

Global Civil Society Opposes Charred Earth Policy

147 organisations from 44 countries warn against 'biochar' (large-scale charcoal) as a dangerous new false solution to climate change

An international declaration was today launched by 147 organisations opposing the growing hype and political support for Biochar. The groups signing the declaration "strongly oppose the inclusion of soils in carbon trade and offset mechanisms, including in the Clean Development Mechanism." The groups further assert that , " the 'biochar' initiative fails to address the root causes of climate change." [1]

Those issuing this warning range from small farmers associations and forest protection groups to international environmental networks and human rights advocates. Further organizations are being invited to sign the declaration.

This International Declaration Against Biochar has been launched as UN and government delegates are meeting in Bonn this week to discuss a post-2012 climate change agreement. One of the proposals [2] which they will be discussing is to allow carbon credits for using charcoal as a soil additive in the hope that this will create a permanent 'carbon sink' and help to reduce global warming, and reclaim degraded soil. They will also discuss whether to generally include agricultural soils into carbon trading.

Civil society groups have called for caution on Biochar in view of serious scientific uncertainty. Many share concerns that this technology would lead to vast areas of land being converted to new plantations, thus repeating the unfolding disasters which agrofuels cause. They point out that large scale financial incentives for biochar or other soil sequestration could result in large scale land conversion and displacement of people.

Helena Paul from EcoNexus states: "Including biochar and agricultural soil in carbon markets would turn soils into a commodity that could be sold to offset pollution elsewhere. It would endanger smallholder farmers and indigenous peoples who cannot compete with governments and large companies and who are at risk of being displaced if the ground is literally sold out from under their feet."

Stella Semino from Grupo de Reflexion Rural, Argentina adds: "The idea that charcoal will rescue a burning planet is absurd. Some biochar proponents call for quantities of charcoal which would require over 500 million hectares of industrial tree and crop plantations. We know already that industrial agriculture and tree plantations are a major contributor to climate change and displace people and biodiversity. We need to protect ecosystems, not grow vast new monocultures and burn them! This is a farce."

Almuth Ernsting from Biofuelwatch states: "Large-scale support for biochar is premature and dangerous. Claims that biochar is retained permanently in soils and increases fertility are based on Terra Preta soils in Amazonia, which were made by indigenous peoples hundreds or even thousands of years ago. Those farmers used biodiverse organic residues and compost, as well as charcoal. Modern biochar is not the same. Some companies are making biochar out of municipal waste and tyres, others promote using biochar to scrub flue gases from coal burners and then using this combination as a fertilizer. Some plan to use giant microwave ovens to char trees –

justifying this by pointing to ancient Amazonian soils is absurd.” [3]

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NOTES:

[1] The declaration and organizations can be found at <http://www.regenwald.org/international/englisch/news.php?id=1226> . Further Organizations wishing to add their name to the declaration should contact: rsmolker@riseup.net

[2] The governments of Belize, Gambia, Ghana, Lesotho, Micronesia, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, have called for the inclusion of biochar into the Clean Development Mechanism, i.e. into carbon trading. This is also supported by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

[3] For further information and references regarding biochar, see “Biochar for Climate Change Mitigation: Fact or Fiction?” <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/docs/biocharbriefing.pdf>