

New Copenhagen Draft Proposals Subsidize Forest Destruction and Land Grabs

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For immediate release

Copenhagen, 17th December- The new draft proposals released yesterday at the Copenhagen Climate Conference will lead to large-scale destruction of ecosystems and unprecedented land grabs as spurious ‘offsets’ will allow Northern countries to burn ever more fossil fuels say civil society groups who have been tracking negotiations.

Proposals (1) are expected to lead to huge carbon credits under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) for tree and crop monocultures, including for biochar production (2), ‘no-till’ GM soya (3), and tree and shrub monocultures falsely classed as ‘carbon sinks’. Details are to be worked out by a technical UNFCCC meeting next year (4).

Stella Semino from Grupo de Reflexion Rural (Argentina) states: “If these new proposals are agreed upon we will see a massive boost for crop and tree plantations alike which, in the name of ‘climate change mitigation’, will speed up the destruction of forests and other vital ecosystems, the spread of industrial agriculture, and land-grabbing against small-farmers, indigenous peoples and forest communities. Industrial monocultures are already a major cause of climate change and their expansion will make it worse.”

Under the terms of the Kyoto Protocol, no CDM offsets are allowed for existing forests nor soil carbon although a very limited number of CDM credits can go towards industrial tree plantations. Current proposals for large-scale offsetting for ‘carbon sinks’ closely resemble those contained in the US climate bill. Back in 2001, when the US proposed such offsets, the EU had refused them, warning that this would render a climate change agreement completely ineffective.

“The right kind of agriculture, such as organic and biodiversity-based farming, has the potential to store carbon in soils and increase resilience to climate change” said Anne Maina of the African Biodiversity Network, “But realistically, small-scale organic farmers in Africa are not going to be the ones participating and benefiting from the CDM or these complex UNFCCC market mechanisms. They will be locked out of the process, and their livelihoods will be threatened. If heads of state accept this language, it will lead to a destruction of the very same solutions we need to support.”

Camila Moreno from Global Forest Coalition adds: “In Brazil we’re seeing an obscene agribusiness lobby presenting themselves as the solution while they destroy

Brazil's unique rainforest and savannah habitats and contribute massively to climate change. Yet they continue to ply their trade in the highest political circles with impunity. These new CDM rules will further mandate this ransacking of the global South."

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Notes:

(1) The proposals can be found at <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2009/awg10/eng/l15.pdf>, in the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry Section.

(2) Biochar is fine-grained charcoal applied to soils. It is being promoted widely as a means of sequestering carbon even though there are major scientific uncertainties over the amount of carbon in charcoal which will remain in soils for different periods, over possible losses of existing soil carbon as a result of charcoal additions and over the potential of charcoal dust to worsen global warming in the same way as a black soot from fossil fuel and biomass burning does.

(3) Monsanto has promoted the inclusion of no-till agriculture into the CDM since the late 1990s and they have just been awarded the Angry Mermaid Award for their lobbying (www.angrymermaid.org/). Industrial no-till agriculture involves large-scale agro-chemical spraying to destroy weeds rather than ploughing the soil and herbicide-resistant GM crops are most commonly used with no-till, particularly in North and South America. The impacts on soil carbon are scientifically debated and uncertain, there is evidence that this method can lead to more emissions of the very powerful greenhouse gas nitrous oxide, and the introduction of no-till GM soya in Argentina has been shown to have accelerated the destruction of the Chaco forest.

(4) It is proposed that the 2010 SBSTA meeting of UNFCCC will recommend new CDM methodologies for example for tree plantations, 'forest management', a term widely used for industrial logging, and soil carbon management.