

GREEN ECONOMY

Nature: Our Spirit



Native People Against Corporations

In September 2014, a copy of a World Bank internal investigation was leaked to the British newspaper, The Guardian⁸. The Bank was accused of having failed to protect the rights of the Sengwer, one of the last groups of indigenous people living in Kenya's ancient forests. More than a thousand members of the Sengwer were evicted violently from their ancestral land by forest service guards and police. They had lived as hunters and gatherers in the forests of western Kenya for hundreds of years. The Kenyan government justified the action with the need to expand forest protection and ensure access to water. In the government's view, the eviction was justified in the name of climate protection and nature conservation. This forest project was part of a joint program of the World Bank and Kenyan government that was founded in 2007.

It belonged to a catalogue of measures initiated by the United Nations (UN) with the objective of protecting forests and maintaining their function as carbon stores (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation, REDD).

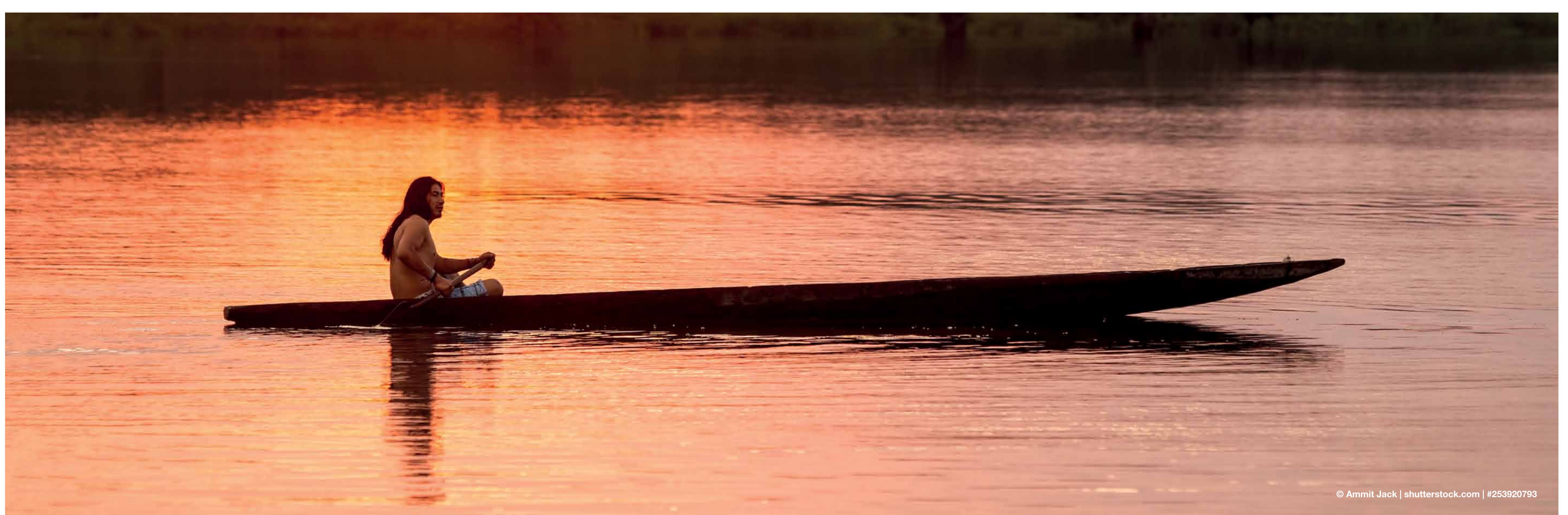
Monocultures Instead of Ancient Forests

REDD projects enable companies from industrialized countries to invest in forest protection and in return receive carbon credits. Forest projects comprise contributions to conservation such as creating and supporting protected areas or purchasing land to establish plantations as carbon sinks. According to the UN definition, monocultures are considered forests. Therefore, companies can cut down biodiverse ancient forests and replace them with plantations in order to produce industrial raw materials like palm oil, cellulose and sugar cane.

Companies thus pay for the conservation of forests located elsewhere and in return receive the permission to continue emitting greenhouse gas. The World Bank coordinates the cooperation between the respective governments and the industry.

Nature Has No Price

REDD projects already exist in numerous countries worldwide, such as Congo, Indonesia and Brazil. The representative of the Brazilian Huni Kui people, Ninawa Kaxinawá,⁹ is deeply concerned about these types of projects: "Nature has no price. It's our forest, it's our food, it's our spirit." His worries are shared by indigenous people worldwide, since REDD projects are often developed and implemented in regions that have been home to indigenous people and smallholders for many centuries. Nevertheless, it happens time and again that they are either driven off their land or are not allowed to use it because they lack a formal title of ownership. Reports on violations of human rights associated with REDD are on the increase, as in the case of the Sengwer in Kenya.



Interventions in Intact Forests

Other projects related to global carbon trading also pave the way to human rights violations. The Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty regulating greenhouse emissions, provides for lucrative carbon credits for the cultivation of renewable resources and the construction of hydroelectric dams. Both plantations and dam projects (the building of the plant, flooding of the reservoir and construction of roads for development) represent major interventions in intact forest regions and threaten the homes of native people.

The protest of indigenous peoples is becoming louder in the face of a power monopoly of international corporations, financial institutions, governments and non-governmental organizations. In some countries, those who oppose this preponderance of different interest groups face harassment, violence and even death. Nevertheless, resistance against the influence of the powerful and the rich has found international support thanks to the courageous fight of many indigenous human rights activists and environmentalists.

Hydroelectric Dams in the Tropics¹⁰

Investors in hydroelectric dams receive carbon credits even though the projects drive local people off their land and flood ancient forests. As the organic material in the reservoir decomposes, it emits greenhouse gases like methane.

⁸Vidal, John (September 29, 2014): World Bank accuses itself of failing to protect Kenya forest dwellers. The Guardian

⁹Global Alliance (December 14, 2014): REDD on trial: No justice as long as nature is property in law. <http://therightsofnature.org/tag/ninawa/>

¹⁰Fearnside, P.M. (2015): Emissions from tropical hydropower and the IPCC. Environmental Science & Policy doi:10.1016/j.envsci.2015.03.002 (in press)