

A Survival International Report

The most inconvenient truth of all

climate change and indigenous people



Survival 

introduction



Indigenous people are on the frontline of climate change. Living in parts of the world where its impacts are greatest and depending largely, or exclusively, on the natural environment for their livelihoods, culture and lives, they are more vulnerable to climate change than anyone else on earth.

According to reports, the impact of climate change on indigenous people is already being felt around the world: from the Arctic to the Andes to the Amazon, from the islands of the Pacific Ocean to Canada's Pacific Rim.

Equally important, but barely recognized, is the impact that measures to *stop* climate change are having, or may have, on indigenous people. These 'mitigation measures' violate their rights and make it easier for governments, companies and others to lay claim to, exploit and, in some cases, destroy their land – like climate change itself.

This report is an exposé of these mitigation measures. They include:

- **Biofuels**
- **Hydroelectric power**
- **Forest conservation**
- **Carbon offsetting**

This report is published ahead of critical climate change talks to be held in Copenhagen in December 2009. The purpose of the talks, organized under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), is to finalise agreements on how to combat climate change when the current agreement, the Kyoto Protocol, runs out in 2012.

What is 'The Most Inconvenient Truth of All'? That the world's indigenous people, who have done the *least* to cause climate change and are *most* affected by it, are now having their rights violated and land devastated in the name of attempts to stop it.

**'The world is ill.
The lungs of the
sky are polluted.
We know it
is happening.'**

Davi Kopenawa, Yanomami, Brazil



The Penan are just one of many tribes affected by climate change.



what is climate change?

Climate change refers to the average rise in the earth's temperatures.¹ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a scientific body established to assess global warming, says the evidence for it is 'unequivocal'.² It is more than 90% certain that 'most of the global average warming over the past fifty years' is a result of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions.³

According to the IPCC, the main cause of climate change is the burning of fossil fuels, which emits greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide.⁴

Deforestation, says the IPCC, is another major source of carbon emissions.⁵ Forests act as 'sinks' that absorb and store carbon dioxide.

The IPCC lists, with varying degrees of certainty, a number of impacts that global warming is having on the planet.⁶ These include:

- **Melting glaciers**
- **Melting ice caps**
- **Melting sheet ice**
- **Rising sea-levels**
- **Changing rainfall**
- **More frequent drought**
- **More frequent heat waves**



Deforestation of virgin forest for crops such as soya and oil palm not only devastates the lands of many tribes but also, according to the IPCC, is another major source of carbon emissions.



how are indigenous people affected?

The Amazon

In 2005 a severe drought struck the Amazon rainforest, home to hundreds of indigenous peoples such as the **Yanomami**. Experts predict less rain, more frequent droughts, and higher temperatures.⁷

'The rains come late. The sun behaves in a strange way. The world is ill. The lungs of the sky are polluted. We know it is happening. You cannot go on destroying nature. We will all die, burned and drowned.' Davi Kopenawa, Yanomami leader and shaman, Brazil.⁹

The Arctic

The Inuit have said for years that climate change is affecting their land.¹⁰ Their whole way of life depends on ice – and now it is melting.¹¹ Hunting and fishing have become more difficult, travel between villages dangerous, the existence of their homes precarious.¹² According to media reports, earlier this year one village belonging to the Yup'ik (a people related to the Inuit) announced it would be forced to relocate after flooding.¹³

'Inuit have a traditional juggling game. The weather is sort of like that now. The weather is being juggled; it is changing so quickly and drastically.' N. Attungala.¹⁴

'It has become so serious that several coastal villages are now actively trying to figure out where to move entire communities.' Patricia Cochran, Inuit woman and chair of Indigenous Peoples' Global Summit on Climate Change.¹⁵

'Mother Earth is no longer in a period of climate change, but climate crisis.'

