



**WRM Bulletin 244**  
World Rainforest Movement  
June / July 2019

## **Cementing Deforestation: Infrastructure at the Service of Corporations and Capital**



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# Cementing Deforestation: Infrastructure at the Service of Corporations and Capital

## Our Viewpoint

### Infrastructure and Extraction: A Host of Deforestation



*National Park Yasuni, Ecuador. Ph: Karla Gachet*

With the growing dominance of colonial, and later post-colonial empires over lands and peoples in the Global South to extract “resources,” **one of the biggest obstacles and challenges has been transport.** That is: how to cheaply transport the minerals, rubber, bananas, cotton, wood or oil from the place of extraction to industrial centers where these “resources” are processed,—mostly in the Global North—to then be transported again as final products to consumers.

At present, this is resolved with **increasingly larger and more intrusive infrastructure projects.** Even projects that are sometimes considered to be infrastructure in themselves, such as hydroelectric dams, in turn need an infrastructure network to access the construction site and to transport the goods (energy)—mostly to other extractive industries or to large urban centers.

**The major expansion of infrastructure networks is therefore fomented by the prevailing economy of over-production and -consumption that is ever-expanding, intensifying historical inequalities and discrimination.** In other words, more forests and community territories are being destroyed to facilitate the rapid transport of goods. More and more communities are stripped of their forests and livelihoods,—almost always in a violent way—and people are increasingly oppressed through exploitative work.

**It is therefore impossible to think about extraction without thinking about a vast network of accompanying infrastructure, and thus even greater deforestation and destruction**—which is almost always mentioned in official environmental impact studies. For example, one study confirms that since 2005, the deforestation caused by mining activity in the Brazilian Amazon has been a total of 12 times greater than that which has happened within the mining concessions. This is due—among other things—to the construction of infrastructure (roads, rails, ports, etc.), urban expansion to facilitate the growing workforce, and the development of associated supply chains—such as charcoal to manufacture iron and steel (1).



The opening of access and other roads also aids in the expansion of the agro-industrial frontier and other threats to forests—such as illegal logging or small-scale mining. That is, **infrastructure not only directly causes deforestation, but also facilitates the entry of other industries into forests.** ‘Road blockades,’ for example—a strategy that peoples who are resisting the entry of an industry onto their lands frequently use—demonstrates the **interconnection and direct dependence between extraction and infrastructure.** Yet these peoples often face criminalization and violence on the one hand, and on the other, strong state and corporate propaganda that label them as being “anti-development.” However, this ill-termed “development” almost always means extractive and infrastructure mega projects that destroy territories and forests to benefit global elites and corporations.

Likewise, Marxist geographer David Harvey explains how several governments—such as France, Great Britain and the United States—chose to **invest precisely in infrastructure when they faced the deep economic crises of modern capitalism** (2). Through various urbanization programs and the promotion of construction work, they managed to assimilate the unemployment caused by these crises, and divert the problem of over-accumulation (that is, when there are no incentives for capital to be reinvested).

In the recent financial crisis of 2007-08, the Chinese government—whose economy was deeply affected—created the largest national infrastructure program. Harvey says that new cities, highways and high-speed train rails were built—directly connecting markets in the south and north of the country, as well as coastal and inland areas. The countries that provided China with the raw materials needed to execute this plan—many of which were Latin American countries—managed to keep their economies afloat after this crisis. But this strategy of rapid urbanization had a high cost. Chinese debt skyrocketed, and since 2014, economic problems in most Latin American countries have deepened. To solve this over-accumulation of capital and workforce, since 2014 China has been aggressively investing in infrastructure projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America, offering steel and cement at very low prices. By the way, many projects in the Global South financed with Chinese capital are also already the focus of conflicts, environmental devastation and resistance on the part of affected communities (3).

**It is clear that this continuous expansion of extraction and infrastructure—the engine of the capitalist economy—must stop.** The idea of connecting regional and international geographies through large-scale infrastructure projects translates into greater exploitation and destruction of territories, forests and peoples.

In this context, it is vital to **support the diverse resistance movements** that peoples are carrying out to defend their territories and forests. In this sense, perhaps one of the challenges is to achieve **greater interconnectivity** among movements, communities and groups that are resisting at both the points of extraction and production and the points of consumption.

We hope that this bulletin will help highlight the structural problems of the mega-infrastructure of capitalism, and at the same time, contribute to reflecting on what infrastructure is needed—and created—by and for forest peoples.

(1) Read the study, “Mining drives extensive deforestation in Brazilian Amazon”, Nature Communications, 2017, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-017-00557-w>



(2) Harvey D, Realization Crisis and the Transformation of Daily Life, 2019, *Space and Culture*, 22(2), 126–141.

(3) See, for example, China afianza su influencia en África a golpe de infraestructuras, El País, 2018, [https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/07/22/actualidad/1532263788\\_828931.html](https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/07/22/actualidad/1532263788_828931.html) ; “Greening” the Belt and Road initiative?: What about people’s rights?, GRAIN, 2019, <https://www.grain.org/en/article/6239-greening-the-belt-and-road-initiative-what-about-people-s-rights>; Hidroeléctricas: una mirada a la inversión china en la Amazonía de Ecuador, Mongabay Latam, 2017, <https://es.mongabay.com/2017/12/hidroelectricas-una-mirada-la-inversion-china-la-amazonia-ecuador/>

## Ever More Extreme Infrastructure



We live in an age of ever more “*extreme infrastructure*”.

*Extreme* not just because of the scale of the infrastructure – roads, railways, inter-basin water transfers, ports, pipelines, industrial zones and the like – that is planned.

*Extreme* because it enables extraction that is even more extreme than extraction used to be, opening up deposits of oil and minerals in areas previously considered unexploitable.

*Extreme* because it is premised on *even more extreme production*, enabling capital to move wherever labour is cheapest and most easily exploited.

*Extreme* because it depends on a kind of finance that is even more extreme than previous forms of finance, involving, for example, new, highly risky asset classes.

And *extreme* because it can only operate through an *extreme politics*, involving elitist forms of planning that are profoundly undemocratic.

### **Mega-corridors**

One manifestation of this extreme infrastructure is the push for mega-corridors.

Infrastructure corridors are not new. But the plans that are now on the drawing board are on a scale as yet unimagined. Roads, railway lines and other transport infrastructure linking major production and resource extraction centres with major consumer centres.

No (inhabited) continent is excluded. Some of the plans are national in scale, others regional and still others continent-wide or near-global. Hundreds of millions of people would be affected.



In Africa, over 30 corridors have been initiated, principally to enable the extraction of agricultural produce and minerals. In Latin America, some 579 projects, costing an estimated US\$163 billion, have been identified. The Big Daddy of corridors is China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) programme, previously known as One Belt One Road, embracing 60 countries (thus potentially half of the world) and stretching from the Pacific to the Baltic Sea.

### **What is driving these extreme infrastructure programmes?**

Remoter sources of raw materials have only become commercially viable because bigger, more powerful and more efficient ships, trucks, trains, barges and cargo planes have reduced the costs of transport. But bigger ships, trucks, planes and freight trains require wider roads, bigger bridges, deeper and wider canals, straighter rivers and longer airport runways. And one wave of infrastructure development creates pressures for yet further innovation. It also leads to *even more* deforestation. The upgrade of the Cuiaba-Santarém highway in Brazil, for example, will serve the expansion of the soy and cattle industries, at the expense of forested areas. Likewise, in Indonesia, campaigners are concerned that the construction of new ports, such as that contemplated at Kuala Tanjung in North Sumatra, will stimulate an increase in forest clearance for palm oil. As bigger and faster forms of transport are developed, it becomes easier for capital to fragment production and shift around the globe in search of the cheapest labour.

*Extreme* production flourishes.

But *extreme* production and *extreme* extraction are also a problem for capital.

This brings us to the second structural driver behind corridors: what financiers call "the production-consumption disconnect".

The problem is not new. Almost 150 years ago, intellectual Karl Marx revealed how the more that capital expands, the more it needs to improve infrastructure to 'annihilate space by time'.

Today's global development agencies, such as the World Bank, are well aware of the problem. Marx may not get a mention in the Bank's flagship 2009 World Development Report but 'annihilating space by time' is *the* leitmotif that runs through the report's 380 pages.

The problem can be simply stated. The distances between points of resource extraction, points of production and points of consumption now involve multiple journeys and multiple forms of transport.

The minerals used in the manufacture of components for a computer or mobile phone, for example, are extracted from all over the globe. While gold and tin are common minerals used to produce 'smartphones,' these metals are responsible for forest and community land devastation, from the Peruvian Amazon to the tropical islands of Indonesia. And "the global consumers" with the money to buy the computer or 'smartphone' live far from the areas where resources are extracted and processed.

This distance matters because time matters. And time matters because the faster commodities can be produced and exchanged, the greater the profits for individual companies.



## ***Re-engineering economic geography***

However, extreme *physical* infrastructure – new highways and the like - only provide a partial solution to capital's problem.

*Extreme* logistical discipline and *extreme* deregulation to free up the movement of goods are also demanded.

The corridors are therefore being transformed into free trade zones, where tariffs are progressively reduced, labour and other laws deregulated, and taxes cut.

Indeed, the push for corridors is nothing less than a deliberate attempt to “re-engineer economic geography”. The plan is to concentrate specific economic activities (mining, agribusiness, tourism, finance, IT) in specific corridors in order to “agglomerate” cheap labour, consumers and investment for the benefit of capital. Transport corridors would then link these zoned clusters of production to concentrated pools of consumers.

In words that could come out of a Stalinist-era play book, the World Bank insists: “No country has grown to riches without changing the geographic distribution of its people”.

The prospect is of mass (forced) migration as markets and employment opportunities are increasingly concentrated in cities and their linking corridors.

## ***Extreme Finance***

All of this requires finance: and *extreme* infrastructure necessitates “*extreme* finance”.

Globally, US\$20–30 trillion will need to be raised between now and 2030.

Individual governments do not have the money. The Multilateral Development Banks do not have the money. China does not have the money. The US does not have the money. The EU does not have the money.

