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Mainstreaming Financialization of Nature

Isaac Rojas – Friends of the Earth International

Financialization of Nature (FoN) represents yet another step in the mounting push to reimagine nature as something to be bought and sold. Nature and its values are considered to be financial assets and derivatives. Nature becomes credits, bonds, and derivatives to be traded in financial markets.

Impacts

This isn't just a theoretical discussion. The implementation of FoN through policies, decisions and recommendations by international institutions and through instruments and pilot projects entails a series of negative impacts already evident at different levels.

Biodiversity is the diversity of living organisms from any source located in whichever ecosystem, including the diversity within species and between species. But further, it also includes intangible elements such as traditional knowledge, innovation and practice. We must therefore recognize the role that local communities and Indigenous Peoples have long held in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. That recognition is a key component in the Convention on Biological Diversity.

FoN, on the other hand limits the concept of biodiversity and excludes communities, creating an artificial division between biological and cultural diversity. Consequently, communities are not taken into account when deciding whether an instrument, project or policy should be implemented or not. The territories, spiritual or cultural sites, sustainable management practices and decision-making rights of communities ignored.

We lose vital skills and knowledge about locally adapted forest management, food sovereignty, solidarity economies and biodiversity stewardship. all managed by the communities in a horizontal way, respecting rights and creating a political culture that is different from the prevailing political culture.

Those real and proven solutions also become invisible under regimes of FoN.

FoN is a new avenue for the privatization of the ways of living and the livelihoods of local communities and Indigenous Peoples who live, exist and depend on forests and biodiversity. This privatization is many times linked to the displacement of communities into new alien territories, often carried out with violent violations of the collective and individual rights of these communities.

FoN is also an attempt to replace national and international laws with payments, so that those with financial resources can choose to pay for the damage they cause, instead of abiding by the law.

FoN and CBD

At the CBD, FoN is present in many areas of negotiation with recommendations, policies, instruments in discussions about mainstreaming of biodiversity, climate change, finances, protected areas, forests, and many others. Years ago in Ecuador, the CBD with other organizations create a space to discuss approaches and concerns about FoN. From this important meeting, the need for more discussions and understanding was clear.

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Submissions are welcome from all civil society groups.

E mail: gadirlavadenz@gmail.com

Today, FoN is mainstreamed into all the discussions even though the majority of those instruments, are only theoretical proposals without any application. On the agenda for this second day of the SBSTTA 20 we find FoN in at least two of the discussions.

We don't need financial experiments that damage Nature and may violate community rights. We need real solutions including community forest management and agroecology and the policies and legislation to support them.

Outcomes of the Community Conservation Resilience Assessment in the Russian Far East in relation to the Agenda Item 9 of SBSTTA 20 (Bushmeat and Wildlife Management)

Andrey Laletin – Friends of the Siberian Forests, Krasnoyarsk, Russia
Anatoly Lebedev –BROC, Vladivostok, Russia.

The Indigenous Udege people inhabit the Ussuri taiga which contains the highest biodiversity in the boreal Asia. Their traditional areas face rapid expansion of logging, hunting, salmon fishing and mining. So Udege are suffering from competition over the resources that sustain their livelihoods. Bushmeat, fish and non-timber forest products (NTFP) like berries, nuts and mushrooms play a key role in their diets, and this livelihood is environmentally sustainable by science and by the Russian law. Women have equal rights to men and play a significant role in dealing with officials, regulations and documents on fish and wildlife management, and often fulfill leadership positions in communes and associations.

Russian law formally recognizes the existence of indigenous territories and grants special hunting and fishing rights and privileges for traditional population. The key privilege consists of the opportunity to get free lease or permits to get certain volume of salmon fishing and the most essential wildlife species to hunt. But, there is a serious discrepancy between formal rights, law enforcement and management practices, leading to deep conflicts around indigenous priority. Regulations regarding indigenous privileges are overly complicated, unclear, different for individuals dependently on their ethnic status, and often changed without due information for communities.

