends of the Earth, the

¹ For further information please visit: EU Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities at <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=418&langId=en>

² Since the adoption of the Monterrey Consensus (2002) and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), the EC and Member States have reflected their commitment to gender equality in a number of crucial documents--such as the 2005 EU Consensus on Development and the 2007 EC Communication on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Development Cooperation--that commit EU donors to ensure the effective implementation of strategies and practices that genuinely contribute to the achievement of gender equality and women’s rights worldwide.

<http://www.wide-network.org/index.jsp?id=400>

³ People’s Summit Linking Alternatives III Declaration, http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/2008/EA3_finaldeclaration_en.pdf

European Union's trade policy "is explicitly about serving the interests of European corporations – opening up new markets, natural resources and energy reserves for them."⁴

Corporations invest millions of dollars in advertising, fabricating new "needs" and thereby further raising the levels of consumption and, consequently, extraction of natural resources in the South.

There are a large number of well documented examples of the destruction that has been directly or indirectly caused (and continues to be caused) by European companies.

These impacts are not gender neutral, and while impacting communities as a whole, they have specific and differentiated impacts on men and women.

In this document we present three case studies that show how consumption levels, EU policies and corporations are impacting on the lives of women in the South.

These studies are the result of three workshops held in late 2008 in Nigeria, Papua New Guinea and Brazil, as part of a joint project between Friends of the Earth International and the World Rainforest Movement, with women from local communities who have seen their lives impacted by the transformation of their ecosystems.

The first case is that of Nigeria –organized in collaboration with Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria- which is about rubber plantations established on the lands of a local community by the France-based Michelin company.

In the case of Papua New Guinea the workshop was carried out in collaboration with the local organization CELCOR/Friends of the Earth-PNG. It refers to oil palm plantations that are being mainly promoted to feed the European market with palm oil (used in products such as cosmetics, soap, vegetable oil and foodstuffs) as well as for the production of agrofuels.

And finally the Brazilian case –in collaboration with Núcleo Amigos da Terra/Friends of the Earth Brazil- is about eucalyptus plantations set up by three companies -the Swedish-Finnish Stora Enso, Aracruz Celulose and Votorantim- for producing pulp for export to Europe for converting it there into paper.

The women who shared their stories at these workshops talked about the impacts caused by a destructive model of development, including the differentiated impacts that they suffer as women. They have lost or are losing their means of survival and their cultures are seriously threatened. At the same time, they have seen their influence on decision-making – as women – become even further diminished. Nevertheless, they are not prepared to give up hope, and are determined to fight for their rights.

Through this work we seek to lend our support to the struggle of these and many other women facing similar situations throughout the countries of the South. One of our main aims is to raise awareness among the men and women of the EU about how their governments are promoting policies that favour corporate investments in the South and on how those investments impact on communities in general and on women in particular. As a result of increased awareness, we hope that EU citizens and their organizations will join in the effort to create a socially equitable and environmentally sustainable world –North and South- where gender justice can become a reality for all.

⁴ Global Europe. The EU's new, offensive trade strategy. Friends of the Earth International Briefing paper http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefing_notes/global_europe.pdf

Case Studies

Michelin's rubber plantations in Nigeria

*“I don't want money. I want my land back
if they give me one million Naira today,
I will still go broke,
but if I have my land
I can always farm to take care of my family
and possibly pass the land on to my children.”*

*A woman from Iguoriakhi, one of the communities
neighbouring Iguobazuwa Forest Reserve.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Most of the world rubber production goes for the manufacturing of tyres for different types of vehicles, from cars, to trucks, airplanes and so on. The number of tyres produced annually is huge and statistics show that 1.3 billion tyres were produced in 2007.

South East Asian countries (Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand) are the major producers of natural rubber in the world, while Africa produces some 5% of global natural rubber production. Within Africa, the main producing countries are Nigeria (300,000 hectares), Liberia (100,000) and Cote d'Ivoire (70,000).

The multinational companies Michelin and Bridgestone, are the major players in the world tyre production. Both of them are active in Africa where they have set up their rubber plantations. Bridgestone/Firestone Corporation has its conflictive plantations established in Liberia⁵

The France-based transnational company Michelin has quite recently established its rubber plantations in Nigeria.

It all started on May 29, 2007, when over 3,500 hectares of Iguobazuwa Forest Reserve -including individual and communal farmlands- were allotted to Michelin to be converted into rubber plantations in an illegal deal without the consent of community people or proper Environmental Impact Assessment.

Iguobazuwa is the administrative headquarters of Ovia South west local government area of Edo State, home to a population of about one hundred thousand people. It is a journey of about 28 kilometers from Benin city, the capital of Edo State, Nigeria.

Iguobazuwa Forest Reserve -spanning over 11 communities - has been described in time past as one of the forest and biodiversity-rich regions in the South western part of Nigeria. It used to be an area of dense forest canopy rich in biodiversity, including animals such as monkeys, antelope, grasscutter, tortoise, snails and birds. Iguobazuwa was also a place where food crops were produced like cassava, yam, plantain, pineapple, melon, corn and vegetables, whether edible or medicinal.

⁵ Further information can be accessed at WRM web site, WRM Bulletins 134 & 102

The high yield and productivity experienced in this area has been linked to its rich soil. No wonder they say anything can grow on the Iguobazuwa soil without manure.

Those forests used to be a source of food and livelihood for the 85% forest dependent people, out of the 20,000 human population of the region. Now that population is facing serious threats with the invasion of its prime forest by the French multinational rubber giant Michelin Nigeria Plc, which has converted over 3,500 hectares of the high forest to rubber plantation.

Communities surrounding the Iguobazuwa forest include Aifesoba, Iguoriakhi, Igueihase, Ora, Amienghomwan, Ugbokun, Obaretin, Obosogbe, Okoro and Iguobazuwa.

On the eve of former Edo State Governor Lucky Igbinedion's exit from office (29th May, 2007), a large expanse of Iguobazuwa forest reserve was allotted to Michelin-Nigeria to cultivate large scale Hevea trees otherwise known as rubber plantation.

The approval, believed to have been gotten through the back door, was done without due process or the consent of community people.

"Michelin started taking our land in 2007. It was when surveying started that we knew that something was wrong." **Woman from Aifesoba community.**

The survey started in November 2007 when community people started observing strangers with various surveying equipment like theodolite, compass, measuring tapes and the likes on their way to their farms. According to a community youth from Aifesoba community, *"when we asked them what they were doing with our land, they said they were tracing a river; while another person said they were looking for oil."* The survey was carried out by the Edo State Ministry of Land and Survey in collaboration with the state's Ministry of Environment, under which there is the Forestry Department.

Although the land legally belongs to the government, in 1972 communities were granted rights over it, with some parts of those forests allocated rotationally to members of the community for use as farmlands.

In December 2007, Michelin bulldozed the 3,500 hectares of forests as well as the people's farmlands.

Local people found themselves from one day to another with both sources of livelihood –their forest and farmlands- completely destroyed. Iguobazuwa communities lost everything. In May 2008, the company started planting the rubber trees. Although the trees are still at an early stage, as the experience in many other countries shows, communities will have to also face the additional impacts resulting from the plantations themselves.

"Two years after my husband's death, I started farming... Michelin came with his evil bulldozer and destroyed everything I had planted. I was crying...I was trying to stop them; they threatened to bulldoze me with their caterpillar if I don't allow them."
Woman from Aifesoba.

Publicized by Michelin and the government as a sign of development, the company's action has brought a serious setback to the agrarian communities, as Michelin's rubber plantation destroyed their forest, forest resources, age-old individual and communal farmlands, leaving the affected community people uncompensated.

Over the years, the community people had had no cause to worry as all they needed was just within their reach. Villagers have now discovered that the forest resources that they used to depend upon and enjoy when the area was covered with forest can no longer be found in the rubber plantation.

2. SOURCES OF LIVELIHOOD GONE...

*'These people want to plant rubbers and starve us to death. I had two acres of farmland in which I planted cassava, plantains, pineapples, cocoyam and pepper. Now, the farm is gone and I couldn't have any source of food or livelihood anymore'. **Woman from Aifesoba village.***

The unholy arrival of Michelin to Iguobazuwa forest reserve after over 300 years of peaceful co-existence among communities has brought nothing but hunger, malnutrition, diseases, poverty, air and water pollution, soil erosion, social dislocation, increase in social vices, alteration of age-old traditional practices, lack of fuel wood and bush meat.