As in the past, capital has few options but to attempt to expand the pool of finance on which it can draw, notably by engineering into “an asset class” to make it more attractive to private investors.

But private investors are not interested in infrastructure that does not yield profits. Indeed, one fund manager has tellingly stated that, from an investor's viewpoint, an oil pipeline is not even “infrastructure” unless it has a guaranteed income stream attached to it.

Hence the push for Public-Private Partnerships, which are central to every one of the proposed corridors.

The defining feature of PPPs is that they establish contractually-binding guarantees on income and/or rate of return. As such, they provide what one fund manager has characterised as the defining feature of infrastructure for finance: “stable, contracted cash flow for the long term.”

The PPP guarantees on offer to the private sector participants include:



- Guaranteed profits – typically 15-20% - which are borne by the public
- Guaranteed Debt repayments – whatever loans have been taken out get repaid by the government if the PPP company can't pay them.
- Minimum Revenue guarantees – if traffic levels on a toll road are lower than anticipated, the government makes up any loss of revenue.
- Availability payments – the private partner gets paid by the public even if a facility is not used, provided that it is “available for use”.
- Financial and economic equilibrium clauses - these entitle a PPP company to compensation for changes in laws or regulations that adversely affect a project's revenues or its market value.

In effect, the private investors take the lion's share of the gains, while the public sector takes all the risk. And the gains are potentially huge. The figure that is most generally cited for infrastructure investments in the global South is 25%.

Moreover the “rights” or guarantees that PPPs establish are contractual rights. This means that they cannot be removed at the government's discretion. Once in place, they are enforceable for the length of the contract.

### ***Undemocratic, elitist and unstable***

The direction of travel is profoundly undemocratic, elitist and unstable.

*Undemocratic* because a handful of fund managers increasingly determine what gets financed and what does not.

*Elitist* because the facilities that are really needed and demanded by poorer communities (water sanitation, roads connecting communities, off-grid solar electricity) do not get built - they simply do not yield the high profits sought by private sector investors.

And *unstable* because infrastructure-as-asset class is a financial “bubble” that is set to burst.

Extreme infrastructure is thus reinforcing the divide between those who benefit from extreme extraction, extreme production and extreme finance and those whose class interests are opposed to “just-in-time” delivery, agglomerating pools of cheap labour and ravaging the earth in pursuit of profit.

It is a divide that reflects different relations to capital. And it is this divide that needs to be further explored, explained and resisted.

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Further readings:

- Licensed Larceny. Infrastructure, Financial Extraction and the global South, The Corner House, <http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/resource/licensed-larceny>

- How Infrastructure is Shaping the World. A Critical Introduction to Infrastructure Mega-Corridors, The Corner House, <http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/resource/how-infrastructure-shaping-world>

- Highway destruction as a way to force in destruction of the Amazon forest, Fernside Phillip, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283136197\\_Highway\\_construction\\_as\\_a\\_force\\_in\\_destruction\\_of\\_the\\_Amazon\\_forest](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283136197_Highway_construction_as_a_force_in_destruction_of_the_Amazon_forest)



## The Amazon Waterway in Peru vs. Flowing Rivers



Ph: Leonardo Tello Imaina

*“And when the great Lupuna tree fell, it gave birth to the great and small rivers, and from its leaves the fish were born.”*

*Story from the Kukama people — Loreto, Peru*

The Amazon Waterway mega project seeks to create a mega-corridor to connect markets in Brazil with the river port of Yurimaguas in the Amazon in Loreto. This port in turn would connect with the interoceanic highway and the Port of Paita on the northern coast of Peru, for transport of goods en route to Asian and Australian markets.

The Waterway would dig out the bottom of rivers in 13 shallow sections, which are commonly called “bad steps,” **to ensure navigability of the most important rivers of the Amazon throughout the year:** Amazonas, Ucayali, Marañón and Huallaga. The removal of rocks and sediment from the bottom of the rivers would allow **large and heavy boats** to navigate them (1).

The stated objective is to connect the Amazon with the world. But this argument is based on the idea that we are disconnected in the Amazon. That is not true. **There are countless trade routes and early trade networks in the Amazon.** The major intercultural exchanges among indigenous communities of the central rainforest in Peru, which took place on the salt mountain, Ampiyacu—among other places—demonstrate that not only were we connected and still are, but that there was first-rate commercial and intercultural exchange (2). **The idea of a disconnected Amazon merely has the economic objective of placing the Amazon in service of capital—an idea that does not even take into account the peoples who live in it.**

**The river is life itself and the world where we Kukama people live**—in the tropical forests of what is known today as Loreto, in northeast Peru. For the Kukama people, **our territory encompasses spaces even beyond the physical.** The river is a being, with a life and will of its own.

### ***The River and the Kukama People***

The Kukama people depend on fishing for their physical survival, and on the rivers for their spiritual and cultural survival.





**The bottom of the river is very important for the spirits that live in the water**, such as the *purawa* (serpent), or the *karuara*—the people who live in the depths of the river, after having been carried away by the water spirits. Those who have gone to live in the world of water communicate through dreams with their families who live in the earthly world. The pools formed on the river banks, which enable the water to keep circling, is our ancestors' place of life. In this way, **the Kukama have a personal and deep relationship with the rivers.**

The bottom of the river is also very complex for other life systems. Many fish live, breed and feed in the riverbed. On the riverbed there are high and low reliefs, like the dunes of a desert. These dunes impact the current of the rivers, sometimes forming backwaters and other whirlpools. This means that **different species of flora and fauna are associated with the dynamics of the river.**

**The river, or the “great serpent,” cannot be seen as a fixed path; it is constantly changing and exchanging with the forest and its many systems of life.** The river has a flood season and a dry season. In the flood season, the water and its sediments enter the forest and give shape to the wetlands, where water is the main factor controlling life. The floods leave sediments that produce specific habitats and bring nutrients that fertilize the land. These floods also help connect the different streams that feed the forest. This helps develop the plants, bushes and fruit trees necessary to sustain life in the forest along the rivers. In addition to feeding, many fish get rid of parasites by eating the fruits of some trees, in order to be healthy in the summer. The Kukama people also use the fertilized lands at different times of the year for their crops.

**Even the tree trunks that fall into the river, either due to erosion or falling down, are an important element for the rivers.** Take the *quiruma* from trees, for example: When they fall, their trunks end up in the middle of the river where the current is faster, and they slow the speed of the water and create a whirlpool where big fish rest—fulfilling a very important function. Likewise, the palisades on the banks of the river serve as breeding grounds for many fish.

**The rivers and the forest are one; everything is united, nothing is separate.** To think about rivers and to protect them is to think about our lives and to defend them. The rivers speak, feel and express themselves. **The Kukama, however, must face the skepticism of the Waterway project engineers and concessionaires, including the State.**

Rusbel Casternoque, *apu* or chief of the Kukama community of Tarapacá, on the Amazon River, said: *“When Westerners talk about the ‘bad steps’, we just keep seeing what we already know: the tail or head of a purawa could be there. When there is a beach in the middle of the river, Raya Mama is there; as usual, they lie in a place and the sand or mud builds up there, and a beach appears. Therefore, for us indigenous peoples, dredging the river is a threat with the risk that—over time—these beings may leave the rivers”* (3).

### **Turning Rivers into Global Market Routes**

The project grants a 20-year concession for dredging work to the COHIDRO consortium—which is the partnership between Chinese company Sinohydro Corporation and Peruvian company Construcción y Administración S.A (CASA). It should be noted that Sinohydro



Corporation has a track record of poorly executed projects and links to corruption in the region.

During the contested consultation process, which was carried out with more than ten indigenous groups that will be affected by this project, **officials from the Ministry of Transport and Communications promised “offerings” to the Kukama people as compensation for affecting the “spirituality of the rivers.”** Given the Kukama peoples’ strong relationship with the rivers, the Ministry’s action constitutes a profound lack of respect for this people’s way of life and their coexistence with their environment.

Currently, the National Environmental Certification Service (Senace) is in the process of evaluating the Environmental Impact Assessment for the mega project.

The Waterway project, however, threatens to profoundly affect the Kukama people, breaking their ancestral beliefs as well as their livelihoods and sustenance.

Where is Mama, now that the *maisangara* have arrived? [bad spirit]  
 Where is Papa, now that these strange beings have arrived?  
 Where are my grandparents? I need their stories in this solitude  
 Mama has been taken as a slave to the boss’s house  
 Papa has been condemned to the roads, to bleed with the trees until he dies  
 Grandmother and grandfather cried, and became the tree  
 I was taken to the bottom of the river  
 I have a spear in my hands  
 I have a bow and some arrows  
 The boss walks in front of me but cannot see me  
 My feet become roots  
 My body a tree  
 He cannot see me  
 I become a tiger  
 I become *izango* [a type of mite]  
 He cannot see me  
 The boss shouts angrily  
 He cannot see me  
 A tree branch slowly rises  
 Another tree branch sustains the arc  
 The arrow shoots through the soul of the boss like lightning

Leonardo Tello Imaina,  
 Radio Ucamará, <http://radioucamara.net/>  
 Nauta, Loreto

*Radio Ucamara was founded in 1992 and reaches listeners in more than 40 indigenous and riverside communities, as well as the city of Nauta. Its mission is to rescue the Kukama culture and language, and to popularize information to reinforce indigenous identity and strengthen the communities who are facing major and abrupt changes and processes.*

Watch the video series: “Río que camina,” at: <http://radio-ucamara.blogspot.com/>



- (1) AIDSEP, ¡El dragado No Va! (No to dredging!) <https://youtu.be/AlpnlwJUxWA> and SERVINDI, ¿A qué juega el Senace? (What is Senace up to?), <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad-noticias/21/05/2019/senace-aprueba-evaluacion-de-eia-del-proyecto-hidrovia-amazonica>
- (2) See the note, “El célebre Cerro de la Sal”, <http://trazohumanistico.blogspot.com/2016/05/el-celebre-cerro-de-la-sal.html>
- (3) Alianza Biodiversidad, Perú Hidrovía Amazónica: Preocupaciones y expectativas del pueblo Kukama, 2018, <http://www.biodiversidadla.org/Documentos/Peru-Hidrovia-amazonica-Preocupaciones-y-expectativas-del-pueblo-Kukama>

## Indonesia. The Gloomy Truth Behind Geothermal Energy: A misleading Narrative of “Clean Energy”



*Protest against Geothermal energy. Mount Talang, Indonesia*

Geothermal energy is seen as one of the potential energy sources claimed to provide “clean energy.” **In May 2015, Indonesia’s President Joko Widodo launched a development project to generate 35,000-megawatts, which included geothermal power plants.** The project was to be completed during his first presidential period (2014 – 2019). Many parties considered this too ambitious and unreasonable because under the previous regime only 10,000 megawatts of power plants were set up in two terms of presidency. However, the president argued that infrastructure development nowadays, especially in electricity, is needed to support the achievement of Indonesia's economic growth target of 6 to 7% per year.