The Anchorage Declaration, 2009.⁸

Saami reindeer herders from Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden report that herd numbers are declining, reindeer are finding it more difficult to access food, and are more likely to fall through thinning ice.¹⁶

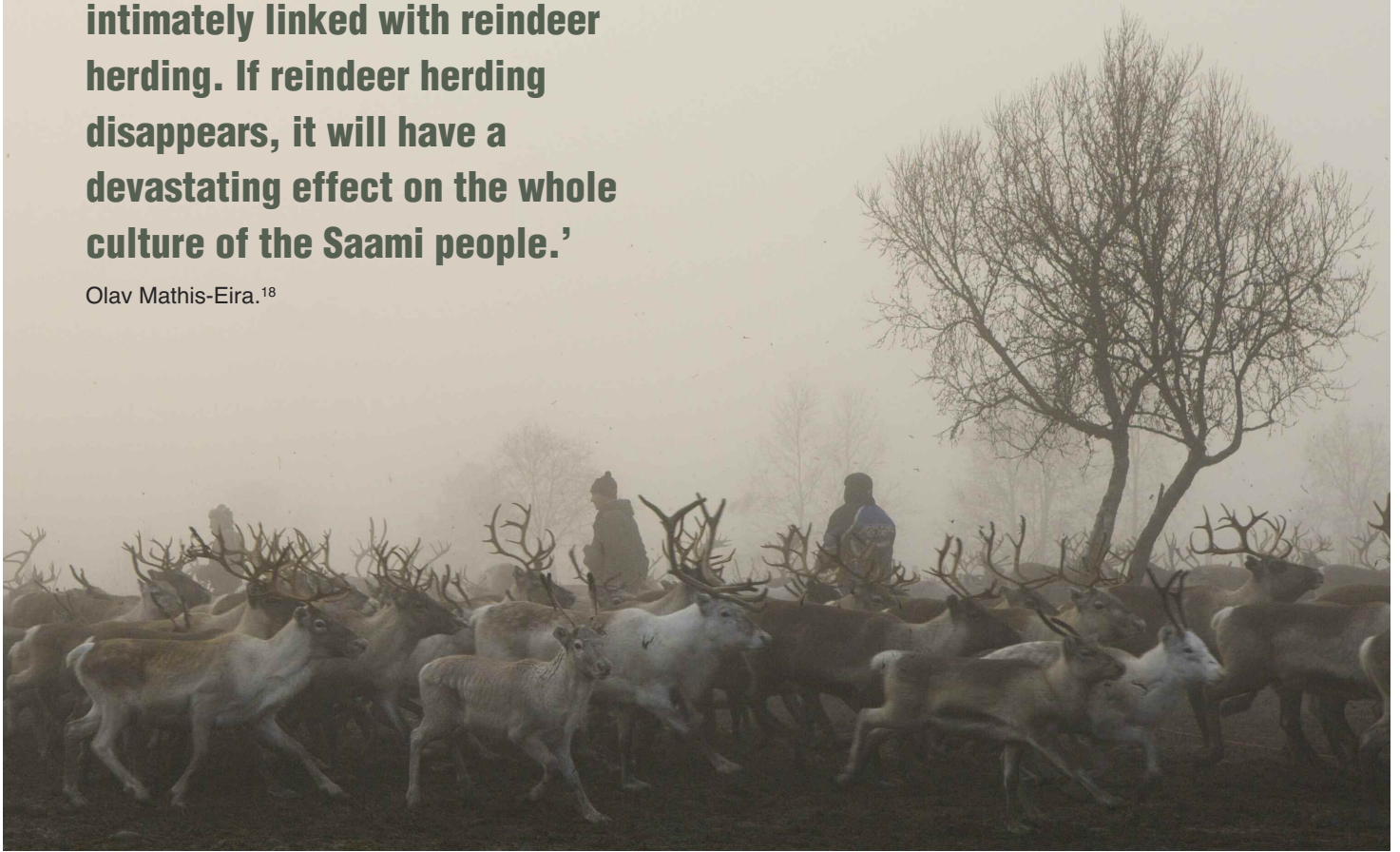
'Traditional weather reading skills can't be trusted any more. In the olden times one could see beforehand what kind of weather it will be. These signs and skills hold true no more. Old markers do not hold true, the world has changed too much now.' Veikko Magga.¹⁷



Reindeer herder, Siberia, Russia

‘Many aspects of Saami culture – language, songs, marriage, child-rearing and the treatment of older persons – are intimately linked with reindeer herding. If reindeer herding disappears, it will have a devastating effect on the whole culture of the Saami people.’