Paraphrasing Chinua Achebe, famous Nigerian-born author of the classic novel "Things fall apart", the sources of livelihood these women maintained can no longer be attained as they have been ripped off from them, most of whom are farmers and breadwinners for their families.

It is important to note that it is the women who use the land for cultivation of crops. As a result of this, women have become farm labourers in other farms in nearby forests or villages yet to be affected by the rampaging Michelin; while others have been rendered jobless, and hungry.

On the other hand, men are the ones who have control over the land. They engage in hunting and sometimes collect herbs, native fibers for craftwork like garri sieve. Men also used to get timber from the forest to build houses.

Women use and have control over water uses for domestic activities. Collection of seeds, fruits, edible and medicinal leaves was a core responsibility of women. Clothing needs are also responsibilities of women.

The majority of the women who shared their experiences said they are usually not given money by their husbands, and that instead the husband provides them with farmland, prepare it for planting and the woman takes care of all the other activities from cultivation to harvesting. The money they get most times is from what they sell from the farm produce at the local market.

According to the women -who are predominantly farmers- they have always been bread winners for their families.

*Michelin has destroyed our farmlands. I feel pained by their actions. The farms used to provide food for our families. I used to assist in paying my children's school fees. We want them to pay for our crops and farmlands. They should leave our lands for us. We want our land back. Our lives depend on it. Now we are jobless. No more bitter leaves, water leaves and pumpkin leaves. My husband has been jobless for years; we can't afford to depend on our husbands for everything. We want Michelin to compensate us...the value is too much to ignore. **Woman from Aifesoba community.***

Hence, the robbery of their farms have greatly affected the women folk as a lot of the responsibilities for family upkeep rest on the women, so they have no other choice than to resort to menial jobs in order to survive.

"Aren't these people sending us to go and steal?' They took away my four acre land and the source of livelihood for my family. They drove me away from the farm while I was still working, without any explanation or compensation. My husband lost his job as a driver in the city and I have four children, all of whom are now out of school for lack of school fees."

Woman from Aifesoba community.

3. MEDICINES THAT ARE GONE WITH THE FORESTS

*"I am pregnant and ill, and the herbs are nowhere to be found. Before now, we used to go to the bush to get herbs to cure all sorts of ailments. You know there are some ailments that orthodox medicines cannot cure; but now we cannot access them because Michelin has bulldozed our forests. You can see that my legs and limbs are swollen; unlike before when I get pregnant, I cannot get those very effective herbs for my condition anymore." A **heavily pregnant woman from Aifesoba.***

Medicinal plants are vital in local communities' traditional practices linked to health and their collection is also a responsibility of women. The disappearance of the forests has caused that now women must go far away -with the shortest distance of about 15km apart- to get herbs to treat some ailments.

As a woman from Iguoriakhi, says:

"We just know that Michelin is doing the damage. They are the people we are seeing. In the past we fed from the forest; our life depended on the forest. There are a lot of people in my community that do not know where hospitals are, because the forest provides their medicinal needs."

An 83 year old woman from Iguobazuwa community explains the situation as follows:

"I have lived in Iguobazuwa for 65years. I used to go to the forest to pluck some medicinal herbs to treat my children whenever they fall ill. It was from the forest I got medicinal leaves to treat myself all through the years of my several times of pregnancy."

4. TRADITIONAL PRACTICES UNDERMINED

Traditional practices were undermined with the arrival of Michelin. On the one hand, several animals and plants that are needed for some cultural practices have disappeared as the forest is gone, and it was women that used to go to the forest to pick snails, "ebiebai" leaves, tortoise and other plants and animals that are now difficult to find.

Another traditional practice is also gone with the forest: the Igue festival, which was the most popular and significant festival in the great Benin kingdom. The ewere leaf is used to climax the Igue festival. The ewere celebration, done towards the end of the year, is believed by the Benin speaking people to usher new blessing for the upcoming year. Men used to do the ewere dance in the evening while the women do theirs in the early hours of the morning. To them, the celebration of the ewere during the Igue festival drives away bad omen, sickness and disease. Since the invasion of the forests by Michelin, the ewere plants have disappeared and this has in no small measure affected the people's spirituality.

Local communities' traditional practices have been also hampered as some of their sacred areas in the forest, where their ancestors and gods are worshipped, have been bulldozed to give way to plantations.

Before the arrival of Michelin, the Oguedion (the elders court) was functional and it was used to settle community differences. Elders of the community would meet at the elders court to settle differences among its members. Cases like cultural taboos, theft, immoral behaviours, inter family conflicts, ailments and other socio-cultural concerns were cases brought before the elders court. The arrival of Michelin has created friction and factions among the elders council and the “Oguedion” in now under lock and key with a part of the building already overtaken by weeds.

5. ¿A SIGN OF DEVELOPMENT?

The arrival of the plantations has not even been a source of employment for the local communities.

Jobs are not provided for community people whether men, women or youths. Instead, casual jobs like security guards are provided for people from neighboring towns that are transported in Michelin’s heavy duty truck to and from the plantation site on a daily basis.

Chemicals sprayed on the plantation affect whatever they get in contact with. Plants get burnt instantly by the herbicides applied to them. People who unfortunately walk past the plantation to their farms when the chemical is being sprayed; end up being affected by it.

On the other hand they no longer count on their sources of livelihood. The majority of the women now engage in small scale subsistence farming within their compounds. Some buy cassava crops from those who have, and process them for sale when they mature. More recently, male youths from the communities who used to depend on farming for sustenance, have migrated to the city center to learn bike riding and end up becoming public motorcycle riders, while others take to drinking; as according to one of the men, “it is a way of forgetting your sorrow”.

Local people’s relatives working with government in urban centers now share their salaries to support family members in the plantation-troubled communities.

The above examples clearly show that these rubber plantations have created poverty in previously resource-rich communities under the guise of “development”.

6. WOMEN RESISTING AND ORGANIZING THEMSELVES

“If I have my way, I would stop them from buying our lands for rubber plantation...If I have my way, I would uproot the whole rubber plantation with my hands...They should leave our land for us.”

Women know that nothing good for them has or will result from the activities of Michelin in their area. They are starting to organize themselves and are looking for support. They want their lands back, their trees planted again and also to be fully compensated for the destroyed crops.

They are decided to carry out actions, protest marches, and demonstrations to Michelin Nigeria to enforce their demands in resisting all forms of large scale tree plantations in their territories.

For that, they need to overcome some problems. As a woman from Iguobazuwa community says:

“In the past, we used to have women group, but now, it no longer exist. That is one of the reasons why we have not being able to confront them as a group. No unity, no resistance!”

Traditionally, Iguobazuwa women have not participated in any form of resistance, until recently when some community women and some men from Aifesoba and Obosogbe communities engaged in a protest march in Benin city to denounce the activities of Michelin in their locality.

This protest march coordinated by ERA/FoEN is part of the resolutions reached at the Nov. 4-5th workshop jointly organized by WRM and ERA. They only get to know about things when they ask their husbands. But they are aware of men's involvement in moves to resist Michelin and that several attempts to meet Michelin officials by the community people have failed.

More recently, women have become more assertive to know and exercise their rights, the value of their forest and how to become more active in the decision making process as it relates to good forest management practices in their localities.

In Aifesoba community, the women -in the company of men- engaged in a protest march to the forest area where Michelin's trucks and bulldozers were busy felling trees. They stopped them from working on two occasions; on the third time Michelin got mobile police men to guard them and to intimidate and scare the community people away. As a result, some women from other communities are now scared of taking any move to confront Michelin as they are afraid of being maltreated, intimidated or harassed the way Aifesoba community people were treated.

At Igueihase, only men have been going to Michelin to complain. But all their complaints seem to have fallen on deaf ears. Believing that since government sold the land to Michelin, and the Ministry of Environment says government owns the land, they feel hopeless about the situation.

"They did not listen to our husbands who married us in the house... is it we the women they will listen to?" A woman from Aifesoba community.

As a fallout from the 2-day workshop held on the 4th -5th November 2008, Michelin called some members of two communities (Aifesoba, and Iguobazuwa) out of the nine communities directly impacted, and payed them compensation. One group from Iguobazuwa was paid fully while the other community from Aifesoba was payed what the community people described as peanuts, as according to them, it was a far cry from the extent of destruction and was not commensurate with the amount valued for the crops destroyed.