**The World Bank introduced the use of Public Private Partnerships (PPP)** in the country several years ago, which opened access for the private sector to build energy infrastructure through concessions and auctions. **PPPs also ensure that the private sector (both domestic and multi-national corporations) get a large portion of the energy generated** in comparison to the public sector, and facilitate companies to get involved. To date, the National Electricity Company has undersigned Power Purchase Agreements for 25 years with 53 independent power producers, to establish around 22,000 megawatts or 74% of the total project.

To ensure that this runs without difficulties, the government included it as part of the 2017 National Strategic Project Based on Presidential Regulation no.58, on the amendment to Presidential Regulation no.3 of 2016 on the Acceleration of Implementation of National Strategic Projects. Investors benefit from this decision in various ways, such as facilitating



the processing of **obtaining permits**, obtaining **security guarantees** and **safeguards** by the state's civil and military apparatus and **access to exploration and exploitation in Protected Forest areas**, including the moratorium area.

Today, one of the areas affected by the “service to investors” is Nagari Batu Bajanjang, located in Lembang Jaya Subdistrict, Solok Regency, West Sumatra Province.

### ***Geothermal Shock***

Below the Earth's crust, there is a layer of hot and molten rock, called magma. Heat is continually produced in this layer, mostly from the decay of naturally radioactive materials such as uranium and potassium. The areas with the highest underground temperatures are in regions with active or geologically young volcanoes.

The presence of heat sources, abundant precipitation, and the occurrence of volcanic rock as cap rocks and reservoir in Sumatra makes it a target for geothermal energy development.

Lembang Jaya Subdistrict, Solok Regency, is comprised of Six *nagari* (villages); Batu Bajanjang Nagari, Koto Anau Nagari, Batu Many Nagari, Nagari Bukik Sileh Salayo Tanang, Koto Laweh Nagari and Nagari Limau Lunggo. **These *nagari* or villages are on the mountainside of Mount Talang, one of the active volcanoes in West Sumatra**, about 70 km. east of Padang, the capital of West Sumatra Province. 87% of the inhabitants of Batu Bajanjang subsist as farmers, with a cultivated land area of 11,793 hectares. The main agricultural products grown are rice, shallots, potatoes, cabbage, tomatoes, sweet potatoes and carrots. In 2018, their rice production reached 32,001.9 tons, which led the governor of west Sumatra to proclaim **this region as one of the rice barns crucial to meeting regional food needs**.

**The Mount Talang area has been established as a protected area** because of its important function for water catchment. This means that no permit can be issued there, but the geothermal law provides an **exception for geothermal** exploration and exploitation.

In mid-2017, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, through the Investment Coordinating Board, issued a permit for geothermal exploration and exploitation in the Lembang Jaya sub-district to a consortium of foreign and domestic companies. The concession is for an area of **27,000 hectares, which includes community-owned land, rice fields, and farms**. The exploration and exploitation period will run for 37 years and might be extended as long as potential geothermal energy can be extracted. The permit was issued to the Turkish consortium PT Hitay Power Energy and PT Dyfco Energi, which defeated the state-owned enterprise PT Pertamina Geothermal Energy.

The permit, however, was issued **without a proper process of consultation** with affected communities. **This triggered protests from the communities**. As it is generally known, before getting permission for a concession, a company is required to obtain environmental permits and present comprehensive information to the public about the possible environmental impacts and damage while providing an opportunity for the affected communities to express their collective decision, without any pressure or coercion, something that is known as the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent. However, the facts in the field indicated that **the socialization process was in reality forcing communities to approve this geothermal project by arguing that this was a part of a “National Strategic Project”**.



Recently, it was revealed, maybe surprisingly, that before the geothermal permit was issued, **the central government**, through the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, **unilaterally designated the Mount Talang** (or *Gunung Talang*) and Bukit Kili areas as **geothermal concessions**, which would be offered to investors through an auction process. Hearing about this information was a peak moment where the communities felt betrayed by the government: How could the government give away an area of 27,000 hectares which intersected directly with their living space, without hearing their opinions and obtaining consent? Communities felt treated only as an object of development and not a subject in which their concerns are supposed to be noted and taken into consideration. **This situation then sparked further resistance from the communities**, demanding that the government restore their rights to a healthy and clean environment.

### ***Against a misleading narrative of “clean” energy***

Resident Y, an onion farmer who lives and tills around the mountainside of Mount Talang, never expected to have to deal with the police and court trials. Y is one of 13 residents who are **criminalized for opposing the construction of the geothermal power plant labeled a "National Strategic Project"**. In reality though, instead of committing criminal acts, what he does is freeing the people from the limited information they receive. He is a key actor in the **Mount Talang Lovers Community Association, an organization established to resist the suppression of people and territories in the name of development**.

Proclaimed as “green energy” and “clean energy,” geothermal energy is seen as an unavoidable choice in the struggles against destructive energy sources. **This narrative of geothermal energy as "clean" and "necessary" facilitates the stigmatizing of communities who protest against this project**. They are considered to be an opposition to a global movement trying to explore “cleaner” and “greener” sources of energy. However, communities in Mount Talang basically demand and question simple things: “If our environment (land, water sources, air and livelihoods) is being destroyed and polluted by geothermal exploration and exploitation, **how can this energy be called “clean”?** “**Clean” for whom?** And why are we not being heard at all in this process?”

The question they raise is grounded on solid argumentations. **Throughout the whole process of geothermal energy development in Indonesia, many villages have been feeling a direct environmental impact**. In Mataloko, East Nusa Tenggara, hot water mixed with mud flooded their fields. Initially the problem was confined to small well-like holes, but after six months these had enlarged multiple times. This condition caused declining of crop yields, minor earthquakes, and even sulfur bursts. Similar conditions have also been reported in Slamet, Central Java, Lebong Bengkulu, Sarula North Sumatra, Lahedong, and Kerta Sari.

This further strengthens the community's will to fight the oppression and imposition of this project which threatens to cause significant harm to their livelihoods. They did everything to maintain their living space. **From building guard posts and public kitchens around the company's concession area to consistently refusing companies to enter and build factories because of the difficulty of revoking the permit of an established company**. This advocacy works triggered local government and companies responding with pressure. The company utilized police and military facilities to break through community barricades. **The military was ordered to conduct war training in the area, even though the community protests were peaceful**. On at least three occasions in 2018, people were

heavily injured while communities and police clashed. A woman brought her 12-year-old son to take part in the road blockade. Her reason was simple, she wanted her child to witness and learn about this struggle over land rights so that the water, air and the environment would not be polluted and privatized by this project.

Subsequently, **three people have been imprisoned on charges of provocation against the geothermal project.** They were sentenced to three years and six months. This has not made the community back down; on the contrary, they were even more energized. Now, **the community is preparing a lawsuit** against the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources which unilaterally designated their villages and land as geothermal working areas. **Their struggle is now getting bigger and stronger.**

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## Women Stand Up to Fight the Suzano Paper Mill in Maranhão, Brazil



*Ph: Carolina Motoki / Reporter Brasil*

The Suzano Pulp and Paper mill in Imperatriz, Maranhão state, Brazil, has caused a lot of devastation for communities in the area. This mill was inaugurated in 2014 and has an annual production capacity of **1.65 million tons of pulp and 60 thousand tons of toilet paper.**

WRM interviewed Rosa (Rosalva Gomes), who is from a babassu coconut breaker family. Breakers are women who live among, and depend on collecting babassu palm coconuts for their livelihood. Rosa is a leader and an advisor to the *Movimento Interestadual das Quebradeiras de Coco Babaçu*, MIQCB (the Interstate Movement of Babassu breakers) in the region of Imperatriz, Maranhão state.

Created by women in 1991, the MIQCB arose from the need for women to have a space where they could act and discuss their demands. The social spaces at that time were the Rural Workers' Unions, where women did not even have the right to vote in union assemblies or discuss demands specific to women; they were not seen as an important part of the organization or the struggle for land.



It all started with discussion circles. They established contact with other women in Maranhão, as well as in the neighboring states of Pará, Tocantins and Piauí. Women began meeting in larger circles, talking about the realities in their regions, and in 1991 they founded their own movement **to organize women coconut breakers from these four states and together demand their rights—mainly the right to access the coconut palms.**

Today, the main rallying cries for the struggle continue to be: the organization and empowerment of women breakers; access to coconut palm; defense of babassu forests; organization and marketing of babassu production; access to institutional policies; and the unwavering fight for regularization of traditional territories. The struggle also aims to strengthen the communities and territories with a focus on agroecology and “living well.”

This is Rosa’s testimony.

### **1. What was the process like when the Suzano mill was installed in Imperatriz? What discourse did the company and government use to try to gain the acceptance of communities?**

Back in the 1990s, the company (then called Celmar) tried to establish the pulp production center here, but it did not succeed. This was partly due to social movements’ resistance to the mill at that time. Later, and with the name Suzano, the mill was implemented. This was possible through the **use of a discourse about jobs, growth of the city and benefits for traditional communities—mainly communities near the place where the mill was to be built.**

With a view to “growth” in the region, state and municipal governments facilitated all processes for the production center to be implemented—including public consultations, which were not done in a consistent fashion. The consultations that took place were not well advertised, and they always painted the company in a rosy light. **The company heavily used, and still uses the local press to create a good image of themselves, and the few movements which were not co-opted are considered to be “anti-development.”** This is the case of MIQCB, which was one of the few movements that did not accept alliances with the company, sell out or allow itself to be co-opted. It has always maintained its position against that “development” model.

