



Report of the Debate “Biofuels – implications for the South” Dutch Parliament, The Hague, June 29, 2007

Introduction

On 29 June, the Global Forest Coalition and Corporate Europe Observatory organised a biofuels debate in the Dutch Parliament, in cooperation with the Environment Committee of the Dutch Parliament. The aim of the hearing was to analyse the implications for developing countries of the EU's policy to promote biofuels (now often called agrofuels). More than 15 representatives of non-governmental organisations, Indigenous Peoples' organisations and other social movements discussed the direct and indirect impacts of agrofuel production on the global South.

The European Commission is expected to come forward with a proposal for a revised Biofuels Directive, that includes a 10% mandatory target for agrofuel use in transport by 2020. The possible negative implications of this policy have been widely recognised. The 2007 Spring Council meeting of the European Union has agreed to the 10% target *provided* that it can be met with 'sustainably produced' agrofuels. At this moment, there are strong doubts as to how such sustainability could be guaranteed, especially if one takes into account the so-called macro-effects of biofuels, which cannot be addressed by criteria and certification systems for specific crops.

Agrofuels are being promoted as a measure to help mitigate climate change, but if you take into account the sheer volume of plantation crops that would be needed to provide the fuels for 10% of the entire transport volume of the European Union in 2020, it is clear that they pose a major threat to both sustainable development and the climate. The core message of the representatives is that the promotion of large scale agrofuel development is having devastating social and environmental impacts in producer countries, especially for groups like indigenous peoples.

Opening address, Minister Cramer

Minister Jacqueline Cramer expressed her appreciation to the Global Forest Coalition and Corporate Europe Observatory for setting the scene, and her serious concern that biofuels can have severe impacts on the future of our planet if they are not produced in the right way. She stated that the Dutch Government has a responsibility to work towards a sustainable energy supply, but also has a responsibility to solve the climate change problem. They cannot rely on solar and wind energy only, so they also need other sustainable energy sources.

On a macro level, biofuels can have indirect effects on biodiversity and can be in competition with food production. It is important to have a dialogue with different stakeholders. We need not only sustainability criteria on a micro-level but also additional policies to ensure sustainability on a macro-level. She highlighted that a land use planning system is one of the main tools to ensure that the land is used in the proper way.

The choice the Netherlands has made is to set up a system and keep experimenting to find a more sustainable form. She cautioned that if a moratorium on agrofuels means that countries stop producing agrofuels, they will not gain the experience to do this in a proper and sustainable way, supported by society.

Mina Susana Setra, AMAN, West Kalimantan, Indonesia
Oil palm plantations are a tremendous disaster for indigenous peoples.

The first presentation was made by Mina Susana Setra from the Indigenous Peoples' Organization AMAN from West Kalimantan. The Niut mountain area on the Indonesia-Malaysia border is threatened by an ambitious government project to establish 1.8 million hectares of oil palm plantations. This project will destroy the environment and biodiversity; create social problems, poverty, political alienation, and cultural disintegration; and have negative impacts on the livelihood of indigenous peoples. Numerous people who have tried to protect their land have been tortured and put in jail for trying to protect their land.



“Is this the way to reduce climate change?”, asked Mina. Agrofuels are not going to reduce the poverty of these communities. In Kalimantan there is little forest left. Mina Susana Setra urged that the expansion of oilpalm plantations be stopped by reducing the demand for palmoil, and by improving the system and quality of existing plantations. She called for support to solve the land conflicts and human rights abuses related to the agrofuel demand from developed countries.