Olav Mathis-Eira.¹⁸



Nenets reindeer herders from the Russian Arctic say they are facing increasingly unpredictable weather.¹⁹ According to media reports, their annual pilgrimage last year, involving thousands of reindeer, was delayed because the ice over a key river was not thick enough to cross.²⁰

‘The snow is melting sooner, quicker and faster than before. The changes aren’t good for the reindeer and ultimately what is good for the reindeer is good for us.’ Jakov Japtik.²¹

Canada

According to one report, rising temperatures in Canada have led to what scientists have called the largest insect infestation in the history of North

America.²² It has destroyed millions of acres of pine trees that indigenous people like the **TI’azt’en** rely on.²³

‘Millions of acres have been destroyed with direct, immediate and serious impacts on our safety and well-being, communities and entire eco-systems, including salmon spawning and rearing streams and migration routes.’

TI’azt’en man, Ed John.²⁴

According to reports, the **Gitga’at** are experiencing increasingly unpredictable weather, affecting the way they obtain and prepare their food.²⁵

‘They don’t even know what to do with this weather!’ Gitga’at woman, Canada.²⁶

How are mitigation measures affecting indigenous people?

Many different measures are being taken in the name of combating climate change. Some of these are 'formal' measures agreed to by signatories to the UNFCCC's Kyoto Protocol. Others are 'voluntary', taken by multilateral organizations, governments and companies.

Biofuels:

Not so 'green' for the Guarani

Biofuels are being promoted as an alternative, 'green' source of energy to fossil fuels, but much of the land allocated to grow them is the ancestral land of indigenous people. It has been estimated that if biofuels expansion continues as planned, sixty million indigenous people worldwide are threatened with losing their land and livelihoods.²⁸

One of the biggest victims of the biofuels craze is the Guarani tribe in Brazil. The Guarani, some of whom featured in the award-winning film 'Birdwatchers'²⁹, are Brazil's biggest tribe and were one of the first to be contacted by Europeans five hundred years ago.

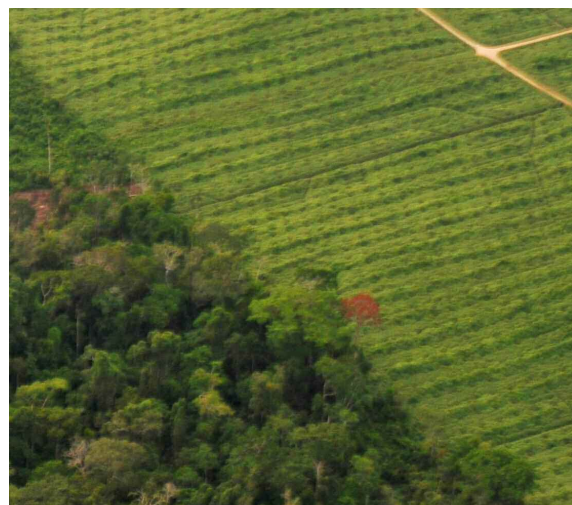
Brazil's President Lula is expanding sugar cane cultivation in order to convert it into ethanol to meet energy demands. The stated aim is to make Brazil more energy self-sufficient and reduce fossil fuel consumption as a means of combating climate change.

'Biofuels are an effective weapon in the fight against global warming,' Lula said at the Fifth Summit of the Americas held in the Caribbean

'These so-called 'solutions' to climate change are grabbing our land and devastating our territories.'²⁷

this year. **'Our society demands renewable, clean, inexpensive fuels. The production of sugar cane ethanol increases energy security.'**³⁰

In September, Lula stepped up his attempts to 'green' biofuels by announcing a proposal to ban sugar cane production in the Amazon rainforest. This would make Brazilian ethanol made from sugar cane '100% green', said Brazil's Environment Minister Carlos Minc – meaning that no more rainforest would need to be cut down to grow it.³¹



Oil palm plantation, Peru. Much of the land used to grow biofuels such as oil palm is the ancestral land of tribal peoples.