**The company corrupted virtually the entire platform of social organizations in the region. Suzano also corrupted officials from federal environmental protection agencies.** One example is the regional managers of the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMbio, by its Portuguese acronym).

In the 1990s, women coconut breakers and the MIQCB fought to create the Ciriaco reserve, which is one of the largest babassu reserves in the country. The management that protects the declared reserve area in Ciriaco (municipality of Cidelândia, Maranhão) participates in “social” actions with the company, serving as a bridge for the company to have more access to grassroots communities. There are reports of violations in the protected area, such as ranching and the felling of palm trees within the reserve. The management knows this and is complicit. In 2012, MIQCB conducted a survey in the region about the impacts that the company causes, and those it would cause upon implementation of the mill in Imperatriz. The researchers at that time needed to speak with management at the center, but were not admitted; we were not even authorized to enter the reserve. The Institute is playing a



completely different role than the one entrusted to it. This is appalling, too, because the ICMBio came from, and even bears the name of Chico Mendes—who fought so hard for the life and diversity of the forests. He fought so much, and they took his life because of his struggle. Now, the policy adopted by the Institute and the management at the production centers are killing Chico Mendes again. That’s how I see it.

Historical organizations in the region, such as the Rural Worker’s Union of Imperatriz (STTR, by its Portuguese acronym), only keep with an opposition nowadays through its Secretariat of Women’s Policies, a union department chaired by Maria Querobina da Silva Neta. However, the union leadership itself is doing a job of containing the communities that are in dispute with the company over lands. Leaders of grassroots organizations—**activists who previously worked with communities—have also been co-opted. And because they were politically formed within the territories, they were hired by the company to work in social sectors and serve as bridges to ensure space for the company in these localities.**

There was an organized backlash to the company’s first attempt to implement the production center in 1990. The second time, the company worked in such a way that the reaction was not strong or sufficient, because it had made sure to corrupt various sectors, managers of institutions such as ICMBio and the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA, by its Portuguese acronym), directors of grassroots organizations and community associations, the local CARITAS (organization tied to the Catholic Church, which was created to support rural communities in the face of conflicts and threats), union leaders in the region, and so on. This was a large group of representatives who could—via their organizations or institutions—stir up big problems for the company. So that’s where they began. **That was the first major impact: a de-structuring of the social forces of the region,** which were already in a process of weakening.

## **2. The mill is a major infrastructure project that required a large number of workers to build it. How did this affect the population of Imperatriz, especially women?**

The mill is one of the major pulp production centers in the country and it **affects us in every way.** While the mill was being built, many men and women were hired, who—deceived by the discourse of “development”—left behind their identity as rural workers. This affected their rural retirement, because they had their work permit signed (as non-rural workers) for a few months.

In both the city and the region, there was **a lot of movement of men coming from other places, and many women suffered sexual abuse.** Many women who went to work at the eucalyptus seedling production sites are suffering from **health problems,** including cancer. Many women were seduced in the general services spaces and on the construction sites. There were several accidents during construction, **including the deaths of workers, which was covered by the local press.** The families were given little or nothing of what they were due by law. Vehicle transit increased on the Rice Route (Padre Josimo Tavares MA 386 highway), which meant more disturbances in communities bordering the road, more risks for people—mainly children—and the harassment of adolescents from the communities. Many young people from the communities went to Imperatriz in search of much-dreamed employment at Suzano; this interfered with the communities’ continuity and also caused overcrowding in the municipality, which was not prepared to receive this influx.





### 3. Today, almost five years after the mill was installed, what could you say this project brought, in terms of “local development”?

Nothing good.

The jobs that are currently available are for manual labor on the outskirts of the city and the state. The municipal government collects millions in taxes from the company annually, but it does not invest in anything in the region. The city is ruined. Recently, we had to fight hard to get approval from a Parliamentary Investigation Commission on health (CPI, by its Portuguese acronym) at City Council to investigate significant misuse of funds. There is a dangerous transfer of responsibilities from the municipality to the company, via the famous social responsibility projects and activities. **Communication spaces in the region have been appropriated for the benefit of the company. The company has intervened in spaces created by social movements**—such as the CFRs (Rural Family Houses), which were conceived of based on Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of the alternation as a model of contextualized education. There is now a very strong socio-political division in babassu coconut breaker communities; whereas before, the movement benefited from the strength of their autonomy.

**Fish in the Tocantins River are dying**, because water used at the mill is being returned to it. According to the company, this water goes through a treatment center. However, the chemical agents are not fully removed, and this can end up disrupting even the reproduction of native species of the river. **The way the city is presented to the world has been distorted. The roots of Imperatriz are the Tocantins River, artisanal fishing, and the collection and use of resources.** This symbolic city, on the border between the *Cerrado* (savannah) and Amazonian biomes, is called the Gateway of the Amazon. It has now been decorated with eucalyptus trunks and eucalyptus trees, and the company’s logo is on sports uniforms and festive clothing in the city; people are being induced to forget their ancestry. On some days the city stinks. The wind brings a bad odor from the mill, which is pervasive in the neighborhoods closest to the production center. **Drought in the streams and creeks** is occurring more intensely every year, due to the water consumption of the eucalyptus trees. **The soil, air and water are poisoned**, and several people have **health problems** that were not common in the communities before—such as itching of the body and blindness. **Serious and fatal accidents** occur, mainly due to the trucks that transport logs. There are fires on the plantations during the summer which are not reported, nor are the affected people indemnified. Most of the trucks are 30 meters long and transport wood from the plantations to the mill. They are very heavy trucks that carry hundreds of logs, which—due to movement on the roads and high speeds—end up falling off and causing accidents and deaths. The risks are greater on the roads of Maranhão, as they are more narrow and do not have rest areas. The trucks damage the roads because of their weight, and the constant vibration of the earth causes the walls of houses to break.

The Interstate Movement of Babassu breakers (MIQCB) filed a complaint with the Federal Prosecutor’s Office (MPF, by its Portuguese acronym) about the death of at least eight people in 2015—including three women who were burned to death on plantations. However, the MPF replied that it was impossible to move forward with the process, citing insufficient information about the victims and their families. They said something to the effect of needing the victims’ full name, father’s name, mother’s name...it was totally absurd. There was even a horrifying news report on Mirante TV, a local station, with the son of a victim who died from a trunk that fell off a truck that was transporting wood to the mill. It showed how company



representatives had not visited the family, and there was no indemnification. (The family lives in the municipality of Vila Nova dos Martirios, a city near Imperatriz, which also suffers from impacts caused by the company.)

There are communities in conflict with each other, divided into their own territories. There are social organizations without autonomy. In short, **the good it is bringing is only for a small minority of businessmen and politicians who are pocketing millions, to the detriment of many harmed people.**

#### **4. Are there other infrastructure projects in the region related to the Suzano company?**

Part of the MA 386 Rodovia Padre Josimo highway is a stretch of ten kilometers that connects Imperatriz to the company's mill. The road was originally built **for the transport of wood. This stretch of the road is in terrible condition and is extremely dangerous.** It is very narrow, and in some places has no asphalt, which breaks under the weight of the trucks. Many communities bordering this stretch of the highway suffer due to the dust and the **risk of accidents; and in the case traditional communities, their harmony is disrupted.** Trucks also drive in urban areas, causing accidents. One recent accident caused the instant death of a couple at the intersection of JK avenue and the BR 010 highway.

#### **5. Is there anything else you would like to share?**

There is no oversight of Suzano's activity in the region. The company is not held responsible in any way for the physical, cultural, environmental and social damage it causes in communities. **The transfer of responsibility from public authorities to the company is dangerous** and threatens the sovereignty of the municipality and of the people.

**It can take many years for organizations that work with communities to reverse the social fragmentation that the mill caused in the region, particularly in the communities.** It is a typical venture that uses people in order to appear to be a company acting in good faith. All the while, Suzano is one of the multinational companies that is most promoting human rights violations in Brazil.

**As for the movement...As a black woman and activist in a women's movement, I often feel threatened by the company.** We are followed around the communities; we are watched while we meet in the communities. We are easily identified by the work we do, and we are determined not to stop working, even in the face of these risks.



## Infrastructure for Extractive Industries and Corporate Profits: What about Community Needs?



472-km Mombasa-Nairobi Standard-Gauge Railway. Ph: [globalsecurity.org](http://globalsecurity.org)

The discourse about infrastructure across the African continent is plagued – perhaps more so than elsewhere - by a staggering contradiction: The rhetoric from governments, development banks and investment analysts is heavy on ordinary peoples’ infrastructure needs for sanitation, clean drinking water, affordable and reliable electricity and internet connectivity and roads for small scale farmers to bring their produce to market and small enterprises to prosper. Using these basic and undeniable needs for infrastructure, they emphasise the sound of clean drinking water being delivered to households across growing sub-Saharan African cities as ‘the sound of prosperity, and the promise of opportunity’ – and then, prioritize a totally different kind of infrastructure.