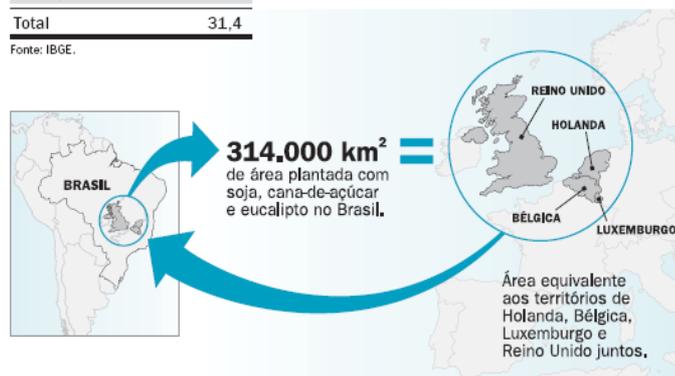
Mateus Trevisan, Landless Farmers and Rural Workers Movement (MST), Brazil
Agroindustry and agrofuels: an explosive mixture

Mateus stressed that in Brazil, agrofuels have been produced for about 30 years, especially sugar cane ethanol. The actual area planted with possible agrofuel crops is 22.2 million hectares of soy, 6.2 million hectares of sugar cane, and 3 million hectares of eucalyptus. That is 314.000 km² of land, equivalent to the size of the Benelux countries and UK combined.

Área plantada atual (milhões de hectares)

Soja	22,2
Cana-de-açúcar	6,2
Eucalipto	3,0
Total	31,4

Fonte: IBGE.



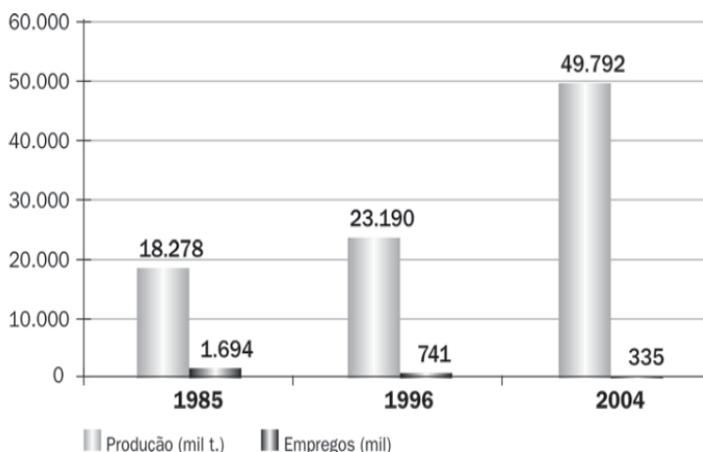
What are the impacts of these monocultures?

1. Illegal logging to give space to new plantations of sugar, soy or eucalyptus.
2. Of the 204 million hectares of original Brazilian ‘Cerrado’ land, 57% has already been destroyed and half of what is left has been strongly altered. In the past 5 years, 107,000 km² of the Amazon was deforested.
3. The majority of Brazilians used to be small farmers, but now only 20% live in the countryside. Monocultures, highly mechanised agriculture and agribusiness have caused massive migration. The expulsion of small farmers from their lands, often by violent means, is generating rural conflicts: from 1960 to 2005, 60% of the rural population relocated to the cities; in 2006 alone, 10 million people were involved in land conflicts that related to 25 million

hectares of land; from 1996 to 2006 there were 386 assassinations of farmers' and workers' leaders.

4. There has been a concentration of lands in the hands of large landholders, in some cases on the basis of government donations. 1% of the landowners own 46% of the land.
5. The increased use of agro-toxics and other agrochemicals is affecting the health of workers and the populations of neighboring areas, especially where there has been aerial fumigation: Brazil is among the main consumers of agrochemicals in the world, of the 150,000 tons of pesticides consumed annually in Brazil, sugar cane cultivation is responsible for the use of 20,000 tons, that is, 13%.
6. Large plantations provide only 2.5% of agricultural employment, and medium farms provide a mere 10.2%. Small farms, in contrast, provide 87.3% of agricultural jobs. Soy production has gone up, but the number of jobs has dramatically decreased.