For example, fishermen of one of Udege communes received rights to fish 700 km from the place of their village in the place that previously was given to Japanese fleet. Nonsurprisingly, there was almost no fish in that place for Udege fisherman.

On 27 July 2015, as part of a world-wide assessment of the resilience of community conservation, a full-day capacity building workshop for leaders of Udege communes took place.

It was organized by GFC and BROC and involved 24 indigenous, scientific and environmental experts from different Udege communities of the region. Since indigenous people traditionally occupy the most resource rich territories of Russian Far East and Siberia, contradiction between their substantial needs, national resource monopolies and authorized poachers become crucial. Despite series of legal and official statements indigenous rights and tenure use to be ignored, violated and reduced constantly, which became the key issue on the CCRI workshop. Resolution, produced by that workshop, was based upon target to develop and maintain public participation and expertise in land lease and use practice, promotion of Udege culture on any levels and activation legal awareness among indigenous communities.

The main external threats identified include absence of recognized land rights, overexploitation of wildlife and fish resources by outside poachers and especially by commercial fishing fleets that overexploit salmon stocks at sea leading to a serious decline in salmon resources. Government authorities often react by limiting hunting and fishing opportunities for Udege, which already lack traditional resources by overuse. Resulting social and political marginalization, lack of understanding of the regulations trigger frequent conflicts between communes and government inspectors, turning Udege people unwillingly into poachers and a prey for the authorized inspectors.

Legal and illegal logging are another serious threat. The “Udege Legend” National Park was created on Iman river in 2007 to support Udege culture and livelihoods, but timber businesses, dependent local officials and nonindigenous hunters blocked that efforts, substituting initial local enthusiast by former inspector from outside at director’s position.

All initial plans for national park to promote and develop traditional hunting-fishing culture of Udege under park administration had thus failed, and key hunting zone was lost both by park and Udege commune, while remains open for alien poachers and illegal loggers.

The main internal threats identified include the lack of capacity to fully understand relevant hunting and fishing regulations, which leads to frequent conflicts, both with law enforcement authorities and internally, as indigenous and non-indigenous individuals in one commune are subject to different privileges. Another serious threat is the loss of traditional knowledge, language and customary use practices, especially amongst the young Udege. Due to lack of employment and livelihood opportunities one can find few people between 20 and 30 years in the communes.

These experiences show that extensive habitat loss and fragmentation are key contributors to the decline of wildlife species. The recommendations on SBSTTA 20 paper on Agenda Item 9 should explicitly state the importance of mainstreaming biodiversity in primary sectors and removing perverse incentives as key strategies in addressing the wildlife crisis. Moreover, in addition to reporting on rights-based management, Parties should also actively develop and implement rights-based recognition of community wildlife conservation. It is recommended that the following two provisions are added:

“1.bis Urges Parties to fully implement commitments to mainstream biodiversity within and across sectors and to eliminate, phase out, and reform harmful and perverse incentives (Aichi Target 3) as important means to address upstream drivers of habitat loss and fragmentation.”

“1.ter Encourages Parties to strengthen legal and policy recognition of indigenous peoples’ customary rights and community conserved territories and areas that contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of wildlife.”

“Contained” industrial use of GE microbes: A regulatory loophole large enough for most commercial synthetic biology uses to fit through

Imuth Ernsting – Biofuel Watch

The vast majority of current synthetic biology applications involve microorganisms, including bacteria, fungi (e.g. yeast) and microalgae.

Nearly all uses of genetically engineered (GE) microorganisms are classed as ‘contained’, a term which, under different countries’ and regions’ regulations covers all uses inside industrial facilities, such as biofuel refineries, as well as manufacturing plants. GE microorganisms are being used, for example, to produce algal oils included in cosmetics, to ferment sugars to ethanol, or to make products like farnesene, which can be used in pharmaceuticals, tyres or biofuels.