**The infrastructure highlighted for priority funding in ambitious investment programmes spanning the entire continent is squarely focused on facilitating the export of minerals and agricultural commodity crops and the import of processed foods and manufactured goods.** “Most international interest in big infrastructure projects depends on whether or not these projects deliver an export revenue stream,” an investment analyst notes. (1) A casual look at the maps outlining planned and internationally funded large infrastructure projects highlights this **export-focus with little to no regard for the infrastructure needs of the majority of the population.** (2) As Rudo Sanyanga from the NGO International Rivers points out in her 2018 article for the WRM Bulletin (3), several questions need to be asked before planning further infrastructure across the continent: **“What kind of infrastructure do we need? And does it meet our own development goals? Decision-makers need to deliberately target infrastructure which respects social and environmental concerns, for servicing the majority of people who need the energy and to define milestones to assess progress.”**

In 2012, the 55 members of the African Union adopted, in partnership with the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank, the **Programme of Infrastructure Development for Africa (PIDA)** (4), a multi-billion dollar initiative to promote transboundary and intra-regional infrastructure in four key priority areas: energy, transport, water, and ICT (information and communication technology). While infrastructure in these sectors is essential for providing basic needs, it is another kind of infrastructure in these same sectors that is being prioritized for construction of **the backbone of industrial, export-oriented, not people-oriented “development.”**



**Who would benefit from infrastructure thus fundamentally depends on the kind of infrastructure that is being built and planned:** roads that cater to the needs of the majority of the population or super-highways and toll-roads for giant trucks and transport of heavy goods; railways that increase the mobility of people or that bypass cities so the minerals can be taken as fast as possible from the mines to the ports; electricity lines and power generating infrastructure that provides communities and the majority population in urban centres with affordable energy or mega-dams marred in conflict because whole communities will be evicted, their land flooded yet the electricity generated is destined to industrial hubs around mines and ports.

According to the 2018 PIDA Progress Report, its Priority Action Plan aims to implement key transboundary infrastructure projects “with the potential to interconnect, integrate and contribute to structural transformation of Africa’s geographic and economic regions by 2020.” (5) From its more than 400 projects overall and its 51 priority projects, 20 have been completed or are under construction, including the Algiers-Lagos trans-Saharan highway, the Lagos-Abidjan transport corridor, the Zambia-Tanzania-Kenya power transmission line and the Brazzaville-Kinshasa bridge. The PIDA priorities underline the focus on infrastructure that feeds corporate greed, not people’s needs: **These mega-infrastructure corridors bypass or steamroll communities to connect the sites of mining and energy generation with export hubs and ports.**

The 2018 report also highlights that, at the time of writing, 44 out of the 55 African Union member states had signed the consolidated text of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Even though some countries have not ratified it, it has already entered into force. PIDA directly contributes to the plans of AfCFTA for **intra-continental infrastructure corridors as a pre-requisite for cross-continental (corporate and industrial) trade.** What all these plans fail to provide is a convincing narrative on how these gigantic infrastructure corridors could possibly cater to the needs for basic sanitation, water, electricity and internet connectivity of the majority population.

**China’s mega-infrastructure plan, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is also branching out into African territories.** Launched in 2013, BRI envisions a land-based “belt” connecting China with Europe and a sea-based “road” crossing the Indian Ocean to East Africa up through the Mediterranean and reaching over the Pacific as far as Oceania and Latin America. The Algiers-Lagos trans-Saharan highway, for example, one of PIDA’s priority projects, is already linked to BRI development in Africa. (6)

BRI plans to close some of the missing links of major transport corridors while speeding up the implementation of PIDA’s priority projects and flagship projects on the African Union’s Agenda, such as the African integrated high-speed railway network.

**Chinese companies are building ports and sea infrastructure** funded by Chinese investors to upgrade the route from South Asia to Kenya and Tanzania and up to the Mediterranean via Djibouti. Inland railways are also being built. Moreover, **Chinese investments have been flowing into agro-industrial parks** in Mozambique, Uganda, Zambia and other countries. China has begun to expand its agro-industrial investments under the banner of the BRI. (7)



BRI – along with regional and continental infrastructure programmes such as PIDA - are set to **reconfigure large territories**, turning them into production and distribution zones, with warehouses, railways, terminals, waterways, ports and export-import zones. As NGO GRAIN points out, due to its vast geographic scale and massive investment, BRI will also **increase the concentration of global food production and distribution, potentially pushing small-scale farmers, fisherfolk, forest peoples and rural communities further to the margins and restricting their access to land**. Concerns are growing that BRI will lead to land grabs and human rights abuses; push state governments into even deeper indebtedness and cause major ecological destruction and health impacts in the target countries. (8)

### ***Loans and public-private partnerships***

Both China's BRI investments and PIDA project implementation are extensively using public-private partnership models. Championed as a smart way for governments to use public money to attract significant private investment by offsetting the risks for private investors, the reality of PPPs has seen **corporations pocketing exorbitant profits while public institutions shoulder all the risks**. (9)

A recent article from African news portal Pambazuka (10) revealed how a concessional loan of over US 2.3 billion dollars is earmarked for the construction of 273 kilometres of rails between Uganda's capital Kampala and Kenya's Indian Ocean port city of Mombasa. Further extension to Juba, South Sudan, and Kigali, Rwanda, is expected in the future. The first stretch of the line between Mombasa and Nairobi was inaugurated in mid-2017 and celebrated by state governments and financial institutions as another milestone of Chinese-African development cooperation. The project received funding from the European Investment Bank, the German development bank (KfW) and the African Development Bank.

However, **corruption, embezzlement, human right violations and unmet deadlines are few of the problems surrounding these projects**. (11) The recently leaked loan contract signed in 2014 by state-owned Kenya Railways and China's Exim Bank reveals significant legal risks for Kenya in case Kenya defaults on the loan – a likely scenario considering the amount of debt the government has amassed in recent years. In addition to these secret contractual risks, construction of the Mombasa - Nairobi port access road is linked to severe human and collective rights violations, including force evictions and threats and intimidation strategies used towards affected communities. (12)

And this is no exception. The easy availability of infrastructure credits linked with the arrival of the BRI on the African continent brings **sizeable risks to communities whose territories are located along the priority corporate infrastructure corridors**. There has been a rush to generate projects, particularly for generation and transmission of electricity and transportation. These projects enjoy political backing from the highest levels of government, and few questions appear to be asked by governments tasked with providing infrastructure for the basic needs of a country's population on whether these mega-projects will address the genuine infrastructure needs of the majority of the population. There are many cases in which, **if a project built as part of a PPP-contract fails (or fails to maintain the expected profit levels of the private investor), governments and citizens absorb exorbitant costs over decades**.



In Tanzania, the BRI-associated US 10 billion dollars Bagamoyo Deepwater Port and Special Economic Zone project - a joint venture between the Tanzanian government and China Merchants Holdings International - was initially suspended in 2016 for lack of funds. The Tanzanian government's funding constraints meant that it had to forego its equity stake in the project. As a result, the government now risks losing project ownership and access to long-term revenues from the project. (13)

### ***Dams: electricity for community needs or for corporate greed?***

Pointing to the low level of access to electricity and the comparatively high costs to households, PIDA proposes a number of new power plants and transmission lines spanning the continent. Within the PIDA Priority Action Plan **there are 13 large dams, including very controversial projects**: The Inga 3 Dam on the Congo River, the Grand Renaissance Dam on Ethiopia's Blue Nile, and the Mphanda Nkuwa and Batoka Gorge Dams on the Zambezi.

But, who will benefit from the energy generated by these dams? Most probably not the people who need electrification the most. The estimated 4,800 MW to be produced by the Inga 3 Dam in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, are earmarked **to supply mining companies** in the country's East **and for export** to South Africa. The same goes for the Mphanda Nkuwa dam in Mozambique. The government hopes that the dam will **attract energy-intensive industries** to the country. But for the foreseeable future, much of its electricity will be exported to South Africa. (14)

Looking at who receives access to electricity and who is bypassed provides one indication for understanding **who profits and who pays for the infrastructure boom on the African continent**. The question of land provides another. According to a recent report from International Rivers, "**over 100,000 people would have to be moved to make way for reservoirs that would be filled behind the PIDA dams**. The social disruption that dam-induced resettlement has engendered is long-lasting and multi-generational." (15)

### ***"If you want to prosper, first build roads"?***

If evictions and destruction of fertile agricultural land in the path of these mega-infrastructure corridors are added to the equation, it becomes even clearer that the Chinese proverb 'If you want to prosper, first build roads' isn't going to deliver for the overwhelming majority of people across the African continent. What is needed is a different kind of roads, railways, electricity generation and other infrastructure to prosper than the mega-corridors at the heart of PIDA, BRI and others. The risks are high that the kind of infrastructure promoted by those plans will be suffering, loss of land and violent clashes, not prosper and food sovereignty for peasant communities and forest peoples.

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<https://www.euromoney.com/article/b1b6hvm1pljh0/africa-seeks-new-solutions-to-its-infrastructure-needs?copyrightInfo=true>

(2) Overview maps among others: Deloitte (2019): If you want to prosper, consider building roads.

<https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/industry/public-sector/china-investment-africa-infrastructure-development.html> See also the webpage of the Africa Infrastructure Knowledge Programme:

<http://infrastructureafrica.opendataforafrica.org/apps/gallery>

(3) WRM Bulletin, Large Hydro-power dams are not the answer: Time to re-think Africa's energy infrastructure, Rudo Sanyanga, January 2018,

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- (4) See the PIDA website at <http://www.au-pida.org/>
- (5) 2018 PIDA Progress Report: <https://www.tralac.org/documents/resources/african-union/2509-2018-pida-progress-report-summary-update/file.html>
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## Uruguay Goes into Debt with Million-Dollar Infrastructure at the Service of a Multinational Pulp Company



*25 de Agosto bridge, Uruguay*

**The infrastructure of a country or region is key for extractive neocolonialism in countries in the Global South.** Companies study and strategically select the places where it is most profitable to set up their operations; in so doing they take into account local unemployment, limited local organized opposition and national/regional legislation that is favorable to their interests, among other things. All this is in detriment to the quality of life of inhabitants and the environment.

For pulp companies that already have large areas of pine and eucalyptus plantations—as in the case of Uruguay—**infrastructure is what makes the installation of a mill viable or**



**not.** Companies need a road network to ensure transport of the wood from the plantations to the mill, and the subsequent transport of the pulp produced to points of exportation to international markets.

In a secret agreement with the Uruguayan government, **Finnish company UPM demanded a series of requirements as indispensable conditions to decide whether it will install its second mill in the country**—the third pulp mill in Uruguay (1). Among these requirements is the construction of a new railway between the site where UPM plans to locate its new mill (in the center of the country) to the port of Montevideo—covering a distance of almost 300 km.