Brasil – Produção e número de empregos na agricultura da soja



7. Rural and urban poverty is often caused by the expulsion of small farmers from their lands, as monocultures provide hardly any employment. Without other options, many farmers have been dislocated to the peripheries of the cities.
8. The labor conditions should also be taken into account. Sugarcane is cut by hand. People work 18 hours a day. They have to cut ten tons of cane a day but are paid only one Euro per ton of sugar cane cut. In 2006 100 people died from exhaustion cutting sugar cane.

The expansion of agrofuels will increase the problems just described. Mateus proposed to decrease their production, develop other alternative forms of energy, and change the agricultural system in Brazil. Agricultural production needs to be diversified instead of relying on monoculture production. The possible solutions should offer positive development and be sensitive to cultural needs.

Responses from Members of Parliament

The members of Parliament and Minister Cramer admitted that they were impressed by the case studies that were presented and highly concerned by the impacts described.

Liesbeth Spies (CDA) highlighted that the presentations offered useful input to the Parliamentary debate on this issue, planned for 4 July. She emphasized that the 10% target is only acceptable if it is sustainable on a large scale.

Helma Neppérus (VVD) stated that it was very useful to actually hear what is happening, as it provided a better insight into the impacts than written reports.

Harm-Evert Waalkens (PvdA) stated that he was an organic farmer and from that perspective he believed that the increase of agrofuel production provides both opportunities and threats. Human development is essential. He stated that he was in favour of setting up new criteria, including social aspects. He felt the solution was not in halting the production of agrofuels but to guide it towards more sustainable production, and that threats to people's security should be addressed. He stated that 200,000 tons of sustainable soy are already available, and that there might be an option to make agreements with farmers and try to make the main stream production sustainable.

Paulus Jansen (SP) asked the speakers whether another scenario is possible: is biomass production only a threat or can it also contribute to local community development by means of local energy production?

Minister Cramer, who had to leave the hearing halfway, asked whether it is possible to set up a system which could address all of the concerns, or whether we should stop promoting biomass production for energy purposes.

Wally Menne, Timberwatch Coalition, South Africa pointed out that there is an increased interest in the potential for agrofuels produced from trees, using new technologies. These technologies have not yet been proven, and neither have their environmental impacts been assessed. Wally gave an overview of the negative impacts of large scale tree plantations, which affect water resources, biodiversity, community health and security, and local economies.



*Large timber monoculture (left); FSC certified timber plantation after clear cutting (right).
Photo: Wally Menne*

According to Wally, development of agrofuels would not benefit consumers in the South, but only those in the North. The time has come for people to look at their own behaviour. Northern countries have to be prepared to look at the overall environmental and social costs of their consumption patterns. There is a lot of waste in European countries that can be used to produce biofuels. Tree plantations in South Africa are sometimes called a green cancer.

Tatiana Roa, CENSAT-FOE Colombia related that in Colombia, land tenure is a crucial issue and a key cause of social conflicts. Almost 90% of the land is in the hands of 1% of the population. More than 3 million people were displaced in recent years, often affecting entire communities and indigenous peoples.

The second issue is food sovereignty. Currently, 4 million hectares are used for producing food for national consumption in Colombia. But the Colombian government has set a target to expand the acreage of plantations to 6-8 million hectares by 2019. The price of corn, sugar and cooking oil is rising because of agrofuel production undermining the capacity of people to feed themselves and increasing hunger.

Tatiana's third point was that agrofuels are promoted as economically, socially and environmentally beneficial. The forestry sector is getting carbon credits. Tree and oil palm plantations receive subsidies, while the small food producers have lost their subsidies over the last years. In the event that small producers want to produce agrofuels, they often have to mortgage their land and go into debt. Furthermore, the country as a whole is increasing foreign debt to finance agrofuel plantation expansion. Sustainability criteria don't solve the grave problems caused by plantations and omit social and cultural issues. If Europe wants to take on the challenge of climate change, they must take the responsibility to reduce GHGs at their source. The world needs to solve existing inequities and not create new problems that exacerbate these inequities. We need policies that address climate change effectively and at the source, including strategies for transforming the patterns of overconsumption and production as well as support for public transportation systems.