But the Guarani, having already lost much of their land to sugar cane plantations and cattle-ranchers, are now threatened by Lula's plans for more than forty new plantations. Many of these will be planted on ancestral land claimed by the tribe.

The effects have already been catastrophic. In the last six years at least eighty children have died from starvation.³² Once the owners of 350,000 sq. kms. of Mato Grosso do Sul state, many Guarani are now camped on roadsides or on tiny parcels of land surrounded by plantations.

'The big sugar cane plantations are now occupying our land. Sugar cane is polluting our rivers and killing our fish. (It is increasing) suicides, mainly among young people, alcoholism and murder,' said Guarani leader Amilton Lopez during a tour of Europe last year.³³

Hydroelectric power: 'Damming' Borneo's hunter-gatherers

Like biofuels, hydroelectric power (HEP) has been identified as a major source of alternative energy to fossil fuels. But the construction of large hydroelectric dams in the name of combating climate change is destroying indigenous land and driving people from their homes.

In Borneo, Malaysia's government promoted the construction of the enormous Bakun dam as a source of 'green energy' and part of the country's effort to stop global warming. The dam is due to be completed next year and will flood 700 sq. km of surrounding land.

The Bakun dam 'is very much in line with the objective of reducing and containing global warming as well as reducing acidity in rain at the local and regional levels,' said 'Green Energy for the Future', published by the Malaysian prime minister's office.³⁴



In Brazil, the Guarani have been forced off their land and many now live by the side of the road.

'Thus the project serves as the country's positive contribution to the protection and enhancement of the global environment, in line with the Framework Convention on Climate Change. . . Compared to fossil fuels, hydropower is much cleaner and friendlier.'³⁵

But the dam displaced 10,000 indigenous people, including many members of the Penan tribe. The relocated Penan, semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers, are now unable to hunt or gather and struggle to support themselves on tiny plots of land, some of which include swamps and rubble.³⁶

'In our old homes we could easily find food, but living here is very painful,' a Penan man called Deling, one of those displaced by the Bakun dam, told a Survival researcher this year. **'We used to eat three times a day, but here it is very difficult. Once a day.'**

Hundreds more Penan and other tribal people face the same fate following plans, leaked on the internet, by the Sarawak government to build more dams. The first of these, the Murum dam, is currently under construction: hillsides are being dynamited, the Penan are being told they must leave.

Like Bakun, government ministers are appealing to HEP's 'clean' credentials to justify the project. **'Hydropower is the cleanest renewable energy the world has. Since we have it, why not develop it?'** said government minister James Masing, just after the plans were leaked.³⁷

Six members of the Penan were arrested in September after trying to voice their opposition to the Murum dam to Sarawak's chief minister. 'The forest areas and resources that support our lives will be destroyed,' said a statement from the Penan.³⁸

Forest conservation: Thousands of hunter-gatherers to be expelled

An international appeal to save the Mau Forest in Kenya has been launched by Prime Minister Raila Odinga after thousands of hunter-gatherers from Kenya's Ogiek tribe were told to abandon their homes there.

Years of illegal settlement have devastated much of the forest, a crucial source of water to millions of Kenyans. But the government's plans for it involve evicting everyone resident there, including the Ogiek, who have lived in the forest sustainably for hundreds of years.

In its appeal to the international community for funding to save the forest, Kenya's government is citing climate change as a key motivation. This year, Kenya has experienced devastating droughts, leading to severe power and food shortages.

'The water from the dam will flood our traditional lands including our villages, gardens, paddy fields, farmlands and graves etc. . . We will be forced to move to an area that we do not know and is not compatible with our life conditions.'³⁹



The Murum Dam is under construction, and many Penan will be forced to leave their land.