At the end of the workshop the women released a communiqué in which they demanded a series of urgent actions. Among them, they demanded that the current Edo State Government should review the sale of Iguobazuwa forest reserve, that Michelin Nigeria should return their lands to them and replant every tree fell, with full compensation for crops destroyed, and that the invasion of their forests by Michelin Nigeria should not be seen as a sign of development, but of impoverishment, as their lives and livelihoods have been jeopardized and that further expansion into their lands at Iguobazuwa MUST STOP.

But the most important thing is their determination to get their lands back.

Papua New Guinea: Oil Palm changing traditional livelihoods

1. PALM OIL CONSUMPTION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Palm oil makes up more than a third of the world's vegetable oil market, with soy in the second place. Palm oil is mostly traded in China and the European Union.

The oil derived from the palm is extensively used for food production and also with industrial purposes (for cosmetics production, lubricant oils, detergents, etc) as well as for energy production (biodiesel).

Palm oil exports have more than doubled over the last 10 years, and it is expected to continue to grow. Among the reasons that explain the growth of the demand there are two that appear to be among the more relevant.

On the one hand, the increase of palm oil use in food production. This increase is due to two factors. A) the recent substitution –because of associated health risks- of trans fats used in food production with palm oil⁶. B) the increasing absorption of EU produced rapeseed oil for biodiesel uses has led to a considerable gap in EU food oil supplies, EU palm oil imports have already doubled during the 2000-2006 period⁷.

On the other hand, palm oil is being heavily promoted as a source of energy, for producing biodiesel. Within the framework of Climate change discussions agrofuels (fuels derived from biomass) have been presented as the “solution” to the climate crisis and as an alternative to fossil fuels. The European Union alone has set targets for a 10% of agrofuels to be included in transport fuel by 2020⁸.

2. FROM WHERE IS IT SOURCED?

With Indonesia and Malaysia as the biggest producers and exporters of palm oil –accounting for some 90% of the world palm oil production- Thailand, Colombia, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea are the remaining four main producers.

When planted on an industrial scale, there are many problems associated to oil palm plantations. The negative social and environmental impacts of monoculture oil palm plantations have been documented in many countries all over the world⁹ and these impacts range from human rights violations to environmental crimes.

3. THE CASE OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

PNG is one of the most diverse countries of the world. With a population of some 5 million people, PNG hosts more than 850 languages and cultures with unique lifestyles. Most of its population still lives in the rural area and rely on subsistence farming for their livelihood.

6 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trans_fat#cite_ref-105

7 The bulk of biofuel demand is met by biodiesel produced from domestically grown rapeseed. To date no or only minimal quantities of biofuel have been imported.

8 European Comisión, Energy section web site: http://ec.europa.eu/energy/renewables/index_en.htm

9 See WRM web site, www.wrm.org.uy

In Papua New Guinea -a country where 97% of the land is communally owned- oil palm production is increasing in the last years. In 2005, palm oil production accounted a total of 346,000 thousand tonnes and in 2006 it represented a share of 34% in agricultural exports. It is estimated that the country has more than 100,000 hectares of oil palm plantations.

Much of the oil produced in PNG ends up in the European Union. According to a Friends of the Earth report¹⁰ “A key competitive advantage of PNG, which explains the interest from foreign investors, is the fact that the country is among the ACP countries (African, Caribbean and Pacific countries) which have a preferential trade agreement with the European Union (EU). This means that Crude Palm Oil (CPO) exports from PNG to the EU are exempt from 6% import tax that the EU raises on CPO imports from other countries, including Indonesia and Malaysia. The CPO export from PNG is thus 100% directed at the EU with the UK, Italy and the Netherlands being the main markets. Furthermore, because PNG is a relative newcomer in this industry, its oil palm plantations are planted mostly with highly productive seedlings from Malaysian nurseries. On a country level, PNG therefore records the highest CPO production level per hectare (4.2 tons) of all productive countries.”

The PNG case is of particular interest because almost all oil palm is grown under the Nucleus Estate Smallholder Scheme, whereby a central company and plantation contracts small farmers to supply it with oil palm fruit.

Oil palm plantations under smallholders schemes have been heavily promoted by the International Financial Institutions in PNG. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank have promoted the introduction of this cash crop as a way for “alleviating” poverty in the country and allowing farmers to gain access into the cash economy.

Policies promoted by this International Financial Institutions are the same old story. If there is something that can be said about this country is that Papua New Guineans are far from being poor. They have their own land where they can grow almost all the products they need for their livelihoods, they can raise their animals, they have their forests, and beautiful clean rivers on which their lives depend upon. Promoting oil palm under the guise of alleviating poverty, is a dangerous policy that may end up turning Papua New Guineans into impoverished people.

At the same time, these schemes appear at a first glance as a more “socially responsible” way of doing business in a more friendly scale. The real argument behind them is that they allow corporations to increase their business while reducing investments and costs. Corporations no longer have to buy land to make way for plantations, they have cheap labor from the landowners, no workers unions, and the responsibility for the ecological impacts of plantations is faded away.

A local woman during the workshop, put it in very simple and accurate terms:

“The more smallholders the more profits the companies get, it's cheap labour for the companies”. **Woman from Kokoda**

Oil Palm plantations have been promoted and developed by the Government and International Financial Institutions in five project areas in the country. These are: Hoskins and Bialla in West New Britain, Popondetta, Milne Bay and New Ireland.

In each of these regions different companies have established the nucleus estate, developing in all cases their own industrial oil palm plantations plus contracting smallholders from nearby areas.

10 http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/greasy_palms_impacts.pdf

Since 2005 the US giant Cargill is present in three areas in the country, with important areas of industrial oil palm plantations. The Belgium company Société Internationale de Plantations et de Finance (SIPEF) is also present.

Most of the oil produced by these companies is traded in different European countries, such as Germany, the UK, The Netherlands, Italy and others.

WRM and other organizations have documented the impacts of industrial scale oil palm plantations in PNG and information on this that can be accessed at WRM's web site¹¹. The aim of the present study is to analyse the issue from a different perspective, focusing on the testimonies provided by women smallholders during a workshop held to that effect.

4. WOMEN'S TESTIMONIES

During the second week of November, more than 50 women from several regions of PNG met to discuss the differentiated impacts of oil palm plantations on women. The workshop took place in Kokoda, a sub-district of Northern Province situated in the outskirts of Popondetta town.

Women know the importance of their forests, rivers, their gardens, and their biodiversity. Indeed forests, rivers and gardens are their sources of livelihood.

Oil palm was promoted as an alternative to access cash, and also as a way for improving communities access to services such as roads, schools, health centers, etc. Communities were encouraged to plant oil palm "blocks" on their lands. While the average land tenure is around 4 to 6 hectares of land, the blocks occupy two hectares in size. There are regions where landowners are being encouraged to plant even more than half of the land they own. Loan facilities to buy seedlings, fertilizers and agrotocics, are among the many facilities offered to the people by the government as a means of promoting oil palm plantings.

Oil palm is harvested every fortnight. The men are in charge of cutting the big bunches of fruit from the palm. After the harvest they leave the fruits on the road, where the company trucks pass, weigh and collect them. The industry noticed that during harvests many fruits fell and were left on the ground of the plantations. Therefore the Oil Palm Industry Corporation (OPIC) implemented a scheme called the "Mama Lus Fruit Card" under which they encourage women to engage in the collection of those fruits and therefore earn money from selling what they collect. Under this scheme, women are given their own harvest nets and payment system (called a 'mama card'). They pick up the loose fruit and sell it to the company. This system is used by the big plantation companies as well as by smallholders on their blocks.

This scheme has proved to be very useful for the companies, because it has not only resulted in the increase of the amount of fruits collected but also in a better public image for the industry which publicized the scheme as "developing opportunities" for the women.

However, there are different views regarding the Mama Lus Fruit Scheme. According to a report from the Australian Conservation Foundation "Men were convinced to accept the MLFS because OPIC told the men that if the women earned an income, the whole family would benefit. At the beginning, this seemed like a good idea. However, this might also have encouraged some men to give all the responsibility for the welfare of the family to women, so that they could spend their own pay cheques only on themselves."

11 <http://www.wrm.org.uy/countries/PapuaNG.html>
<http://www.wrm.org.uy/plantations/palm.html>

- Food Sovereignty at stake

The land allocated to the oil palm blocks can no longer be allocated for food production, for making their “gardens” as local people call them in Papua New Guinea.

Women have witnessed that oil palm cannot perform as a forest, and while it has allowed them to access some cash, it has also raised many different impacts.