When the agreement between UPM and the government was made public, the details of the infrastructure projects that the Uruguayan government had committed to carrying out at its own expense became known. In addition to the million-dollar railway project, the government will assume the design, construction and maintenance of: a “Port Project,” an exclusive port for UPM’s pulp and derivatives (chemical products, forest products, etc.); the necessary dredging of the canal connecting the La Plata river and the dock adjacent to the UPM port terminal; a “Viaduct Project” to facilitate the crossing of the railroad with the port watercourse and to provide uninterrupted access to the trains carrying UPM cargo to the port; and “Roads Projects,” which include the renovation of roads apt for 48-ton semi-trailers and triple trailer trucks and the reinforcement of bridges in UPM’s area of influence in the center of the country (2).

These projects **will cost more than double what the government originally announced.** The Uruguayan people’s investment will practically double that of the company. In this way, the historical colonial pattern is repeated: while the transnational company obtains the most beneficial conditions for its business, **the people go into debt to carry out construction projects that do not respond to their interests. On the contrary, these projects enable the expansion and profits of an extractive industry** that increases the area of tree plantations, expels the rural population, consumes and contaminates soils and waterways and does not generate the jobs promised.

Although the Uruguayan government tries to justify its decision by stating that UPM’s second mill will create thousands of jobs—including through indirect job creation—**the company only mentions 300 direct jobs at its facilities for the project** (including workers at the UPM2 mill, workers at the chemical plant and maintenance workers) and 100 jobs at companies that provide services such as food, cleaning, security, etc. (3)

The Uruguayan government’s policy of openness to foreign investment, its desperate race to fully comply with UPM’s demands on time, and statements by government representatives across the media lead one to believe that these megaprojects have the full support of citizens. However, opinion within Uruguayan society is divided; and as the details of the agreement and these ventures come to light, a greater number of people question both the legality and content of the agreement, as well as the infrastructure and pulp mill projects.

There is hope to be found in the painstaking work, and the strengthening of different organizations and citizen initiatives that aim to show what is happening. They are denouncing the impacts, informing the population, defending the rights of citizens, and above all, rejecting this new form of colonialism.





### ***(Dis)information, the Government's Strategy***

When UPM's intention to install its second mill in our country was announced in 2016, the President of Uruguay declared that: "the company will allocate four billion dollars, and Uruguay will have to invest one billion dollars" to meet UPM's infrastructure requirements (4).

However, as the government went about its "duties" (developing terms of reference, receiving budgets, etc), that which social movements and organizations denounced from the beginning has come true: the real investment that Uruguay would be making is much larger—and the company's is much smaller—than what was originally stated. So much so, that infrastructure costs are currently estimated at more than four billion dollars for Uruguay. Meanwhile, UPM will not invest more than 2.4 billion dollars, and it will be exempt from the vast majority of national taxes, due its locating and operating in a free trade zone (5).

In his statements to the press, the Minister of Transport insists that the new train will be "a train by and for Uruguayans," referring to the transport of passengers and other freight that will be able to reach the country's capital via the new railroad (6).

However, **from start to finish, this infrastructure project responds to UPM's demands**. The more than 270 km of railroad starts at UPM's port terminal, goes through the free trade zone in Pueblo Centenario where the UPM pulp mill will be installed, and ends up at Paso de los Toros—where UPM's waste plant will be located. According to the agreement, **Uruguay is obligated to allow UPM unrestricted access to the new railroad 24 hours a day, 365 days a year**—starting from the date the pulp mill is completed. It is also obligated to guarantee at least six daily trips in both directions to transport pulp (mill <--> port), and one round trip per day for the shipment of chemical products to the mill (2).

Nothing would indicate that this railroad is meant for other uses. For the time being, the project does not have other cargo terminals, nor does it involve the logistics necessary to transport other kinds of goods along the route. Furthermore, **existing passenger trains in Uruguay are not compatible with this new infrastructure**. The project is so much in service to the company that both the people and the media call it "the UPM train."

According to representatives from the Railroad Workers' Union and the State Railways Administration (AFE, by its Spanish acronym), the machines that AFE has used so far to transport cargo and passengers will definitely not be able to run on the new tracks built for UPM (7). AFE provided a passenger service in small sections that ended on June 14<sup>th</sup> of this year, due to the start of construction for UPM.

### ***Impacts of "The UPM Train"***

The new railway will be built on the existing route, which dates back to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At that point in time, most of the towns that one sees today along the route did not exist; many of them came into being because of the train stations. According to official data, around 38,000 people live within the area of influence of this project (8).

The project will affect people in several departments, with direct consequences such as the expropriation of their land or the impacts caused by the **noise and vibrations**, etc. While the proposed project would maintain the current railway embankment, it would involve dismantling the existing tracks to install adequate infrastructure to guarantee **transit of**



**freight trains 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. These trains are 800 meters long** and have engines that can reach a maximum speed of 100 kilometers per hour (9).

A project of this magnitude, designed for the **industrial transport of pulp and dangerous chemical products**—such as caustic soda and sulfuric acid—should not pass through urban centers. An estimated 350,000 tons of sulfuric acid, caustic soda, fuel, limestone and salt will be transported annually between the port terminal and the plant (10).

The suspension of AFE's passenger service **to initiate construction for UPM affected some 1,300 people**—mainly workers who used this service to commute daily between Montevideo and relatively nearby towns. The main advantage of this service for these users was the considerably lower cost of the ticket and the speed relative to the buses in the metropolitan area, as well as greater comfort (11).

For railroad workers, the UPM train marks the beginning of the end of the state railroad monopoly, opening the door to private companies that will use a railroad built with money from the Uruguayan people.

**Infrastructure for what and for whom?** The infrastructure projects of a country should respond to the needs of the people and not to the demands of foreign capital. In this case, the UPM project is not taking into account existing territorial studies, or norms within the framework of Uruguay's Land-Use Planning Law.

### ***Citizen Opposition and Constitutional Initiatives***

UPM does not have social endorsement because the population is divided. There are those who want new jobs and dream of improving their quality of life, betting on promises from UPM and the government. And there are others who express their discontent, citing not only socio-environmental impacts, but—in the first place—the million-dollar investment that the country must make to ensure the company receives considerable benefits.

“On the Side of the Tracks” is a group of residents from Montevideo who will be affected by the UPM train. They are denouncing the impacts of the railway project, and defending the rights of people who live near the tracks along its route through Montevideo. They are taking action with human rights organizations, Parliament, Municipal Government authorities and the Ministry of the Environment, etc., denouncing all kinds of irregularities in the train approval process (12). They emphasize that the **trains will travel at high speeds**, which implies vibrations, noises and air pollution. “The trains are eight blocks long and will travel at 60-80 kilometers per hour; they have to travel at that speed because they have six hours to get from the Port of Montevideo to Paso de los Toros. If they take longer than six hours, they do not get paid. That is why it is fenced off with barriers; the barriers are not for the protection of people, but for the protection and transit of the train.” (13)

The Movement for a Sustainable Uruguay (MOVUS, by its Spanish acronym) has also been monitoring the infrastructure projects, analyzing and denouncing the different irregularities in the process and promoting public debate on the issue. This is despite the fact that the information given to the people has always been incomplete—shared only upon citizens' requests for access to public information, or provided once actions have already occurred (14).



The group “NO to the UPM train,” made up of people who live in Municipality C of Montevideo, is pushing forward a constitutional initiative to ban passage of the UPM train through that urban area. To this aim, it must obtain the signatures of 15% of the people authorized to vote in the municipality.

Similar initiatives are underway in various localities along the railroad track, including: Santa Bernardina, Durazno, Florida, Sarandí Grande, 25 de Mayo, Progreso, Canelones, La Paz; and other localities are joining.

Many informative talks, promoted by civil society organizations, are taking place in different neighborhoods of the country. On June 14<sup>th</sup>, a demonstration took place at the Montevideo train station, in recognition of the last passenger train that will travel for now, and for at least three years while construction for UPM is underway.

In June of this year, the “National Coordination of Social Organizations Against UPM” was formed to bring together the different social organizations that oppose the new mill.

The Coordination’s first action was to deliver a letter to the Honorary Consul of Finland in Uruguay, in order to let the Finnish government and citizenry know that there is growing social opposition to the UPM project in Uruguay. “This project agreed upon between UPM and the Uruguay’s executive branch – in an arbitrary and unconstitutional manner – constitutes a serious attack on the sovereignty, the environment, and human rights in the country,” denounced the organizations. “As inhabitants of this territory, we consider ourselves seriously affected in our legitimate rights and interests and we will appeal to all possible instances so that UPM2 is not carried out. For this reason, we make this call to the Finnish government and the UPM company to cease and desist from this megaproject,” the letter concludes (15).

*Lizzie Díaz*

*Member of the WRM Secretariat*

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## Infrastructure From and For Forest Communities: The MicroHydro Power in Long Liam, Sarawak



*Micro Dam Project, community of Long Liam, Malaysia. Ph: Bruno Munster Funds*

The year 2016 saw a great victory for indigenous peoples in Sarawak. The construction of the 162-metre high Baram Dam - which would have flooded 41,200 hectares of forests, displaced at least 26 indigenous villages and affected up to 20,000 people -, was cancelled. This decision came after repeated protests, blockades and opposition by indigenous people and allied networks. Two strategic road blockades were set up in 2013 and accomplished to remain for over two years: one to prevent workers entering the dam site and another one to prevent cement trucks and workers from constructing the access road to the Baram Dam.

The cancellation of the dam also meant that all the Native Customary Rights land seized for the dam site and the reservoir was returned to its original indigenous owners.