Almost invariably, the GE microbes used in industrial production have been classified as being of ‘negligible’ or ‘low risk’ largely based on the developer’s own risk assessment and on the fact that the natural organism which has been genetically engineered, as well as any organisms from which genes have been transferred, are not pathogenic. This means that the measures required to try and contain them are very basic. In the US, GE microorganisms used commercially are generally excluded from the requirement of a detailed risk assessment, although food or animal feed products made with such microbes may require a limited public health assessment.

Even with conventional genetic engineering, it is highly problematic to base risk assessments solely on risks associated with natural organisms which have been genetically engineered or from which genes have been transferred. Gene transfers very commonly result in unintended mutations and in gene expressions which can translate into unintended traits. In the case of synthetic biology, such an approach is most obviously negligent. For example, biofuel company Mascoma has genetically engineered baker’s yeast so that it can split starch molecules into sugars and then ferment them with a higher yield than ordinary yeast provides. This yeast has been widely used in corn ethanol refineries, run by companies with no background biotechnology and biosafety measures. Another company, Algenol, has been growing cyanobacteria (“blue-green algae”) which have been genetically engineered to directly

ferment carbon dioxide into ethanol - in plastic tubes. Nothing other than thin sheets of plastic separate these microbes from the open environment, and the tubes need to be regularly flushed.

The environmental risks posed by such GE organisms cannot possibly be judged by looking at the properties of ordinary bakers' yeast (which cannot split starch) or of ordinary cyanobacteria, which play a major role in the earth's carbon cycle and in marine nutrient cycles.

In both of these cases, physical containment measures are minimal, biological containment has not even been attempted, and the risk of accidental release of such microbes is obviously high.

COP11 (XI/11) urged parties and other governments to apply the precautionary approach organisms and products derived from synthetic biology. Previously, COP 10 (X/37) decided to apply the precautionary approach to the use of GMOs in biofuel production. 'Contained use' regulations effectively exempt the vast majority of organisms that have been genetically engineered through synthetic biology methods and that are, or are likely to be used commercially, from meaningful regulation. This is entirely incompatible with the precautionary approach and with previous CBD decisions.

AGENDA ITEM 8 – CLIMATE CHANGE

Joint statement from Biofuelwatch, Heinrich Boell Foundation, ETC Group, Ecoropa, Global Forest Coalition and other CSO's participants of the CBD Alliance.

Our comment pertains to SBSTTA recommendation 6, which invites the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and requests the Executive Secretary to provide input to the special report of the IPCC on 1.5 degree warming.

We are concerned with the way that the IPCC has dealt with the dangerous and unproven concept of "negative emissions". IPCC working group 3 in their fifth assessment report, incorporated as "necessary" the large scale implementation of BECCS, which refers to bioenergy with carbon capture and storage, into their models. They did so without any technology assessment, nor assessment of environmental, economic and social impacts. Rather they adopted a blanket assumption that BECCS is

feasible and will be effective as a means to remove CO2 from the atmosphere.

Large scale BECCS would have very serious negative impacts on biodiversity. The CBD considers BECCS to be a climate geoengineering technology, hence falling under the remit of paragraph 8w of decision X/33. We believe that is the correct placement for discussion of BECCS.

The CBD has also assessed impacts of bioenergy/biofuels based on comprehensive review of peer reviewed literature (technical series 65) and overall advises precautionary approach and consideration of biodiversity impacts in decisions (IX/2).

We would like to point out that there is one paragraph (III/46) in the the SBSTTA 20 climate and biodiversity paper that is concerning in this context. It reads: (III/46) "Some advanced biofuels, when coupled with carbon capture and storage, may potentially have a greater mitigation potential than ecosystem recovery. However, there are large uncertainties over the land area for dedicated bioenergy crops without competing with other land uses."

We strongly urge the CBD to avoid such language. Instead CBD should take a strong position against large scale bioenergy technologies, including BECCS. The CBD should base decisions on ecosystem-based approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and focus on the important role of healthy and intact ecosystems to prevent dangerous global warming.

The logo for the CBD Alliance features the letters 'CBD' in a large, bold, green sans-serif font. Below 'CBD', the word 'ALLIANCE' is written in a smaller, bold, red sans-serif font.

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