Several testimonies showed the women's concern about land being occupied with oil palm and leaving little space for gardening:

“Therefore, we have limited land for gardening and no more forest for hunting wild animals. The land we have is being used over and over again and its ability to support food production is decreasing. In ten years time, we will face food shortage. Actually we are experiencing it right [now] but it will be worse in ten years. Because the forests are gone we lack protein in our diets”. A woman from Kokoda Village

“The Mama Lus Fruit Scheme” enabled women working in plantations to earn money apart from the men. But as women are the ones responsible for the house and for taking care of the family and for cultivating their gardens, this is overloading their lives and leaving them with little time for those activities.

“Due to the fact that we tire out working on our oil palm blocks we do not have the strength to make good and big gardens now as we used to before. As it is very tiring to clean, harvest and load oil palm during the harvesting days, we usually get shoulder aches and other sicknesses and as such we do not have the strength and time for food gardening, so we end up making smaller gardens and they are usually within close proximity of the village.” A woman from Popondetta

Food diversity and therefore nutritional health is severely impacted due to land allocation to oil palm.

But also while the access to cash from oil palm would have allowed women to access different products or cover different needs than the ones they obtained from their gardens, women argue that now they need to have cash to access to food...in the stores:

“Also nowadays many of us depend on store goods as an alternative to food gardens. Some of us in the communities have converted all our good land for oil palm plantations and little is allocated for food gardening. When we have little in the garden we have to spend money again at the local market to supplement our meals. Since we don't get much from our harvest we often go for the cheap foods offered in the supermarkets. Sometime these cheap foods are not good for our health or have low nutritional values”. A woman from Popondetta

Traditionally women go to the markets to sell the products from their gardens that they do not use for their families. This is another opportunity that women have to have access to some cash and buy other needs such as clothing. Shortage of land for farming and less time to devote to that activity is preventing women from going to the markets, which for women was also an important moment for socializing.

Furthermore, oil palm plantations do not allow inter cropping as some other crops such as coco do, so the land allocated to this crop cannot be shared to produce other food products.

- Environmental and Health risks

There are many environmental problems associated to oil palm. We all know that the problem is not the oil palm tree, that has for centuries been cultivated in many countries by traditional communities, but the industrial model that implies planting it in large scale tree plantations. If we look at only one block from one landowner in PNG, it is easily arguable that it is far from being industrial scale. And indeed, that is correct. However, when we look at the smallholder-schemes promoted in PNG (as well as in other countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia), their plantations are part of a large scale development plantation where their 2 hectares block are part of a complex formed of many thousands of hectares. For example, in the Popondetta region there are more than 23,000 hectares of oil palm plantations, more than half of which are on local peoples lands.

Life in PNG is tied to the land. Land in PNG means food, water, shelter, culture, history and identity. The constitution of PNG recognizes this by protecting customary land tenure and ensuring that the environment is “conserved and used for the benefit of us all” and “replenished for the benefit of future generations”. The nucleus estate smallholder scheme, under which all oil palm in PNG is grown, is having a big impact on the natural environment and the lives of all those connected to it.

PNG still has 70% forest cover, so it may be difficult for many people in PNG to imagine life without forests and forest gardens. But land must be cleared to make space for oil palm. This land could be:

- Primary rainforest: forest which has never been logged on a large scale. Primary forests are vital to the lives of local people, and for the world’s biodiversity. The forests of PNG are home to many rare and endangered species of plants and animals.
- Secondary forest: forest which has been logged before and allowed to regrow. This kind of forest is just as important to local people, and still houses many rare and valuable species.
- Agricultural land or gardens: which provide income and food for local people.

Oil palm companies often refer to the land they choose for plantations as ‘degraded’, ‘unused’ or ‘valueless’. However, none of these lands are ‘valueless’. Even if local landowners may not even visit these lands often, forests have important functions which oil palm cannot perform:

- Forests provide food for local people, including edible plants, nuts and fruits. They are also home for many of the animals which nearby communities like to hunt for protein. However, oil palm does not allow other plants to be grown amongst it; in fact, herbicides are sprayed to keep all other plants away. This means there is nowhere for native animals to live. The traditions of hunting and gathering are not possible in an oil palm plantation.
- Forests support biodiversity. PNG is home to 5% of the Earth’s biodiversity, even though it only has 1% of the world’s land area. This biodiversity – the plants and animals found in the forest - could be a great source of income for PNG in the future. Forests are vital for the soil functions. By holding the soil in place with their roots, forests stop the top part of the soil from washing away in the rain (a process called ‘erosion’). This ‘topsoil’ is the best soil, which has the most nutrients. Once the topsoil has eroded, fertilisers must be used to artificially replace the lost nutrients.

Together with deforestation, impacts on water are also among the most relevant.

Rivers in PNG are vital for daily livelihoods and particularly for women's livelihoods as they are the ones in charge of household activities. They are the direct source of drinking water (in PNG’s rural areas there are no drinking water services) as well as for bathing, washing, and also for

entertainment. For centuries local people have used their rivers, and most of them are in good health. But with oil palm there are many problems. Firstly, palm oil refineries (where the fruit is processed after being collected) are a great source of water contamination because of the mills' effluents.

Secondly, the use of agrottoxics in the plantations is contaminating rivers, streams, as well as soils and the air. Chemical use is also affecting fishing in the rivers.

Agrottoxics are also posing a great threat on people's health.

“Health is a very big concern in our place right now. When sun heats the chemicals sprayed in the company estates and even VOPs,[Village Oil Palm] we breathe in the chemical. I'm pretty sure we are inhaling dangerous substances and definitely are dying every minute. Some pregnant mothers have babies who develop asthma within first one or two months after birth. Babies whose parent never or families never have asthma are developing this life threatening disease. There are many cases of such and it is really funny. During my time there was never such a thing. The chemical are killing us; we will all die sooner.” A woman from Saga Village

Indeed, chemical use is adding problems to their food production and nutrition. The sprayed chemicals reach their food gardens and are contaminating their crops and in some opportunities destroying their food production.

Not only chemicals are affecting health, but also the hard work needed during the harvest and transport of the fruit:

“I am not harvesting my oil palm now because of the hardship that I have faced as my estate is about 12 kilometers from the loading area. It is very hard work transporting bunches to the river bank, then ferrying them to the other side of the river on rubber tubes. After about 6 years now I am giving up. Most of the time we get sick, sustain big cuts and bruises and generally we are losing our general health status because of all the hard work we do even in bad weather.” Woman from Botue Village

The following quote from a woman at the workshop sums up the suffered impacts:

“Our land is slowly dying. Right now, as we are talking, the ground is crying out in pain because oil palm is sucking everything”. Woman from Kokoda Village

Sucking everything...nutrients from the soil, water, communities' means of livelihood, their health and also their culture.

- Social impacts & Land disputes

Distribution of oil palm income and the introduction of a cash economy has had specific impacts on women. Following are some of the issues women living on the Hoskins and Popondetta plantations have raised:

- Men usually have more control over the income from oil palm production than women. This is mainly because oil palm companies usually talk to men instead of women. It is also because the highest paying jobs on an oil palm plantation go to men (i.e. chopping the large bunches of fruits from the trees).

- Conversion of traditional farmlands to oil palm plantations restricts women's access to garden land making it harder for them to provide food for their families. Gardens are important both for feeding the family, and selling garden food at local markets. Women usually have control of income earned from the markets, unlike oil palm income which men often control.
- Often, women only get a tiny amount of the money their husbands earn from oil palm, even though they have contributed to the production of palm fruits. Many say that the money they get from their husbands is only enough to buy store food for the family for a couple of days after pay day.
- Families now have to rely on store food since there is less land for gardens and subsistence farming.
- Domestic violence has become common around payday- men often spend the money carelessly on gambling and beer while women struggle for cash to buy essential household items.

“Men go around looking for beer during company fortnights [payment fortnights] because most of the stores here are liquor outlet, and there are no restrictions, so there are always disturbances and drunkard men roam on the road. The oil palm workers earn money and spend the money on alcohol. People in Saga are careful. They use common sense and wisdom to keep themselves away from trouble. The community does not get involved in problems like that. When those drunkards get into the community that is when the community gets involved through the leaders dealing with the situation.” **Woman from Kokoda Village**

Another woman from a village said among the social issues drug abuse particularly -by young people- is increasing.

HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases is another huge problem that is rising rapidly and worrying women in particular.

