

REDD IS THE COLOUR OF BLOOD

REDD MONEY IS BLOOD MONEY

REDD: Reducing (carbon) Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation

We are being offered blood money

We are being offered blood-price for extermination of our brothers and sisters

We are being offered money to sell out humanity's last defence and protection: our stewardship of all that our Mother Earth nurtures and cherishes

What is the price of the free and uncontaminated breath of a single healthy child?

What the price of a single exterminated species?

What is the price of identity, honour, sacred trusteeship?

REDD IS ASKING US TO NAME IT

REDD is a new global project cooked up by the World Bank Group and its "experts" to pay those who claim present or future income from deforestation and degradation of remaining natural forests, to refrain from cutting down forests. The climate change related rationale behind this new recipe is that the world (read industrialized world) is committed to a certain trajectory of market based economic growth fatally addicted to fossil fuel technology and high consumption patterns that it does not want to abandon or change. The recipe offers an attractive incentive to high-end emitters of GHGs to make further profits doing more of the same while washing their dirty hands by paying off forest conservation efforts in the global south. The cooks present the recipe as a new market-based scheme

that can contain carbon emissions using proxies, that is, natural forests as carbon sinks. Therefore, conserving such forests, in this scheme, becomes a profitable activity (non-activity) because southern governments, commercial entities and communities are going to be given a handsome purse, perversely paid, not to do a bad thing – cut down natural forests. Such a payment allows the industrialized north to continue to extract, pollute, acquire and profit according to their growth agendas. This is in essence REDD.

There are many difficulties in this market-based cook-up. It has been proposed that since there is no convincing way of assessing such prices at a small scale these assessments will have to be done at the national or similar level and money to be distributed through national programmes. The price of the fictitious commodity sought to be traded – the earth's ability to cleanse itself – is to be determined by "experts" appointed and sponsored by the industrialized countries. The problematic of how much carbon a sink can really sink is also yet to be resolved. On the one hand indigenous peoples' territories are the reserves of natural resources for industrial profits. We are being offered, however belatedly, a slice of this dubious cake of profits, with the sugar icing that it is for the common good of the world. Many of our communities are driven by various policies and laws to the edge of survival, and we hope that REDD will give us some money that will let us survive for another generation, even for another year. Some of us believe that these policies and programmes are going to be instituted anyway: whether we agree or not, so why should we not just go along with them and take what we can as benefits.

On the face of it, the scheme presents us with what is known as a "win-win" situation. One can well understand why and how poor indigenous communities may be easily and rapidly persuaded to buy into such schemes.

Of course, the payments will be evidence based: therefore, there will have to be guarantees that once paid for, such forests must be assured of intact survival, otherwise even the crude and possibly fictional calculations of their carbon capture capacity will not hold. Only those entities which can therefore ensure such stringently set standards of conservation will be entitled to receive payments of this kind: in Asia that means forestry departments, large corporations with experience in bookkeeping, large (corporatized) environmental NGOs and possibly the military [REDD proponents might claim that payments can also go to local people, smallholders, the governor of Aceh, etc.]. There will also have to be evidence that there was a clear intention that these forests were targeted for destruction in the first place, directly or indirectly. Otherwise, what would be the point of making payments in the first place?

The rank absurdity of such a proposal that invites those who have destroyed such life giving and sustaining qualities of earth to take charge of healing it is buried under complex financial formulae and a blinding panic that somehow these units of carbon capture and storage called natural forests, must be temporarily at least preserved until a more profitable and technologically complex manner of addressing carbon emissions reduction is dreamed up.

So where are we indigenous peoples of small and already excluded communities placed in this grand scheme?

We have always claimed, and rightly so, that we have collectively tended our forests, of which we have plenty, for generations because of our spiritual relationship with our lands and territories; our traditional knowledge and technologies are the reliable foundations of sustainability. Most of all we have defended our spiritual relationship and norms regarding Mother Earth and the use of her gifts, our position as guardians and trustees and claimed a special status on this basis, in the deliberations of government and nations. We have taken the moral high ground at the United Nations when we went to seek justice from States, our honour intact. So we have stood tall.

We have many concerns and challenges regarding this position of trusteeship, or stewardship. Some of these challenges are as old as human society, and we have learned to harmonize with these cultures and civilizations through interpretation of sacred laws, taboos, prayer, beliefs, dream, dance, songs, stories and traditional practice. Others, including the global depletion of biodiversity, desertification and loss of freshwater, of climate change and atmospheric pollution, the insidious aggression of the global market are new ones that threaten the very foundations and roots of our ways, and amount to the anaesthetizing of our minds and the soft enticements to ease and greed.