'Years of rampant excess in the global and local mismanagement of our environment have contributed to the melting of ice caps on Mt Kenya and the vast destruction of our once-beautiful forests,' Odinga told the UN in September.⁴⁰

Odinga said that Kenya was acting to 'reverse the ravages' of global warming and cited Kenya's efforts to save the Mau Forest as an example.⁴¹ 'No agenda is as important to the country today as that of climate change. Conservation has moved to the top of our national agenda.'⁴²

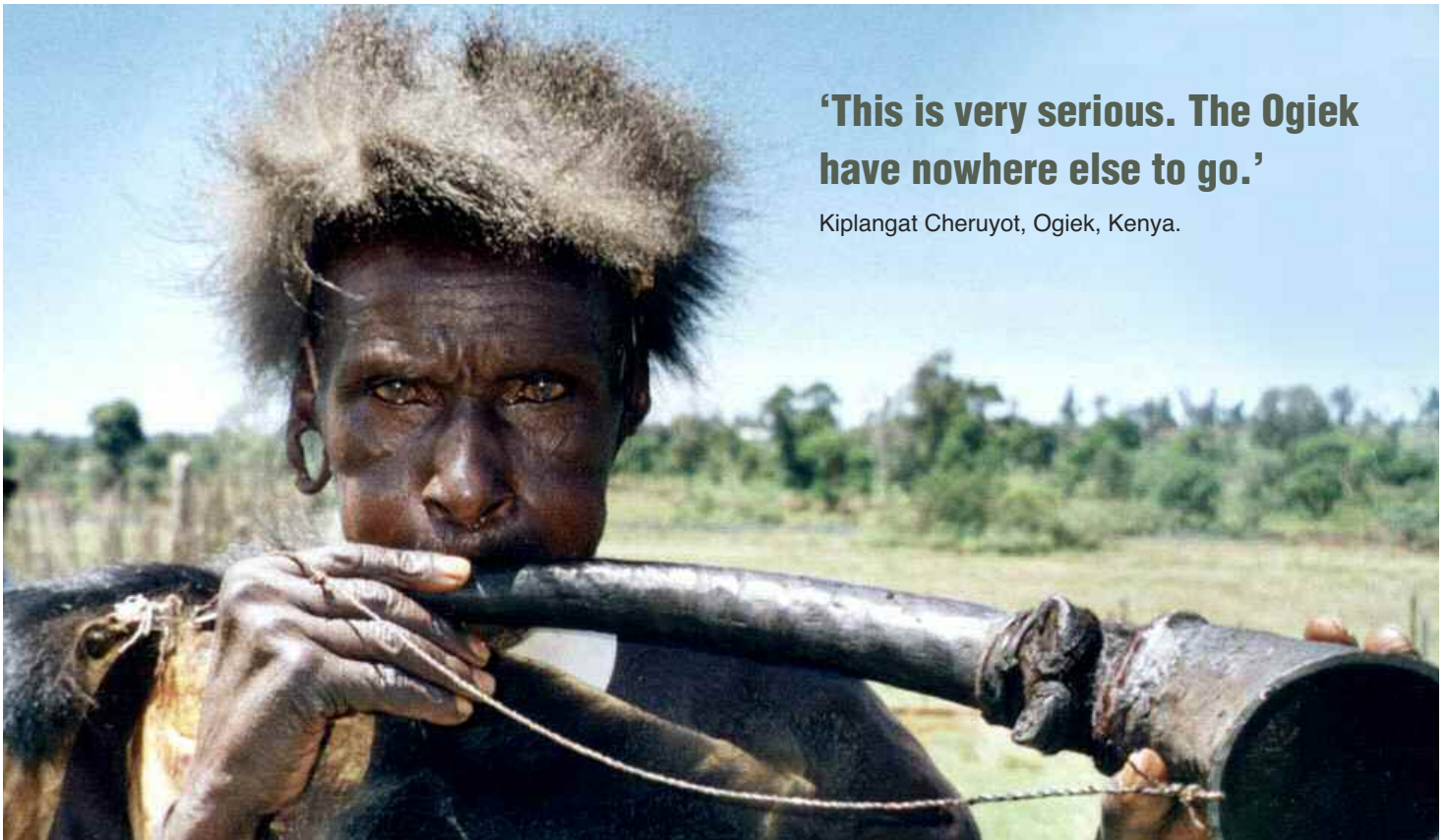
Kenya has also announced its intention to plant 7.6 billion trees, some of which are destined for the Mau Forest.⁴³ The carbon stored in these trees could become financially very valuable in the carbon market – while the forest's ancestral residents, the Ogiek, go homeless.