Women also fear about sexual abuse:

“Knowing that there is a mixed community here, people try to be careful in how they conduct themselves in their daily lives. People do not spin in odd times especially the women. We are very cautious because if we are not wise, that is when we ask for trouble. We are really careful not to go on the road on pay days”. **Woman from Kokoda Village**

Prostitution was also raised by the women as an issue of concern. Child labour in plantations, as well as high rates of young girls' pregnancy were issues also raised linked to plantations that are of high concern to women.

Land disputes have also caused important social conflicts in the oil palm regions in PNG.

“Much of land has been stolen by the State and we are almost landless in own land that is rightfully ours by history, culture and tradition. The land which the company has taken is our birthright inheritance reaped from us.” **Woman from Kokoda Village**

Growers are organized into Village Oil Palm (VOP) and Leaseholders. VOPs are operated by landowners on their own customary lands while leaseholders lease land from other landowners for the plantings. Women from different provinces present at the workshop expressed concern about increasing population and future land shortages due to oil palm expansion. Land which has never

been a problem before, as the population density was quite low, is now becoming a very scarce resource. This is clearly reflected in increasing intra and inter-clan land disputes. According to the President of the Women's Council at Kokoda, land disputes are a major issue now, and more than 50% of court cases are related to land.

- Vanished promises

Promoted as the new panacea for Papua New Guineans, that would bring about many improvements, oil palm plantations have not lived up to expectations.

At the workshop, women complained that:

“The only sign of spin offs in the village are trade stores that were build from our own money earned from oil palm. But the trade stores are operating on ad hoc basis (seasonal), the stores are fully stocked during bigger harvests (and high prices) and at times (during low prices) there will be no stock.

That is as far as spin off services go. Other spin off services like schools, health and transport in our village is virtually nil. Many times our children stay back at home and do miss out on school because the village is flooding and they cannot cross it. Because of that we built our own elementary school using corrugated iron and timber so that our children will easily receive education but the school inspector said that we do not have enough children. Currently we have less than 30 children and we need more than that to qualify for elementary school status. So now our children have to attend Mamba Estate elementary and go to Kokoda for their primary schooling which is quite a distance for a 5-7 year old child.”

To make matters worse, the standard of education is very low, hence the reason why not many people get high earning jobs. A lot of people drop out of school at a very early grade and end up in the plantations to work as laborers.

A woman from Kavieng, of the New Ireland Province, did acknowledge some improvements in her region linked to school development. However, it is interesting to highlight that Kavieng is a matrilineal society where women have the right to decide over their lands and, during her presentations, it was clear that the improvements seen were the result of women's involvement in the community.

Last but not least, dependence on one crop may end up creating economic problems. For example, the recent sharp fall of commodity prices (including palm oil) has put at stake future incomes from the oil palm fruit. If world prices drop, landowners would be affected and the burden of the loans would end up being impossible to afford. In that case, and if important areas of community lands have been converted into plantations, from where are they going to get the food? Women are very much aware of this risk.

5. STILL TIME TO STRIVE FOR CHANGES

“It seems that we are getting more negative impacts than benefits from this project and we have become SLAVES ON OUR OWN LAND!!!!” A woman from Botue Village

However sad the above quote may be, it clearly describes the drastic change that has come with this externally imposed project, which has disrupted and undermined existing customary systems and structures which have sustained local communities for as long as they can remember.

Destroying local diverse agroforestry systems to set up oil palm monocultures have proved to have serious negative impacts for local peoples and particularly on women, while yielding high profits for the companies.

As one woman said, *“Every bunch of fruit that falls from the palm sinks us further, while the companies get one meter higher”*.

Among the resolutions of the workshop conducted in PNG, the women “united in one voice” and called for the recognition of their rights in all decision making processes and demanded a stop to any further oil palm development.

The long term effects of the oil palm scheme may be irreversible and there is still time to evaluate and reverse the ongoing plans of oil palm development in PNG.

Women are aware of the risks of future developments and the problems caused by the existing plantations. It's now their time to strive for changes!

Brazil: Turning Prairies into Green Deserts

1. INTRODUCTION

World consumption of paper has exploded over the past 50 years. Since the early 1960's world paper consumption has increased fivefold, to the point where today we consume more than one million tonnes of paper each and every day.

Wasteful paper consumption is growing at an alarming rate while for the majority of the world's population paper is a scarce luxury. High income countries consume, on average, 57 times more paper than low income countries. These high rates are directly correlated with wasteful consumption practices.

Only about 1/3 of paper production is used for writing and printing paper, most of which is used for advertising. And almost half of all paper produced is used for packaging.

For ensuring increasing paper consumption levels, huge areas of large scale tree plantations are being established in Southern countries by the pulp and paper industry. This industry is among the world's largest generators of air and water pollutants, waste products, and the gases that cause climate change. It is also one of the largest users of raw materials, ranking first in industrial consumption of freshwater and fifth in industrial energy use globally.

The pulp industry is increasingly moving its operations to the South as a number of conditions in these countries allow for large corporate profits. Fast-wood monoculture tree plantations have been a key factor in the increase of paper consumption.

Fast-wood monoculture tree plantations are vast areas of land covered with a single alien tree species, planted uniformly and managed intensively with the sole objective of maximizing wood biomass production. These plantations are developed as monoculture tree crops supported by a technological package, including mechanization, chemical fertilization and the use of agro toxics.

Large-scale monoculture tree plantations cause serious social, environmental and economic impacts for local populations and ecosystems. Country after country land is appropriated by large, often foreign, corporate landowners, local communities are displaced, and an extensive transformation of the landscape begins -where native ecosystems are replaced with "green deserts". Local animals and plants disappear in the planted areas. Water resources are depleted and polluted by the plantations while soils become degraded. Human rights violations are strife, ranging from the loss of livelihoods and displacement to repression and even cases of torture and death.

Pulpwood plantations are widespread in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, South Africa, Swaziland, Chile, Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil.

European companies, aid agencies and institutions play a significant role in promoting the expansion of the pulp and paper industry in the South. The largest pulp and paper machinery exporters are Germany and Finland. In 2005, Germany exported more than USD2 billion worth of pulp and paper machinery and Finland more than USD1 billion. European companies and institutions promote the expansion of the pulp and paper industry in the global South not as a form of "development" but because it is beneficial to Europe¹².

12 Extracted from Chris Lang's work "Plantations, Poverty and Power" available at http://www.wrm.org.uy/publications/Plantations_Poverty_Power.pdf

Furthermore, paper consumption rates in Europe -together with the United States- are among the highest.

2. BRAZIL: MAKING LAND DISTRIBUTION MORE INEQUITABLE

Brazil is a wonderful country and famous for many different things: “carnaval”, the Amazon rainforests but also for being the country with a highly inequitable land distribution, with three per cent of the population holding almost two-thirds of the country's arable land.

Brazil is the world leader producer of bleached eucalyptus pulp. While most of pulp for export production is based along the Atlantic coast, in recent times the pulp industry is expanding more intensively to the most Southern state of Rio Grande do Sul.

Three main actors moving to that region are: Aracruz Celulose, Votorantim Celulose Papel and the Swedish-Finnish Stora Enso. While Aracruz and Votorantim are Brazilian companies, the markets for their products are mainly European countries.

The Southern region of Brazil, called the “sul-rio-grandense Pampa” (grassland area of the state of Rio Grande do Sul) extends for approximately 176 thousand square kilometres, equivalent to around 60% of the area of the state. The Pampa is characterized by grassland vegetation, with prevailing plain relief, and by denser, shrublike and tree vegetation in slopes and along streams, apart from the existence of swamps.

The Pampa of the South of Brazil, in the State of Rio Grande do Sul (RS) borders another two countries of the Pampa: Uruguay and Argentina.

Due to a number of factors, including its vast prairies, the region is suffering an offensive of three large companies of the pulp and paper sector¹³ –Aracruz, Votorantin and Stora Enso- that saw in these lands the convenience of expanding their monocultures of alien trees, as well as their activities related to pulp production.

Since 2003, the government of RS and the local media highlight and applaud the pulp mega projects planned for the region, which have been announced as a solution for local development, mainly for the “problems” of the Southern area, an economically stagnated region with large areas of land, where cattle raising is declining.

The opportunity arose during the last two administrations of the government of the state of RS. However, it was actually consolidated during the administration of the current governor Yeda Crusius. The highest levels of the state government adopted the investments in the pulp sector as a government project and have been promoting in several ways the consolidation of this sector in RS. These incentives include public financing lines and even imply the relaxation and breach of environmental legislation (for example, excluding or postponing the use of a prior Environmental Impact Assessment in forestation or reforestation undertakings for corporate purposes with less than 1000 hectares). The environmental licenses for eucalyptus plantations are being released on a precarious basis, breaching rules and without having completed an Environmental Zoning for Forestry activities in the State of Rio Grande do Sul

¹³ It is important to highlight that in 2003, Aracruz purchased Riocel (formerly Borregard). Besides, there is another pulp and paper company in RS, Cambará S.A.