The mega-dam was part of the Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE), one of the five regional corridors in the country, which aim to encourage investment in energy-intensive industries by providing them access to energy, transport and communication infrastructure. Among the ten priority industries identified by SCORE, to which the Baram Dam would have provided energy for, are oil, aluminium, palm oil, timber and steel. (1)

After the cancellation of the mega-dam, the villagers of Long Liam, a community deep in the interior of Baram, who were among the thousands opposing the construction of a mega dam, joined forces to create and install the very much needed electrification and power source in their community. Something the mega dam would not have provided. In 2019, a Micro Hydro Power started working in Long Liam. (2)

The story of resistance against the Baram Dam stands nowadays not only as a source of inspiration for many communities threatened by mega dams, but also for those trying to reclaim infrastructure to their own needs and start a bottom-up inclusive energy process.

Bryan Anderson, who is from Long Liam, carried out two interviews with people from his village. Both interviewees actively participated in protesting against the mega dam and led communal work (*gotong-royong*) during the construction of the Micro Hydro Power.

Sam, the first person interviewed, is one of the lead-speakers for the Micro Hydro Project and Nina is a woman who plays an important role in the woman group (*kaum ibu*) and knows peoples' rights regarding the ancestral Native Customary Rights land. (3)



Their testimonies help us understand how can infrastructure look like when having the needs of communities as the starting point as well as the many challenges and obstacles that they still need to confront.

### **Why were you opposing the dam and how did you organize the resistance against this project?**

SAM: I have several answers to your question. My first answer is that we chose to reject the Baram Dam because a mega project like that would have destroyed the ecosystems around the construction area. Secondly, it would have cost us our homes; all the affected Baram people would have lost their homes. Thirdly, the flood from the construction of the dam would have also cost us our inherited land, where we grow various kinds of crops. It would have destroyed the crops that have been planted by our forefathers, which we keep harvesting for years now. My fourth answer to your question is that the Baram Dam would have brought a detriment to the Baram people in terms of having to rebuilt new settlements for their families.

NINA: For me, we rejected the dam because we need the land in order to live. Our land is the source of our food and other resources. The dam would have caused a serious damage to everything that we have now. It is not a small matter. The dam would also have caused us to flee from our homes and settle elsewhere.

The first thing we did to show our rejection towards the dam was doing a demonstration at Nahah Uve' [an area of Baram riverbank close to where the mega project location was proposed] during their site visit. We really did not want the dam. The next thing we did was to hold a blockade at the Kilometre 15 Camp of the Long Kesseh road because, during that time, we heard that the equipment and machineries for the dam were going to be transported via that road. We set up the blockade in order to stop the people from bringing their equipment to the proposed dam site.

### **What is the infrastructure that you actually need as a community?**

SAM: As a community, we really need electricity, but not in a way that the energy facility construction would destroy our nature or river. The second thing that we need is a proper connection road. A proper road will make it easier for us to transport our agricultural products to town. This proper road would also provide better connections for the community within the Baram area.

NINA: We long to have infrastructure projects, such as a telecommunication facility, a hospital, a school and a road. But what we need the most is a telecommunication facility because it will make things so much easier for us these days. We do need a hospital as well, but we already have one in Long San. However, during the rainy season, when the river rises, it is difficult and dangerous for us to go in case there is an emergency, thus, we need a proper road.

### **Now your community has a micro hydro project for meeting the energy needs of the community. How did the project come about?**

SAM: An NGO suggested that we build a micro hydro at Long Liam. So, in the community of Long Liam, people agreed on mutual cooperation and worked together to complete the micro



hydro project from the start to the end.

NINA: This project became a reality because the members of the community agreed to have this friendlier micro hydro project rather than the damaging mega hydro dam. We feel that we will benefit from this project.

### **Are you satisfied with the project? What were the challenges?**

SAM: To be honest, I feel a little dissatisfied because the energy generated by the micro hydro is yet insufficient to provide the electricity that is needed by the whole village. Despite that, we are happy because although the power generated is not enough to support all electrical appliances in our homes, it had helped us to at least light up our homes. The main challenge that we need to face with this micro hydro is to keep a continuous water supply. We are not able to run the micro hydro if there is insufficient water and that is a problem that we are facing right now. We will not use the micro hydro during drought season due to less water supply but we are able to use it during the rainy season.

NINA: We are quite satisfied with the micro hydro at this early stage. However, issues have risen after using it for some time and, due to this, we started feeling a little dissatisfied. The micro hydro cannot provide us 24 hours power supply. On top of that, the power generated by the micro hydro is insufficient to accommodate the power supply needed for the whole village. Another challenge is that the intake tank of the micro hydro is not strong enough to withstand the force of the water current, causing it to leak from beneath its reservoir. That is why we welcome any improvement that can be made to this project in order to provide us with sufficient power supply, because this is definitely a technology that we would want for our village.

### **In your opinion, do you think that local small-scale energy projects could be replicated in nearby villages in Baram, or other places?**

SAM: I would love to recommend this micro hydro to other villages. It is a very clean form of energy because it does not need fuel to run. For a community from rural areas like us, this is an advantage because we do not need to go to the nearest fuel seller to fill it up. Thus, it is also very economical. I would also like to suggest that in the future, should this project be implemented in other villages, professional engineers or personnel should be invited to join the local team in order to study about the water sources and flows. This way the micro dam could be built in the best way possible, thus enabling the community to enjoy the electricity regardless of the weather condition. This is to avoid unhappy villagers due to insufficient power supply.

NINA: I don't see any reason why it should not be replicated in other places. The only consideration is to be sure that the nearby river flow can accommodate enough flow to power up the micro hydro to generate electricity for the whole village. However, since we are facing challenges with the one we have now, maybe some improvements are needed before implementing it in other places. It is best to also have another alternative small-scale energy source next to the micro hydro, such as solar energy, so that when the water flow is not strong enough during the dry season, we can switch to solar energy for power supply.

(1) <http://smasarawak.com.my/cgi/subissues.cgi?file=56is.txt>

(2) The Micro Hydro project was supported by SAVE Rivers and the Bruno Munster Fund.

(3) The original names have been changed for security reasons



## Brazil: The Struggle of the Xinguara Peoples in the Amazon



*Construction site of Norte Energia in the region of Altamira in Pará, Brazil*

**The struggle against the Belo Monte Dam is still alive in the Xingu River area, state of Pará.** It is creative and feminine in nature. This struggle not only recognizes, definitively, that this mega-venture is socially, economically and environmentally unviable, but also **aims to guarantee that other predatory projects are not installed in the region.** An example of such a predatory project is Canadian mining company, Belo Sun, which is threatening the municipality of Volta Grande and everyone who lives near a river that has already been destroyed. Furthermore, peoples of the territory still have to deal with the denial of their basic rights, the increase in violence in the city and countryside, and the enormous challenges of continuing to produce after the impacts of “Belo Monster.”

Today, the need to oppose Jair Bolsonaro’s extreme right-wing government and its predatory vision for the Amazon seems obvious. However, it is important to remember that there are at least two stages of the landmark and ongoing fight against the Belo Monte dam. Initially, at the end of the military dictatorship in the 1980s, the installation of the dam was momentarily stalled. This was thanks to the mobilization of indigenous peoples of the Xingu, social movements, river-dwelling families, the Xingu Prelacy and the Ecclesiastical Grassroots Communities, who recognized the federal government and this project as enemies. In the second stage, when—for the first time—a self-declared left-wing group governed Brazil, the struggle for hearts and minds was not only between the ruling class and the working class, but to a large extent among popular groups themselves.

That is, the struggle that has taken place in this region since the first white colonizers arrived—which included the challenges of the rubber tapping period and the Trans-Amazonian Highway—now is in a distinctive chapter. The region has shown that **conflict will arise against any party or organization that does not stand with the people, regardless of its declared ideological spectrum, party flag or institution.** In the same radical way (in the sense of being rooted in non-negotiable popular demands), groups led or formed mostly by women continue to raise their voices against any project of death in the region. They are decrying the established bad-development model, and proposing a path of peace as the fruit of justice.

### ***Life Threatened in the Municipality of Volta Grande do Xingu***

The complexity of the Xingu river, the biodiversity that depends on it, the productive activities that historically have been developed along it and because of it, are threatened—following



the installation of the dam, which forced 30,000 people to leave their lands. The most emblematic case, however, is that of Volta Grande do Xingu, a region of about 100 km<sup>2</sup>, where hundreds of river-dwelling indigenous Juruna and Arara families live. They learned to live with the seasonal cycles of the river, whose flow increases or diminishes depending on the time of year. **With the definitive installation of the dam in 2015, this flow is controlled by the Norte Energia consortium. Since then, agriculture, livestock production and fishing have been significantly impacted.** This shows how the so-called “Consensus Hydrograph”—proposed by the company to simulate the flow of water in the region, and which would come into effect after installation of the last turbines in late 2019—is destined to fail.

“The idea is that IBAMA (Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources), researchers, Norte Energia and the communities monitor whether the flow released by Norte Energia damages the fauna, flora and life as a whole in Volta Grande for six years following completion of the dam construction. However, from what we have observed, we already know that **the impacts are very severe and tend to worsen**, which puts the consortium up against a wall. If it releases the necessary amount of water, it will not produce the energy it is supposed to; and if it produces that energy, the life of the Xingu will die,” says Cristiane Carneiro, researcher of aquatic life and traditional populations of the Xingu region. According to Carneiro, several researchers had thoroughly denounced this before the crushing process that the governments of Lula and Dilma used to impose the project.

“The fish can swim upstream but not downstream. Every day that goes by, it is harder for us to fish, because they are decreasing in number and size,” observes José Pereira, a fisherman, farmer and artisanal miner. According to Pereira—also known as Pirulito—it’s not only that productive activity has been jeopardized, but also that his community, Ressaca—in the municipality of Senador José Porfírio—has not received satisfactory compensatory measures from Norte Energia and the respective prefectures. **“They say that they have put money here, that they have spent billions, but I don’t see anything here; I just see people getting poorer and poorer,”** he says.

