

<http://lipietz.net/Would-a-label-Not-produced-on-Paramilitary-land-be-possible>

Would a label "Not produced on Paramilitary land" be possible?

- Député européen (Verts, France) - Mes initiatives - La production d'agro-carburants. Le cas du palmier à huile. -



Date de mise en ligne : Wednesday 9 May 2007

Copyright © Alain Lipietz - All rights reserved

Because agrofuels will need strong support of public money, and because they are supposed to contribute to combating climate change, certification is being proposed as a way to guarantee their 'sustainability'. This in contrast to all already existing uses of the same commodities like food, feed and paper, for which no criteria exist at all. However, the fact that the EU will add another demand for these commodities, puts into question to what extent criteria can guarantee the sustainability of agrofuels, since agrofuels, if not expanding production in new areas, will displace production for other uses to elsewhere.

Because the economic interests behind agrofuels are so strong, many efforts are made to sustain a 'green' image for them. On the international level, there are numerous institutions and for a that have taken up the development of sustainability criteria of agrofuels, like the Global Bioenergy Partnership (an initiative of the G8) and the Round Table on Sustainable Biofuels (with WWF, World Economic Forum, major oil companies, Dutch and Swiss governments).

The European Commission has always said that it was important to have sustainable agrofuels only. Three EU member states are in the process of discussing their own set of criteria: the UK, Netherlands and Germany.

What is striking in all these initiatives is the complete lack of stakeholder involvement from the South. This has in the Dutch case clearly led to a flawed analysis of the problems, and therefore to some flawed indicators. Global Forest Coalition, World Rainforest Movement and others responded in a press release by saying *"The undersigned organisations express their disappointment that the committee responsible (the Cramer committee) has not consulted with civil society organisations in the South, where most biomass (for example for agrofuels), will be produced. The perspectives of smallholders, local communities and indigenous peoples, often suffering the consequences of monoculture expansion, have not been heard. As past experiences with developing certification schemes have shown, local stakeholder participation, especially in the criteria setting process, is crucial. Not only for its credibility, but also for a sound analysis of the social and environmental problems related to monoculture production."*

Importantly, the Cramer report does acknowledge the fact that certification in itself cannot solve the 'displacement' or indirect effects. The report states that if the negative impacts at macro-level appear to be too big, it is the responsibility of the Dutch government to take action and exert influence on producer countries.

All these initiatives state they are 'meta-standard' approaches, meaning they draw heavily on existing certification initiatives, notably the voluntary NGO-industry initiatives like the Round Table on Sustainable Palmoil, FSC, and the Round Table on Responsible Soy. FSC and the RSPO have important lessons to share about failing stakeholder involvement, especially groups in society affected by expanding monocultures. It is clearly very hard in practice for a certification scheme to be developed in situations with huge conflicts of interest between the local population on the one hand, and plantation holders and agribusiness on the other; and a huge gap in power that both have.

Many organisations, for example all those in Papua New Guinea, decided not to take part in the RSPO, because this scheme would not prevent expansion of oil palm plantations. The RTRS was completely rejected by virtually the entire Paraguayan civil society, including farmers movements, unions and NGOs. A declaration of this coalition asked: *"Who will take responsibility for the environmental pollution caused by approximately 20 million litres of chemicals dumped on Paraguay this year?, The destruction of streams, rivers, springs and wetlands? The eviction of almost a hundred thousand small farmers from their homes and fields? The assassination of more than one hundred peasant leaders? The forced relocation and ethnocide of Indigenous Peoples and communities? The charges pressed against more than 2,000 small farmers for their legitimate resistance to this predatory system? Large scale soy monocultures are NOT possible without this litany of adverse impacts."*

Would a label "Not produced on Paramilitary land" be possible?

In the case of Colombia, some of the palmoil companies with worst human rights record have over a dozen 'green' and 'eco' labels on their products. This makes it even more difficult to fight them, since consumers in the North think they are buying a good product. For these reasons, there is a big problem with simply taking over the criteria from these existing schemes, since they often lack civil society support.

Back to the EU. Despite all this sustainability talk, the European Commission is not intending to introduce any kind of sustainability scheme. They will only arrange that 'bad' agrofuels are excluded from tax support, 'bad' defined only by a CO2 balance lower than zero (so much for the 'climate change' argument for agrofuels!) and no impact on 'high conservation value areas'. No social, economic or specific human rights criteria are proposed since these would be 'not WTO compatible'. The EC clearly chuses not to be courageous in this respect, and points to toothless UN conventions like ILO to strengthen labour rights, for example.

There is strong opposition from organisations both against this mandatory target and these unacceptably low criteria. However, it should be stressed again that criteria should be developed by Northern actors without involvement of the ones that are going to feel the consequences on the ground. In addition, no criteria on individual loads of agrofuels can prevent the negative macro-impacts and displacement effects.