These three pulp and paper companies, Aracruz, Votorantim (VCP) and Stora Enso, divided the sul-rio-grandense Pampa (Figure 1) mainly according to its logistic infrastructure, into three territories in order to set up their mega projects.



Figure 1: Where the “forests” are
source: Jornal Zero Hora, November 2008.

It is estimated that these companies will invest about USD 3 billion in the production of pulp in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Currently, RS has an area of more than 500 thousand hectares¹⁴ of monocultures of alien trees and according to estimates, it will have about a million hectares of pine, eucalyptus and acacia plantations and investments for approximately R\$ 6.1 billion by 2015.

Apart from the so-called “forestry” investments (read “monocultures of alien trees”), companies intend to set up three pulp mills in RS. As known, Stora Enso intended to set up a unit for the production of pulp in the West border of RS in seven years. Aracruz intended to quadruplicate its pulp mill already established in Guaíba. And finally, VCP intended to set up a pulp mill in the middle region of the state, possibly in Rio Grande or Arroio Grande.

In summary, the situation faced by RS does not seem very different from the remaining countries of the South Cone, where pulp companies proclaim the “golden promises of green deserts”¹⁵, that although they have already proven not to be so continue to conquer rulers and politicians in general,

¹⁴ According to the former Secretary of Environment of RS, Francisco Simões Pires, there are almost 500 thousand hectares planted, being around 140 thousand hectares under environmental license. Environmental entities composing the Environment State Council have requested in August 2008, data about licensing, as well as about the percentage of hectares dedicated to forestry, but they have not received any answer yet.

¹⁵ *As promessas douradas dos desertos verdes viraram demissões e incertezas*. Available at: <http://www.rsurgente.net/2008/12/as-promessas-douradas-dos-desertos.html>

seducing the media and failing to provide the proper information to the local population about the implications of the expansion of monocultures of alien trees to the environment as a whole.

As a result of the situation, mobilizations and resistances of sul-rio-grandense ecological entities, unions and social movements are extending and gaining ground in several municipalities of the State. A large part of such resistance has been led by sul-rio-grandense women who have broken the silence and reported the degrading, irresponsible and unscrupulous model of agribusiness related to forestry. Some of the accounts of such women will be presented in this case study of the sul-rio-grandense Pampa.

3. ACCOUNTS OF SUL-RIO-GRANDENSE WOMEN

The Pampa, both in Rio Grande do Sul and in neighbouring countries is associated to the “gaucho”. The gaucho, a male figure, riding a horse, is shown as the character who lives in the Pampa. Only few times women who also live there are shown.

And certainly, not all women who live in the Pampa necessarily identify with the stereotype of the gaucho. Of course, many families cultivate the habits of the gaucho traditional movement, specifically as regards the local clothing, food habits, parties and music.

The Pampa is also known by large ranches that raise cattle on an extensive manner. But families of small rural producers also live in the Pampa and women develop activities related to family agriculture, raising of domestic animals, production of milk and others.

Production of milk within family farms is very important and women play a significant role. Women milk the cows, place the milk in the pots and take the pots to the entry of their farms where a truck of the regional production cooperative picks them up, to be then processed and distributed in the region.

Milk constitutes the more fixed and regular source of income along the year, and therefore the activity of women is very important.

- Cultural identity

During the workshop, one of the first impacts narrated by women is related to the loss of cultural identity because of the fact that they cannot live as a family of farmers. Difficulties are huge, public policies are not addressed to small farmers, to family farming, to agroecology. On the contrary, there are very strong policies for the promotion of the “green deserts” that encourage and welcome the entry of large corporations in the field of forestry and pulp in the region.

These difficulties contribute to the displacement of rural population to the cities. This displacement, although not only due to plantation activities, causes the slow loss of local identity. The landscape is transformed, changing from prairies to large scale tree monocultures. With the exodus of families, many years of local knowledge related to the rural production where women have a significant role, disappear.

Local culture is being destroyed and erased from memory. One of the impacts described was the destruction of old houses with stone fences (built during the slavery period), located in lands purchased by one of the pulp and paper companies. Although the construction dates back to shameful moments of the sul-rio-grandense history, this evidences that companies are not concerned with protecting the historical heritage or any other work of architecture implying any local cultural identity. As described by a rural worker of Herval:

"Companies purchase and destroy. (...) In the interior of Pedras Altas there were beautiful houses, fences constructed by slaves, many of them. (...) Of such time, such battle, such colonel. (...) Walls and windows with designs. (...) There are no tiles there; it was a differentiated architecture because the wind is very strong." Rural Worker of Herval

- Changes in traditional practices of communities

The most visible change commented by all women was the issue of medicinal plants of the Pampa, whose gathering is carried out by women. The tradition of gathering of the medicinal herb Macela (*Achyrocline satureioides*) in RS is being damaged with the expansion of eucalyptus plantations in grasslands. Other medicinal plants will also be affected by the expansion of eucalyptus, such as Espinheira-santa (*Maytenus ilicifolia*). The macela is a plant used for digestive purposes, while the espinheira-santa is used in the treatment of gastritis and ulcer.

- Livelihoods at stake

The purchase of lands by forestry companies is not only braking the land reform in the Pampa but it is also increasing unemployment and migration from the rural areas to the cities.

Families who opt for staying in the rural areas state that their livelihoods are at stake due to the expansion of forestry activities. There are many factors causing this.

Women told that it has been necessary to use fertilizers more intensively in family farming. A rural worker of Santana do Livramento recalls that during the 11 years she has been living in the area, the use of fertilizers in the land had never been so necessary. In São José do Norte they also described the loss of productivity of land, especially for the production of onion:

"It wasn't so necessary to plough so much the land, use fertilizers, and today you have to or you won't get anything. We planted rice because there were small ponds, where dairy cows were left to drink water. (...) It is difficult even to plant sweet potato and manioc; formerly we got them from one year to the other, now there are no more." Worker of Herval

The use of the land to produce food, raise beef cattle and dairy cattle has decreased drastically in most of the regions. According to a rural worker of Herval, due to the drop in production in her region, the local demand is no longer met. It is necessary to bring products from other regions with the resulting increase in the living costs.

A woman from Rio Grande told:

"After Votorantin came here, we only suffered damages." Rural Worker of Rio Grande

They told that the family dairy production is becoming more and more unfeasible: due to the fact that production is not being collected close to the farm, it is necessary to transport milk to a more distant place. At the same time, as we are the sole dairy producers remaining in the region, we fear that gathering of milk may be suspended soon. Besides, the awful condition of the roads, caused by the company' trucks, makes it difficult and many times it even impedes the circulation of the truck that gathers the dairy production:

"We've already thrown away much milk." Rural Worker of Rio Grande

Another situation that is occurring in several regions is the shortage of water. One of the rural workers said that the artesian well of the family does not supply sufficient water. Many times, not even with the use of pumps it is possible to obtain water. In São José do Norte it was also told that water does not have the same quality as in past times and that now there is water only in few places.

It has also been highlighted that many families, when selling their lands for pulp companies went to live in the cities. They currently face difficult conditions of daily subsistence, because many of them had low degrees of schooling and this makes it difficult to obtain a good job. Besides, they must rent houses and they are not able to have gardens for family subsistence:

"Poverty increases in cities because these people who sell their lands go to the outskirts. And they go to the city to do what?" Rural Worker of Encruzilhada do Sul

Women who go to the city generally end up obtaining jobs as maids in urban family houses.

There are also cases such as the one of a landowner where the eucalyptus planted near her farm have caused a barrier against the wind, thus preventing the circulation of air. She believes that two animals died due to the flies in the farm, because there is much less wind.

A rural worker of Piratini highlighted that currently Monk parakeets¹⁶ (*Myiopsitta monachus*) are already affecting the local corn crops and she believes that more of these birds will invade when eucalyptus plantations dominate the landscape. Likewise in Encruzilhada do Sul, it was highlighted that the few rural producers who still plant corn suffer from the attack of parakeets. This has caused that many of them desist from planting corn.