A call for justice comes from **Ligia María Chaverra - Consejo Comunitario de Curvaradó (Choco), Colombia**. Agrofuel production, in the form of oil palm plantations, is an especially grave threat to indigenous peoples and afro-colombian peoples because it will destroy cultural diversity, languages and traditional knowledge of forest management. In the Pacific region of Curvarado, more than 100 people have been assassinated due to land conflicts. The small farmers continue to suffer from the armed paramilitary groups that control the land, many of whom are related to the oil palm industry. Maria: "We want to get our land back from the plantation owner. We want to take care of the butterflies, forests and the water. We invite the international community to support us, give us your solidarity and provide us with personal security. For our government it is easier to create another massacre than for us to make chicken soup".

Marcial Arias, Fundacion para el Conocimiento Tradicional, Panama stressed that in many discussions about the 'sustainability' of commodities, the cultural diversity aspects are forgotten. For indigenous peoples, however, cultural values like language and ways of life are essential for their survival as indigenous peoples. Agrofuels are promoted as providing jobs, but indigenous peoples have their own livelihood support systems and their own economic goals in life, and may not want to be incorporated in plantation systems.

Peter Bosip, CELCOR-Papua New Guinea confirms that the impacts of oil palm plantation expansion is similar in his country to the situation felt in Indonesia. He also explains that non-governmental organisations in Papua New Guinea collectively decided not to engage in the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil, because in their view it is not an instrument to stop the expansion, and because the process is dominated by industry.

Fiu Mataese Elisara, Ole Siosiomaga Society, Samoa emphasized the huge concerns of small island states in the Pacific regarding combating global climate change, as they are at the forefront of it. For small island states, climate change is an issue of life and death as their islands are severely affected by sea level rise, extreme weather patterns and cyclones. He challenged the Dutch members of Parliament to take some leadership in this issue since small island states of the world, and indeed the Pacific, are sovereign countries in the UN Charter and no developed country has the right to cause small island countries to cease to exist and become environmental refugees because of climate change.

Whilst the economy of scale make the island countries not directly involved in large scale monocultures and plantations used for biofuels, their impacts in exacerbating climate change instead of providing a solution, have led him to join the call by the countries of the South to stop agrofuel expansion. Fiu also challenged the Cramer criteria and asks who actually defines sustainability. He argued that it would be a huge injustice to fuel the cars of the EU countries by further plundering the resources of the South. Therefore, Fiu encouraged the Dutch Parliamentarians to continue their attempts to seriously consider the concept of ecological debt as the best way to enable small islands

and developing countries of the South to achieve sustainable development, and as genuine partners in development.

Other inputs from the public

Several members of the public suggested that agrofuels might be able to provide sustainable development benefits, but only if they are produced and used at a local level. In Africa especially, there is a clear need to ensure that agrofuels are not exported to other continents, but are used to fulfil local energy needs. Meanwhile, some local, sustainable small-scale projects are now threatened by large-scale corporate investments that are applying the unsustainable, large-scale plantation development model to Jatropha and other crops. It was stated that large-scale plantations are never sustainable. Taking into account our ecological footprint, several people proposed that agrofuels used in the Netherlands or Europe be locally or regionally produced.

Ana Filippini, World Rainforest Movement (WRM), Uruguay stressed that Uruguay has over one million tree plantations, almost all of which are FSC certified, yet these plantations have negative impacts on people and the environment. The WRM website contains many case studies. Tree plantations are strongly promoted as carbon sinks. The evidence from these plantations is that they contribute to the restriction of access for communities to national parks, food shortages, soil erosion and also negative impacts on women. Now it is said that second generation agrofuels will be the solution. But the same has been said for more than ten years about tree plantations. GM trees will reinforce the development of large scale plantations. Land must be used to feed people not cars!