Our identities as indigenous peoples are founded on our relationship to our Mother Earth and our role as stewards of the lands, waters, air and all that lives in them. As stewards we are responsible for the survival and well being of our mother and all her children, to retain the balance of life and to tend these for future generations of all our brothers and sisters, of humanity and animal and plant life. How is the buying and selling of real or fictional bits of these sacred trusts compatible with our spiritual mission, with our purpose as peoples? Such marketing would extinguish us as indigenous peoples, who we are now, our heritage, who we have been and who we can become for the lives of all our children, to many generations to come. The marketeers want us to buy into this, because once we compromise our essential identity based on our spiritual principles, once we agree that our mother, our relations, are for sale then we will be for sale entirely, just a matter of fixing the price

No doubt we have entered the market in numerous ways before. In every such instance our ancestors have advised against it, have struggled to preserve as much as we can from such marketing. Often we have failed either to protect or to prevent market entry. In those instances where we have sanctioned it, we know very well how we have diminished. An example of this diminishing is illustrated in the trouble we have got ourselves into over bio-prospecting, the legal justifications for bio-piracy – there are instances galore the world over such as that of Taxol (an anti-cancer drug patented and marketed by Bristol-Myers Squibb), the controversy over the Hoodia cactus knowledge of the San (Pfizer and its partners are involved), patenting of the Maca plant of Peru, and so many other instances. We know the specific instances of these, each of us in our own situations. We also know where our adherence to our principles has cost our people lives, even survival to the last child. These are the ancestors that live in our histories and memories as the great ones. Our choice may very clearly be one in which we

decide to protect our principles or to give way, one more time. In the face of climate change and its connected phenomena relating to water, food production and biodiversity, this could very likely be the turning point for human survival. In each instance that we betray this trust, we further abandon who we are; we will have taken another great step away from our right to be indigenous. Like all that we have sold, all we will be is a commodity in their markets: just another disadvantaged group of individuals fighting for a share of the crumbs falling from corporate tables, for ever after. All they must do, then, is print out the cash.

As stewards it is our over-riding duty to safeguard those we are entrusted with. Whether global leadership recognizes or acknowledges us or not, we are those who protect the Earth and all her children; we are bound morally and spiritually, if we claim indigenous identity, to defend and protect even humanity from the consequences of even this devastating experiment with technologies and markets. Our survival as indigenous peoples depends on how seriously we take this duty. We cannot therefore agree to sell or sell out the health and well being of the least or most undeserving of our brothers and sisters for a payment, however large or small.

We are fools to imagine that any real benefits will accrue to us in any case, our experience with these corporate creatures should give us this much knowledge. Poverty is a creation of this market, and more and more poverty is being created even today as food itself and water is being taken away from the reach of a burgeoning millions.

Some of us have put forward the argument that since the scheme will be implemented whatever we say, we should exploit it for various political reasons, such as to force recognition of self-determination or to obtain some sorely needed money for our peoples' welfare. Are we then saying that if our brothers and sisters are being slaughtered anyway we should join the feast on their remains? Or scavenge among the leftovers, as a right to participation or self-determination?

Like all other proposals for our supposed welfare mooted by the World Bank and its allies, REDD will require taking indigenous lands away from us: away from our care, away from our stewardship. Already in many countries, laws and policies have been put in place to make this happen "legally". Already all sorts of programmes and formulae have been computed to let them do away with us cheaply. Already fraudulent claims of "good projects" and "good practice" are being advertised for us to follow, even by some of our own leadership, even in our own forums for debate and discussion, even in our own researchers' presentations. Every example of such market based projects endorsed as good by the World Bank Group and their coteries that was presented by two experts of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) at its seventh session in New York City has been refuted with experience of these projects implementation and impacts by indigenous peoples' delegates from those very areas in which are being implemented. Under such a controversial circumstance, can the UNPFII uphold such examples as good ones, or even welcome the report of the two experts in its entirety or accept the controversial recommendations therein? To do so would be a clear demonstration of bias. This bias is towards the World Bank, which the UNPFII sought to promote

by hook or by crook. How can our people take blood money so that the buyer and its promoters can continue to profit by killing our brothers and sisters in another part of this our earth?

Some of us talk of self-determination and our newly won battles in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Some of us say we have the right to do as we wish in our own territories, and all that is required is our free, prior and informed consent. Since when has freedom meant license to destroy and betray? Since when has our right to live been construed as the right to participate in or to profit from genocide? One way or other, as REDD is implemented there will be those of us who hold to the truth that our lands and our non-human brothers and sisters, our grandfathers and grandmothers that give us air and water and guard us from evil are not to be bartered in the money marts. Our survival as Indigenous Peoples depends on us holding to that truth even when our blood flows back into the earth we defend for it. The survival of humanity will depend on it. If we have claimed, as we have, guardianship and trusteeship of the Earth our mother, and have won even this right, albeit only on paper, from the United Nations and its member governments, what gives us the license to betray it now after it has served us in this?

The arguments of ethics and morality, of spirituality have held little if any force with the powers of the world of politics and commerce. It is we who have insisted on their place in the discourse of international governance, bringing our spiritual leaders and elders across thousands of miles to pray at the halls of the United Nations that our discussions there will serve the purpose of truth and honour, will serve the Earth. If they are today compelled to acknowledge us in their discussions, it is because of this. Nothing is agreed till everything is agreed – we heard this at the United Nations. We have no evidence that our demands and entreaties to States have given fruit – on mining, fossil fuel extraction, water, forests, bio-piracy, and the commons. “We walk to the future together, as indigenous peoples, in the footprints of our ancestors.”

How will we be served if we go back on these now? Who will we be, then? Not indigenous, not peoples.

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BLOOD OF OUR PEOPLES
WHO DEFEND THE EARTH

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