Apart from that, a rural worker of Herval warned about the wild boars¹⁷ (*Sus scrofa*) that have reproduced in huge numbers in RS and use the monocultures of eucalyptus as hideout and shelter, making control even more difficult there.

- Job opportunities

Job opportunities created by plantations are mostly offered to men. In general, the few opportunities open to women reinforce the role that the capitalist society attributes to women, services considered as inferior and less visible, as cooks, maidservants. In Barra do Ribeiro the only sources of employment that plantations provide for women are at the eucalyptus tree nurseries.

Plantations provide unstable job opportunities not always offered to workers of the local community. Most workers come from other municipalities.

For women, *if the company is not engaging anybody there, it is not helping the local development as they use to publicize.*

¹⁶ "In the South of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, the monk parakeet is considered a pest in areas of cultivation of corn and sorghum and in orchards. Upon the disappearance of forests where monk parakeets used to live, they started to search for food in the cultivations which are currently their natural habitat. With easy access to food and progressive extinction of its predators such as the birds of prey, the population of the species increased easily. The plantation of eucalyptus was also important to the population explosion of monk parakeet. They found in eucalyptus a perfect place to build their nests in the highest branches where the eggs, young and adult monk parakeets are protected from the attack of their natural enemies and making it difficult to control their population." Available at <http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caturrita>.

¹⁷ Exotic species introduced in Uruguay and Argentina that crossed the border into RS. The species does not have natural predators, it interbreeds with domestic pigs, thus increasing its negative effect as "pest". Available at: <http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Javali>

The labour situation of women is much different. Tasks developed by women for the pulp companies are almost insignificant. The rural worker of Herval told that women may only work as cooks there. She cooks for the labourers who plant the eucalyptus. She cooks and someone else takes the food to the workers. In Hulha Negra there is also a woman working as a cook for the workers of eucalyptus plantations.

Labour conditions described by the worker of Barra do Ribeiro evidence the exploitation of female labour by Aracruz and its local outsourcing company. Most women who work in the eucalyptus seedling nurseries have tendonitis problems, causing injuries due to repetitive efforts (LER/DORT, by its Portuguese acronym). Apart from LER, this woman developed a serious skin disease in her face, due to the eucalyptus “steam” (she ignores whether she was exposed to any chemical product at work). Such allergy made her vulnerable to her job (to which she renounced) or to any job where it is necessary to be exposed to the sun or to strong luminosity for a long time. The company gave little help in the medical treatment.

Although these are only a few accounts, there are also cases in which women are assuming the control and headship of the family due to the transfer of men to work in the eucalyptus plantations. Thus, they are not able to help in the traditional household chores and women are overburdened. The women and the family are alone for a longer time and it is necessary that women assume the tasks in the farm.

- Violence due to plantations

For women, the expansion of eucalyptus monocultures has created very imminent situations of fear, violence and sexual harassment. The accounts evidence that they fear circulating alone near the plantations, due to the presence of men not belonging to the community. This causes that their right to free circulation is limited, thus favouring changes of habits and customs. Besides, many of them have suffered sexual harassment by said workers. That has obviously meant a setback in the independence and autonomy of rural women, thus contributing to a greater female disempowerment.

About violence, the landowner told that the house of a cousin of hers had been assaulted, just after she refused to sell her lands (because she did not accept the financial proposal) to one of the pulp companies. After the assault she felt coerced, with fear and she resolved to sell her lands. Also in Encruzilhada do Sul, a residence surrounded by eucalyptus was assaulted. The family was afraid of staying there and moved to the house of the wife’s parents. For one of the women interviewed, apart from the presence of unknown men, the roads have also made robberies easier (due to some improvements in the same).

About the violence against women, it was told that the arrival of eucalyptus workers has promoted forms of sexual harassment¹⁸, male chauvinist and sexist attitudes:

"Aracruz does not generally engage workers of the municipality, so the foreigners tease women, there are no cases of abuse yet, but there are cases of sexual harassment, they call women 'gostasas' (gorgeous), even in the interior, when women go walking, and this happens daily." Rural Worker of Encruzilhada do Sul

Women narrated that the presence of these unknown workers promotes fear and insecurity by women and their families. Formerly, in any case it was possible to contact an employee of the

¹⁸ Sexual harassment is a kind of coercion of a sexual nature, characterized by any threat, potential threat or even hostility based on sexism.

ranch/farm, but at present, due to the presence of the eucalyptus, it is hard to find someone who may help.

Another of the phenomena occurring is related to migration. The migration that has occurred is the one known as commuter migration¹⁹, where workers live in urban centres and move to the eucalyptus plantations in the rural area. The occurrence of large migrations has not been documented yet, but the trend is that an increase in the rural exodus is going to happen.

In Santana do Livramento, most workers come from the municipality of Cacequi and there are only a few from Santana do Livramento working in the plantations. In the da Palma community workers are hired from other regions (Pinheiro Machado and Capão do Leão). Every day, around three buses with workers arrive in the morning and leave at the end of the workday.

- Strategies of resistance to plantations

“Woman, freedom will come through our resistance, which resistance we search when we gather together and see that problems are the same and solutions will be sought in the collective, which collective will build a new society and will cause a new woman to appear...”

Unknown author

Message recited by one of the women

As to the specific role of women in the development and implementation of resistance strategies, it was said that the struggle of women is a daily struggle. It is necessary to continuously work on such issues, showing and encouraging other families to participate in discussions. It is a process that needs to be constructed together with the families.

Rio Grande do Sul is the state where during the past years peasant women of the Landless Peasant Movement/Via Campesina, in remembrance of the International Women’s Day have organized several demonstrations to show their rejection to agribusiness and defence of food sovereignty.

More precisely in 2006, on International Women’s Day, two thousand women of Via Campesina, before dawn, occupied the seedling nursery of Aracruz Celulose in Rio Grande do Sul. And in a sudden action, with lilac bandages on their faces, they destroyed thousands of seedlings of eucalyptus. The movement aimed at calling the attention of Brazilian public opinion to the impacts produced by monocultures of eucalyptus and pines on the people and local ecosystems. Such monoculture activities are conducted by multinational companies in the field of agribusiness. Peasant women translated in their statement, the green desert of eucalyptus into aridity and death and highlighted the relationship between diversity and fertility –factors which enable life- and monoculture and desertification –that represent death. “In the International Women’s Day, March 8th, 2006, Brazil witnessed –partly without understanding- a historical battle. The battle between fertility and aridity. [...] Between the hardness of unscrupulous profits and tenderness of mothers”.

This demonstration had a very strong impact in Brazil and in the rest of the world. There are other evidences of resistance that are probably not so evident, but have been very important to be able to achieve the action of women on March 8th, 2006. Women present in the workshop described different forms of resistance:

Women of the Landless Peasant Movement told that they always invite settled families to participate in debates about the expansion of eucalyptus monocultures. And every time they are

¹⁹ This process means simple population flows that are not properly migration, because they do not mean a final but temporary transfer.

invited to any meeting and/or debate, they present the discussion about eucalyptus and pulp production in the Pampa.

Also in Rio Grande, in the da Palma community, resistance has been carried out by a single family. Although this is “big leagues”, according to women, the family will stay there as long as possible. Life is not being simple. They have already thought about selling the farm many times, but it is dairy production that supports the family. One of the women told that she had been at the offices of the company and an officer showed her the papers related to the purchase of lands of the family. According to him, they had just to go to the Notary’s office to conclude the purchase.

"It is not me who must go away (...) they were the ones who encircled me (...)" Rural Worker of Rio Grande

Apart from the purchase offer, the company has already offered an exchange, although for a piece of land without water or electricity.

In São José do Norte many rural families are resisting the sale of their lands, though many of them are “isolated” due to the plantations of pines and eucalyptus. The local forum of rural development has already issued a report recommending the reduction of the areas of plantations, but it is not being complied with. Besides, a small group of local residents are opposing the monocultures of eucalyptus and pines, as well as the export port that Aracruz intends to set up. Such group has distributed pamphlets and banners, given lectures at schools and also performed street demonstrations.

In Encruzilhada do Sul they are developing projects of strategies and resistance through the Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas (MMC) (Peasant Women Movement), aiming at food sovereignty, as well as community gardens. They have also promoted debates in the community so as to clarify the problem of eucalyptus monocultures. However, there are difficulties due to the fact that the local government is in favour of eucalyptus.

Resistance actions have targeted land reform, food sovereignty, maintenance of families in rural areas, reporting of agribusiness and fallacy of development, apart from the struggle for equality and socio-environmental justice.