Miguel Lovera, chairperson Global Forest Coalition and Alter Vida, Paraguay highlighted the impacts of soy monocultures in Paraguay, and the opposition against the certification initiative for so-called 'responsible' soy. By the end of the 20th century, most of the Atlantic Forest in Paraguay had been destroyed and replaced with large monoculture systems, including soy. Forest covered some 9 million hectares, now only 1.5 million remains. Agrofuel demand has already led to a steep rise in the soy price, and thus to further soy expansion. As one example, in the US farmers are switching to corn for ethanol production, therefore producing less soy, leading to a price increase in soy. A lot of herbicides (Monsanto's glyphosate-based Roundup) and insecticides are used. Last year saw the first case in which the Paraguayan courts acknowledged that the death of a child was caused by the spraying of toxics; but the problem is very widespread.

Is certifying 'responsible soy' possible?

If this is the trial period of certification, we will be seeing more of these impacts.

- Soy is a labor-extensive, capital-intensive crop. Soy production provides a level of employment of only one employee for almost 400 hectares. Normally, five hectares would ensure economic stability family of five to six people.



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Abandoned home in a soyfield of the Itapua Province, Paraguay

- Certification does not prevent further land concentration, depopulation or rural and urban misery among Indigenous Peoples and landless farmers.
- Certification cannot address price increases due to other farmers switching crops.
- Investing in agricultural commodity production in times of climate change is a risky development option.

The National Federation of Farmers in Paraguay, the national association of NGO networks, and others have clearly rejected the "Roundtable on Responsible Soy" because of the misguided concept of the process.

Call for a moratorium

Lastly, Simone Lovera highlighted that various networks of civil society organisations have called for a moratorium on EU imports of agrofuels from large scale monoculture plantations; and on their promotion through targets and incentives, including tax breaks, subsidies, and financing through carbon trading mechanisms, international development aid, or loans from international financial institutions such as the World Bank. Such a moratorium will allow time for the in depth study of the tremendous impacts of agrofuels, and for a timely dealing with the adverse impacts already felt by monoculture expansion serving markets other than agrofuels.

Conclusions

Some of the main recommendations put forward during the debate include:

- The need to implement an immediate moratorium on support for the import of agrofuels, so that we can “think before we act” and avoid further devastation.
- Local, small-scale production of agrofuels should serve local energy needs, especially in Africa. Local peoples’ needs should be prioritized.
- If Europe wants to proceed in consuming agrofuels, it should produce them in a socially, environmentally and culturally sustainable manner in Europe itself.
- Analyze the existing lessons learned about the social and environmental impacts of agrofuel production in countries like Brazil and Indonesia instead of implementing “experiments” that might lead to disastrous consequences for local communities and the environment.
- Indirect impacts and macro-impacts of the expansion of monoculture production by the push for agrofuels cannot be addressed by ‘sustainability’ criteria or certification mechanisms. Monitoring and compliance are a huge problem in producer countries.
- Do not introduce sustainability criteria and certification systems on the basis of existing systems like the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil and the Roundtable on Responsible Soy, which cannot address the macro-effects of the expansion of these crops. Further it is important to recognize the experiences with these Round Tables related to (failing) stakeholder participation to even rejection of these processes by local social movements and civil society organizations.
- Any sustainability standards and criteria, if appropriate, should include social and cultural aspects.
- Implement a risk assessment before further developing and promoting so-called “second generation” agrofuels, the promotion of which is encouraging the rapid expansion of tree plantations, genetically modified trees and other genetically modified crops and micro-organisms.
- Avoid using the term ‘marginal’ or ‘degraded’ lands when referring to territories in developing countries. All lands in the South have a function for local communities and/or for biodiversity. In particular, Indigenous Peoples like pastoralist peoples often depend on lands that are easily classified as ‘marginal’.
- Climate change should be addressed by taking other measures, such as reducing the volume of transport, and focusing more on the promotion of truly renewable energy sources such as wind and solar energy. Climate change should never be used as an excuse to *increase* the ecological and social footprint of the industrialized world. Reducing GHG emissions should first be done at their source.
- The land conflicts and human rights abuses that have been severely aggravated by the current agrofuels boom should be solved.