

### Keywords

- > Industrial tree plantations
- > Land use change
- > Deforestation
- > Labour conditions
- > Consumption



### Industrial tree plantations

Large-scale, intensively-managed, even-aged monocultures, mostly exotic trees, destined for industrial processes

Photo: Winfridus Overbeek



### Social and cultural impacts

Aracruz tractor destroying an indigenous village, Olho d'Água, Brazil, 2006

Photo: Vanessa Vilarinho

### From 15 million hectares around 1990 to 60+ million hectares in 2010

The **explosion of industrial tree plantations** (ITPs) in the South is vast and goes much faster than in the North. Cheap land and labour plus higher wood productivity make the South attractive, but it is the US and the EU together that consume most of the final products. The expansion is also driven by their banks, businesses and investment funds.

But all this comes at a heavy price. The **social and environmental justice conflicts that result from the negative impacts of these monoculture plantations** are mainly about land access and tenure. Human rights violations are common and we now have an International Day of Struggle against Monocultures: September 21st.

### Rationale

Today, ITP expansion is being further promoted by the FAO, defining them as 'forests', and the Forest Stewardship Council or the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil, certifying them as 'sustainable'. Another trend is promoting ITPs as carbon sinks (CDM or REDD+ projects), for biofuels and for electricity from burning wood in specially designed and subsidized wood-based power facilities in Europe, closely linked to using new risky technologies such as genetic modification.

These new trends only aggravate the negative impacts, while the **proven deforestation and land use change that results from plantation expansion undermines the supposed carbon neutrality**. Although consumption reduction and paper recycling initiatives are taking place and are important, they could not prevent a **50% increase in paper consumption** globally in the past two decades, basically Northern driven.



Drying up lake close to eucalyptus plantation, a Plantar project in Felixlândia, Minas Gerais

Photo: Winfridus Overbeek

Structural change in the global industrial production and consumption system, of which paper, vegetable oils and rubber are fundamental parts, is needed in order to build a truly sustainable future. Meanwhile, local communities in the South face the challenge to continue building a stronger and broader movement to halt the continuous **land grabbing** for industrial tree plantations.

### Background

Our recommendations come from strong evidence. **An overview of industrial tree plantations in the global South** is the first general report on the tree plantation issue since the World Rainforest Movement (WRM) commissioned a book on the topic from Ricardo Carrere and Larry Lohmann, called 'Pulping the South'. Published in 1996, it focussed on pine, eucalyptus and acacia for pulp and paper production. In 1998, seeing that ITPs were becoming a global problem, WRM launched a permanent international campaign to support local people's struggles against ITPs.

These new EJOLT report updates the information from 'Pulping the South', while covering a broader range of tree plantations including oil palm, rubber. It aims to be a tool for local communities, social and environmental movements and NGOs in the global South, which

## Key policy recommendations

- The EU and its member states should demand from **FAO to review its present forest definition** that considers industrial tree plantations as “forests”. A review process should **guarantee full participation of forest peoples**, recognizing their fundamental role in forest conservation.
- The EU should urgently **review all its policies that promote ITPs directly or indirectly**. It should take responsibility for its role and take urgent action to prevent further expansion and by doing so avoid more violations of the economic, social, cultural and environmental rights of local populations now negatively affected by ITPs.
- The EU should actively promote, not only measures to reduce consumption and promote recycling of ITP-based products, but - taking into account the climate crisis and based on a social and environmental justice perspective - also **measures to reduce the need for imports of ITP based products** in the EU. **Alternative fiber sources**, as well as **truly renewable energy solutions** inside the EU, not based on ITP-based biofuel and biomass imports, exist but should be more actively promoted than today.



This policy brief was developed as a part of the project Environmental Justice Organisations, Liabilities and Trade (EJOLT, 2011-2015) (FP7-Science in Society-2010-1).

The project supports the work of Environmental Justice Organisations, uniting scientists, well known activist organisations, think-tanks and policy-makers from the fields of environmental law, environmental health, political ecology, ecological economics, to talk about issues related to Ecological Distribution.

EJOLT aims to improve policy responses to and support collaborative research and action on environmental conflicts through capacity building of environmental justice groups around the world. Visit our free resource library and database at [www.ejolt.org](http://www.ejolt.org) and follow [twitter.com/envjustice](https://twitter.com/envjustice) or [www.facebook.com/ejolt](https://www.facebook.com/ejolt) to stay current on latest news and events.

already deal or have to deal now with ITPs in their territories and the problems they cause, but also for organizations and people in the North, concerned with the issue. The report calls for stronger alliances among all movements to strengthen the communities that suffer from and resist to ITPs, and to put an end to the irrational policies that promote their further expansion.

The communities continue not being consulted. They suffer from losing their lands and territories, which – contrary to some corporate messages – are not ‘marginal’, ‘degraded’ or ‘unused’. The **conflict over land access and ownership** is therefore the most important one. When communities resist, they can often count on violent repression.

Furthermore, plantation expansion has been a driver of deforestation in many countries. Only in the case of Indonesia, **50% of the about four million hectares** of oil palm expansion in the past two decades led to **forest destruction**.

With expansion of ITPs, **food sovereignty** is severely at risk. In many countries where majority of the people live in the rural areas, people need to cultivate the land to feed their families

and supply the regional population. As several traditional leaders affirm in Mozambique: ‘*Nobody can eat eucalyptus*’.

The **labour conditions** prevailing across vast areas of plantations violate the most basic rights of workers, especially women, and expose them to dangerous working conditions. While for women, a job could mean a way to earn a salary and gain autonomy, in practice ITP jobs reinforce existing **gender inequalities**. Women workers have to make a tremendous effort to shoulder their double burden of working on the plantations and performing their domestic chores.

### For more information

An overview of industrial tree plantation conflicts in the global South. Conflicts, trends, and resistance struggles. EJOLT Report No. 3, available at:

[www.ejolt.org/reports](http://www.ejolt.org/reports)

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