Not many actions addressed to obtaining the support of national and/or local authorities have been carried out, due to the fact that both the state government and a large part of the state Parliament and of the municipal authorities are allied to the pulp companies. Support has been sought in the Public Prosecution Service, both federal and state, so that they force the State to comply with environmental legislation.

The resistance movement is mixed, but it is women who have conducted the debates and actions, since, according to most participants, it is them who feel the lack of food. Women criticise men stating that they do not always “understand” what they are discussing and proposing.

There were accounts of some husbands who complain about the work being developed by women of the Landless Peasant Movement. However, many of them are already perceiving that such work and discussion, promoted by them, is serious and well-based.

In the community of Rio Grande, the movement is also mixed, but the ones who demonstrate in the streets are women. Men help when necessary, because, in general, they are working in fishing activities. There is much resistance of local residents.

Most of the women present at the workshop told that they developed and have been involved in many different resistance processes against plantations. Women have developed specific actions against eucalyptus monocultures, especially on March 8th, that is recognized as the day of struggle of women. In the movements related to rural areas, such activities are developed solely by them.

Men support such initiatives, but they do not always understand why it is women who take the lead in the struggle against eucalyptus monocultures. But there are also men who claim that the 8th of March struggle is a women-only struggle and they think it is necessary to open the struggle to women and men. Although women go to confrontation, men remain as group of support. It has happened that women who demonstrated on March 8th have been arrested and then, men blocked some roads and protested with banners against eucalyptus and against the senseless arrest of women, young people and children.

The participation of women in movements of resistance has altered their position or duties in the community. At present, women of social movements are no longer invisible. Women have transformed from invisible to visible, mainly by the direct action taken in Aracruz's tree nursery in the municipality of Barra do Ribeiro in 2006. In March 8 2007, 1,300 women from Via Campesina, occupied four land holdings belonging to forestry corporations, to denounce that the green desert is stopping the agrarian reform and making peasant agriculture unfeasible. In the year 2008, and again within the framework of International Women's Day and as a way of strengthening 8th March as a day of struggle for peasant women against agribusiness and in favour of the Brazilian people's food sovereignty, 900 women, members of Via Campesina in Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil) occupied 2100 hectares of monoculture eucalyptus plantations belonging to the Swedish-Finnish transnational company, Stora Enso –the Taruma ranch, located in the municipality of Rosario do Sul (State of Rio Grande do Sul), in the frontier zone with Uruguay. Women cut the eucalyptus and replaced them with native trees. The police then violently attacked the demonstration and insulted and attacked the women.

Women broke the silence and took the decision to face the agribusiness of forestry and resorted to confrontation and direct action. Women are seeking their space and are using this for resistance, insistence and reporting over the model of agribusiness that is being established in RS.

And finally, all of them identify that social movements in rural areas have a more open space for women, that has been helped to create other gender relationships.

As to the results identified in terms of lessons learned, it was said that in social movements related to rural areas, the discussions of feminists regarding gender have extended; however, there are still many difficulties to be overcome.

Women of social movements related to rural areas think that actions cannot remain only in awareness and alliances with different local groups (NGOs, Unions, etc.). There is still certain difficulty in involving groups of teachers, public servants, union members and even students. Besides, it is necessary to carry out actions of direct confrontation, such as on March 8th. For participants, the date has already a positive response, since it is evidencing their struggle.

It was also commented that there is much repression against women, for them being related to the rural movement, specially the Landless Peasant Movement. The extension of alliances is essential so that other groups of the sul-rio-grandense society help in the processes of awareness of local communities. *"The struggle does not build itself."*, stated one of the rural workers. Such extension of alliances is necessary, because social movements, unions and NGOs in general are being violently criminalized, persecuted and repressed by local authorities, which situation has created an

environment of hostility, fear and even retraction of movements contrary to alien tree monocultures in RS.

For the participants, it is necessary to go to the streets and expose the situation, because the government and local media do not open spaces to clarify all implications of the expansion of eucalyptus monocultures. The media omit the evils of eucalyptus monocultures. They believe that if people become aware of the problems that the eucalyptus plantations will bring for RS, they will also go to the streets with the Social Movements and NGOs. An example of that was the direct action of women in the nursery of Aracruz. Such action caused the sul-rio-grandense population, mainly urban, to take sides with reference to the event. Even with the partial coverage of facts by the local media, sul-rio-grandense men and women took sides. There were many who considered that the attitude of women was of extreme courage.

Besides, the participants weighed a series of situations that hinder the struggle against the eucalyptus monocultures in RS, such as Herval, where VCP is developing work addressed to local youth, in Rio Grande where VCP has promoted many local activities, with the aim of reinforcing a good image of institutional social responsibility for the community and in Encruzilhada do Sul where Aracruz develops a series of local activities with the aim of promoting good neighbourhood:

*"These companies seem a large octopus with tentacles in all fields of society" **Fisherwoman of São José do Norte***

Finally, the meeting evidenced the leading role of women in the struggle against the expansion of tree monocultures, and their potential to make "the new to happen". It is mandatory to unify the action of urban women with the action of rural women, strengthening the struggle against the expansion of mega projects of pulp and paper companies in the sul-rio-grandense Pampa.

Final reflections

In the three case studies presented, monoculture tree plantations have been established as a consequence of policies that did not result from decisions adopted by the local communities themselves. Instead, they have resulted from policies developed externally and imposed on the communities.

It is clear that the women of Iguobazuwa in Nigeria in no way wanted or needed Michelin to move into their territory. While they have seen few benefits, they have suffered numerous negative impacts, of which the most dramatic, without a doubt, is the loss of their lands.

The same can be observed in the case of southern Brazil, where women are fighting for land reform and food sovereignty. The large-scale tree plantation model is in diametric opposition to their demands, since the huge scale on which these plantations are established makes agrarian reform impossible and compromises the use of the land in the long term.

In the case of Papua New Guinea, the establishment of oil palm plantations was and continues to be the result of old and well-known policies promoted by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and other international financial institutions to “help” the country to “alleviate poverty”.

The Brazilian and Nigerian cases both involve large transnational corporations arriving in the countries of the South and promising such benefits as generating employment, helping the environment, alleviating the pressure on forests, making use of land with degraded soil, and so on and so forth.

But the testimonials gathered from women in both Brazil and Nigeria demonstrate that in reality, local communities in general and women in particular have seen no benefits from these projects whatsoever.

The case of Papua New Guinea deserves special attention. On the one hand, viewed in isolation, it is a difficult model to challenge, because it is carried out by small landowners. Could we possibly be opposed to smallholders planting oil palm trees on small blocks of two, three or four hectares of land? Opposing such an undertaking would seem absurd. But viewed in its entirety, the model used here turns out to be a large-scale plantation model in disguise, in which the smallholders are merely pawns used by big corporations to earn big profits. Local communities saw the arrival of oil palm growing as a means of access to a monetary income. It seems logical that the women and men who own the land have a need for certain goods that can only be purchased with money, such as clothing and shoes. They were inundated with publicity campaigns, organized by the government and transnational corporations, singing the praises of oil palm growing. But the campaigns failed to mention the negative impacts, and now that their land is being used for plantations, they find themselves trapped in a difficult struggle to regain it for their own use.

At the same time, the three studies show that the plantations being promoted (rubber trees, wood for pulp and oil palms) were in no way designed to meet the needs of the communities. On the contrary, they were designed on the basis of an agro-export model geared to the countries of the North – and the European Union specifically in the cases studied – in order to promote excessive consumption, made possible thanks to a series of policies that benefit big corporations.

The policies promoted by European countries – where gender equality is at least more of a possibility than in many countries of the South – should seriously consider what the potential impacts will be on women and men. For women in Brazil, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea alike, the establishment of monoculture tree plantations has not only provoked greater impacts on them than

on men, but has also brought about social changes that even further disempower women in relation to men when it comes to making decisions at the community level and even within the home. Las políticas que se promueven desde los países Europeos -donde la igualdad de género

In the face of this reality, we are beginning to see a growing number of women starting to organize as women and undertaking different kinds of action to change the situation in which they and their communities now find themselves.

Their efforts include demands for the return of their land, compensation for the damages caused, restoration of the forests that have been destroyed, the suspension of further plantation activity, and the elimination of existing plantations. The specific actions they undertake are conditioned by their own particular social and political realities, but they all involve a degree of risk, since the corporations have the backing of the state, including the state's repressive apparatus.

Ironically, the disempowerment brought about by the corporations' activities is becoming a catalyst for a new empowerment of women.