‘Everyone has been living in fear for the last month... People are crying about the eviction. The government said it would spare no one,’ said Kiplangat Cheruyot, of the Ogiek People’s Development Program.

Kenya’s government has repeatedly tried to evict the Ogiek in the past, usually on the misplaced

pretext they are destroying the forest. In late October 2009, some reports suggested the government was backing down on its intention to evict the Ogiek, in the face of widespread international condemnation.

At the time of writing, the Ogiek’s fate remains unclear.



‘This is very serious. The Ogiek have nowhere else to go.’

Kiplangat Cheruyot, Ogiek, Kenya.

Carbon offsetting: Indigenous people without rights?

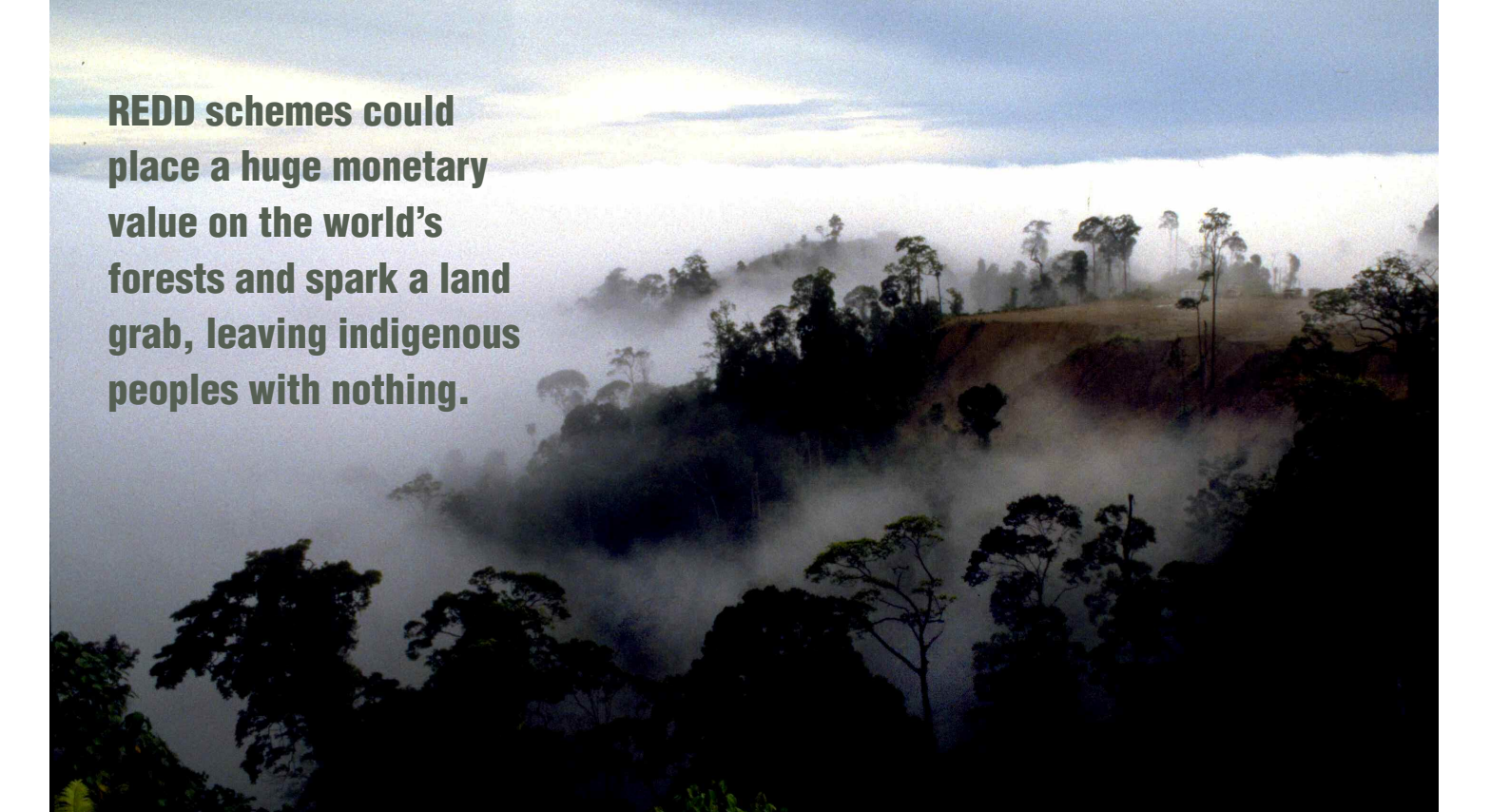
Attempts to stop deforestation have led to the proposal of various schemes known collectively as ‘Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation’ (REDD). A REDD scheme is currently being discussed by the UNFCCC, may be finalized at Copenhagen, and is expected to play a key role in the post-Kyoto agreement to fight climate change.