And if there is a significant feeling of abandonment in Ressaca, which is one of the best-structured communities of the region, the situation is considerably more challenging for Eduvirgis Ribeiro’s family, who live in Travessão do Miro in Senador José Porfírio. His family invests mainly in the production of cacao, among other crops, but much of the production is lost because the impact of the dry season is reaching the water table and drying the igarapés [small navigable streams]. This makes it difficult to raise small animals and for the crops to survive. “Our production and our way of life here are jeopardized, and we have the feeling of being invisible to Norte Energia and government officials. If we want any kind of improvement, it must come from our own pockets,” Eduvirgis says.

### ***Invisible Impacts***

María de Fátima, better known as “Baiana,” represents hundreds of inhabitants of the area near the mouth of the Iriri River, as well as the Arara indigenous peoples in Altamira. The group she leads, comprised of people who still have not been officially recognized as victims of the impacts of Belo Monte, began to fight in 2018 for this recognition and for basic public policies. Since then, her community has experienced the near disappearance of fish, diseases caused by water contaminated from the flooding of the forest, and difficulties in





accessing health and educational services. For these reasons, they decided to denounce this cruel reality at the appropriate institutions.

“Our living situation here is egregious. Previously, we would fish and wait for the intermediary to come take our production. Now with the disappearance of the fish, many of us go hungry; not to mention that one of our neighbors died because he got sick, and nobody had fuel to take him to the city. So it was time to say ENOUGH,” says Baiana.

### ***Youth and Adolescents***

Belo Monte displaced inhabitants from several islands in Altamira and from other towns of the territory. It also attracted a large number of workers to the municipalities of the region, which caused a significant increase in violence. This mainly impacts black youth and adolescents—especially in Altamira. “When the project came, it expelled river-dwelling people, who had a strong relationship with the river. That not only caused major mental health problems for people who had to go somewhere they didn’t want to; it also caused them to practically lose their main productive activity, fishing. And it caused a significant increase in violence—an **absurd increase in killings of black youth**,” says Antônia Melo, coordinator of the Xingu Alive Forever Movement.

“It is not safe for us to walk down the street. We know that they [different kinds of gunmen that are in the city] not only kill who they have to kill, but also who they want to. I do not have small children anymore, but I have a grandson, and I am worried sick that they could confuse him for someone else and kill him. That’s why I worry every time he has to go out,” says Raimunda Gomes. Gomes is a member of Xingu Alive and the River Dwellers Council, an organization created after peoples of the region won the right to return to lands on the banks of the river, and as an instrument to guarantee that those who deserve to return be able to.

This process, unprecedented in experiences with dams in Brazil, is mostly driven by women leaders. They are dealing with Norte Energia’s lack of follow-through in terms of meeting deadlines, as well as the virtually irreversible process of the youth: “The current generation of youth and adolescents have been away from our river territory for years; they have already built a relationship with the city and they don’t want to live by the river again; so I don’t know what will happen to artisanal fishing once the parents are gone,” says Josefa Oliveira, also from the River Dwellers Council. According to Oliveira, there are a couple problems: 1) many of the adolescents who went to the city after their parents were evicted from their land are not interested in life on the islands and 2) in the territory there is a lack of perspective from secondary education studies. “I was able to study only because I came to the city. There was no education after elementary school where my grandfather, a river dweller, lived,” she says.

### ***The Impact on Xinguara Women***

In the cities near Belo Monte, the levels of **violence, child sexual exploitation and human trafficking grew exponentially**, because the region was not prepared to receive the large influx of workers that were needed to build the dam.

“Destructive ventures like Belo Monte hurt women in particular, through an **increase in domestic violence and femicide**. We are the ones who are most impacted by the diseases contracted through the **loss of and expulsion from our territories**, homes, families and community ties; **the death of our sons and daughters** due to violence from **drug**



**trafficking; sexual abuse; prostitution; poverty; unemployment and other losses.** With companies and governments committing so many violations against human rights, women have problems with depression, high blood pressure, deep sadness and some cases that have led to death,” alerts Antônia Melo, coordinator of the Xingu Alive Forever Movement. According to Melo, this reflection is based on a diagnosis made by a group of psychologists and psychiatrists from the University of Sao Paulo (USP) who worked with several families in Altamira.

Another issue is that a project of Belo Monte’s magnitude has a huge impact on the daily lives and living conditions of the local population. At the highest point of the project in June 2014, the number of workers at Belo Monte reached 33,000, even though a maximum of 19,000 workers was projected.

**“In places where large projects are installed, sexual exploitation and prostitution become requirements in order for the project to exist and be completed—as historically one is tied to the other,”** says researcher Assis Oliveira, coordinator of the investigation, *Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras de Belo Monte: percepções sobre exploração sexual e prostituição* [Male and Female Workers of Belo Monte: Perceptions on Sexual Exploitation and Prostitution]. From 2013 to 2014, the study identified “a total of six different kinds of sexual exploitation, which involved—to a greater or lesser degree—the presence of boys, girls and adolescents.” Under this model of development, places where large construction projects like Belo Monte are installed and houses of prostitution are historically linked (1).

**“Xinguara women are the most impacted, but they are also the ones who fought, fight and will continue to fight the most; and that is how we are going to resist Belo Sun,”** announces Antônia Melo.

In May 2019, the second *Xingu: Land of Resistance* workshop was held, with the slogan “Defenders of Human Rights and Nature.” It was convened by the Xingu Alive Forever Movement, the Trans-Amazonian and Xingu Black People’s Training Center, the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesiastical Network, the Xingu Prelacy, the Pará Society for the Defense of Human Rights and the Federal University of Pará. Hundreds of leaders participated in the gathering, and **countless reports of threats and conflicts—directly and indirectly caused by Belo Monte—**were documented. The document will be used as a political instrument to pressure authorities to take urgent measures related to each case; but the gathering also served to show that resistance in the territory remains strong.

Likewise, in late August 2019, there will be a regional workshop to **specifically discuss the murder of youth and adolescents in the countryside and city of Altamira, and throughout the entire Xingu region.** This workshop is promoted by Xingu Alive, the Xingu Women’s Collective and the Movement of Women from the Countryside and City of Altamira, along with CEDECA Emmaus and regional youth and adolescent organizations. Its objectives are to strengthen the struggle, so that all cases of violence are resolved and the responsible parties are punished; and to propose public policies for the prevention of violence.

*Xingu Alive Forever Movement (Movimiento Xingu Vivo para Siempre), Brazil*

(1) <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/entrevistas/552175-grandes-obras-como-belo-monte-incidentam-e-fomentam-o-mercado-do-sexo-no-brasil-entrevista-especial-com-assis-oliveira>



## RECOMMENDED

### **China: Villagers sue a timber company and a local government for drying up their water sources**

In a context of a thriving eucalyptus plantations industry in China, around 150 Yong'an residents are suing both Guangxi Lee & Man Forestry Technology Ltd. — the timber company that operates the nearly 300,000-square-meter eucalyptus plantation — and the local government body that partnered with it, for violating a clause in Chinese contract law that bans businesses from damaging public interests. Villagers claim the eucalyptus sucks up water from three mountain springs, leaving little for them to use for cooking and rice farming farther downstream. This is the first case of this kind in China. Read further (in English) here: <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1004021/as-a-timber-plantation-flourishes%2C-village-dissent-takes-root>

### **The Amazon: Roads and Highways are Hubs of Deforestation**

The study, “Amazonía en la encrucijada” (“The Amazon at the Crossroads”), by the Amazon Geo-Referenced Socio-Environmental Information Network (RAISG, by its Portuguese acronym) presents an overview of the pressure caused by roads in Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Perú and Venezuela. According to the report, of the 136,000 kilometers of roads mapped in the region, at least 26,000 are in protected natural areas and indigenous territories. For example, in the Brazilian Amazon, the report states that most deforestation occurs in the vicinity of roads. The report also suggests that this trend is increasing. You can read it at this link (in Spanish):

<https://encrucijada.amazoniasocioambiental.org/story/caminos-selva-adentro>

### **Clean Energy? Dams that Destroy in Guatemala**

In the Yich K'isis region of Guatemala, the construction of three hydroelectric dams has been planned: Pojom I, Pojom II and San Andrés. These dams will receive water by diverting the Negro, Pojom, Yalwitz Primavera, Varsovia and Palmira rivers. Communities are struggling to resist the imposition of these dams; this led to the death of a community member in 2017. A short video from the Avispa Midia news portal shares the voices of the women and men in the struggle to defend their territories and lives. You can watch the video at this link (in Spanish): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWossKhLuFA>

### **How the rich and powerful hijack resistance victories**

Under the ISDS (investor-state dispute settlement) parallel justice system for corporations and the rich, companies can sue countries when they think that government decisions or court rulings – even ones whose explicit aim is to protect people or the environment – affect their profits. These lawsuits bypass domestic courts and take place before an international tribunal of arbitrators: essentially three investment lawyers who decide whether private profits or public interests are more important. A report from Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), Friends of the Earth and the Transnational institute describes 10 noteworthy ISDS lawsuits that have been used as a corporate weapon against communities and resistance victories. Read the report (in English) here: [https://corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/Red%20Carpet%20Courts\\_1.pdf](https://corporateeurope.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/Red%20Carpet%20Courts_1.pdf)

### **Dam displacements in Malaysia: gender insights**

A paper from researcher Carol Yong critically reviews issues of dam-induced displacement and resettlement of indigenous communities in Malaysia from a gender lens. To understand



why compulsory land acquisition is traumatic for rural indigenous peoples within the larger context of dam displacement in Malaysia, it is important to understand customary land rights and tenure systems, the role of *adat* (customary law) in the regulation of such rights, and what land means to both women and men,

Read the report (in English) here <https://epub.oeaw.ac.at/0xc1aa5576%200x003aaf92.pdf>

### **WRM Bulletin “Voices from the ground: communities in movement and resistance strategies” in Swahili**

Despite the many profound damages that industries cause in the world’s forests, they also cause something else to emerge: the strong and diverse resistance movements of affected communities defending their territories, livelihoods, cultures and even their existence. The struggle continues!

Read the bulletin (in Swahili) in the following link: <https://wrm.org.uy/241-swahili/>

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#### **Bulletin of the World Rainforest Movement (WRM)**

This Bulletin is also available in French, Spanish and Portuguese

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