The basic principle of REDD is to encourage ‘developing’ countries to protect their forests by ‘developed’ countries paying them. One way of doing this is for the carbon stored in these forests

to generate ‘credits’ that ‘developed’ countries can buy to offset their carbon emissions.

Indigenous people have repeatedly voiced concerns about REDD because it could place enormous monetary value on their forests and spark a land grab. A large proportion of the world’s forests, liable for inclusion in REDD schemes, are traditional indigenous territories.

‘REDD will increase the violation of our human rights, our rights to our lands, territories and resources, steal our land, cause forced evictions,



REDD schemes could place a huge monetary value on the world's forests and spark a land grab, leaving indigenous peoples with nothing.

prevent access and threaten indigenous agriculture practices, destroy biodiversity and culture diversity and cause social conflicts,' said the International Forum of Indigenous Peoples on Climate Change (IFIPCC).⁴⁴

REDD could make it more difficult for indigenous people to have their land rights recognized, or more likely for their rights to be undermined or ignored where already recognized. If it does not lead to evictions, it may well restrict traditional use of land or access to natural resources.

It is not clear if REDD will even recognize indigenous rights. In the UNFCCC's current draft, references to the UN's Declaration on Indigenous Rights and indigenous peoples' rights to free, prior and informed consent are in brackets. Whether they are included in the final text may depend on the Copenhagen summit.

'If there is no full recognition and full protection for indigenous peoples' rights, including the rights to resources, lands and territories, and there is no recognition and respect of our rights of free, prior and informed consent, we will oppose REDD,' said the IFIPCC in September.⁴⁵

According to reports, many indigenous people have already suffered from carbon projects on their land. These 'voluntary' projects, outside the UNFCCC, have led to evictions from their ancestral homes, the destruction of villages and resources, violent conflict, harassment, injuries and reports of deaths.⁴⁶

Recommendations

Where they affect indigenous peoples, measures to mitigate the impact of climate change **must**:

- **Involve indigenous people fully and draw on their unequalled knowledge of their environments.**
- **recognize and respect indigenous rights as enshrined in international law (ILO Convention 169) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly their right to the ownership of their land and their right to give or withhold consent to developments in their territories.**

Footnotes

¹ The IPCC's official definition is: '... a change in the state of the climate that can be identified by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties, and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer. It refers to any change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or as a result of human activity. This usage differs from that in the UNFCCC, where climate change refers to a change of climate that is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and that is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.' IPCC, 2007.

Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report, p. 30

http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/publications_ipcc_fourth_assessment_report_synthesis_report.htm

² Ibid. p. 30.

³ Ibid. p. 72.

⁴ 'Technical Summary', Contribution of Working Group 1 to the IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report, 2007, p. 23-25.

http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/publications_ipcc_fourth_assessment_report_wg1_report_the_physical_science_basis.htm

⁵ IPCC, 2007.

Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report, p. 36

http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/publications_ipcc_fourth_assessment_report_synthesis_report.htm

⁶ Ibid p. 30

⁷ WWF, 2007. The Amazon's Vicious Cycles, p. 4.

⁸ Indigenous Peoples' Global Summit on Climate Change, 24 April 2009 <http://www.indigenoussummit.com/servlet/content/declaration.html>

⁹ The Guardian, 13 June 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/jun/13/davi-yanomami>

¹⁰ S. Watt-Cloutier, Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC), speaking to the UNFCCC, 7 December 2005.

<http://inuitcircumpolar.com/index.php?ID=318&Lang=En>

¹¹ 'Satellite data since 1978 show that annual average Arctic sea ice extent has shrunk by 2.7 (2.1-3.3)% per decade, with larger decreases in summer of 7.4 (5.0-9.8)% per decade.' IPCC, 2007, Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report, p. 30

http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/publications_ipcc_fourth_assessment_report_synthesis_report.htm

¹² Petition to the Inter American Commission on Human Rights seeking relief from violations resulting from global warming caused by acts and omissions of the United States, 2005. <http://inuitcircumpolar.com/index.php?ID=316&Lang=En>

¹³ CNN, 28 April 2009 <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/TECH/science/04/24/climate.change.eskimos/index.html>

¹⁴ Arctic Climate Impact Assessment http://www.eoearth.org/article/Nunavut_climate_change_case_study#Introduction

¹⁵ BBC, 4 January 2007. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/6230731.stm>

¹⁶ Arctic Climate Impact Assessment. http://www.eoearth.org/article/Kola:_the_Saami_community_of_Lovozero_climate_change_case_study & Arctic Climate Impact Assessment

http://www.eoearth.org/article/Sapmi:_the_communities_of_Purnumukka%2C_Ochejohka%2C_and_Nuorgam_climate_change_case_study

¹⁷ Arctic Climate Impact Assessment

http://www.eoearth.org/article/Sapmi:_the_communities_of_Purnumukka%2C_Ochejohka%2C_and_Nuorgam_climate_change_case_study

¹⁸ Tebtebba, 2008. Guide on Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples, p. 72.

¹⁹ The Guardian, 20 October 2009. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2009/oct/20/arctic-tundra>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² International Indian Treaty Council, 2008. Climate Change, Human Rights and Indigenous Peoples, p. 19

²³ Ibid. p. 19-20. See also <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/18/science/18trees.html?pagewanted=1&r=1>

²⁴ Ibid. p. 20

²⁵ Salick, J and A. Byg, 2007. Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change, p. 16.

http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/indigenous_peoples_climate_change.pdf

²⁶ Ibid. p. 11.

²⁷ Indigenous Peoples' Guide: False Solutions to Climate Change, 2009, p. 2.

http://www.carbontradedwatch.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=262&Itemid=36

²⁸ Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, email to Survival, 29 April, 2008.

²⁹ For more information: <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/3672>

³⁰ China View, 19 April, 2009. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-04/19/content_11212325.htm

³¹ BBC, 18 September 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/8262381.stm>

³² Campo Grande News, 17 December 2008. <http://www.campogrande.news.com.br/canais/view/?canal=8&id=242815>

³³ Survival transcription and translation.

³⁴ Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Office, Malaysia, 1996. Green Energy for the Future, p. 57.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 57.

³⁶ Suhakam, Malaysia's Human Rights Commission, 2009

Report on the Murum Hydroelectric project and its Impact towards the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of the Affected Indigenous Peoples in Sarawak, p. 9.

³⁷ Hua Daily, 2 August 2008

³⁸ Survival International, 23 September 2009. <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/4964>

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Daily Nation, 26 September 2009. <http://www.nation.co.ke/News/-/1056/663936/-/unej3w/-/index.html>

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² NAM, 23 September 2009

⁴³ Reuters, 12 August 2009. <http://www.reuters.com/article/environmentNews/idUSTRE57B3BU20090812>

⁴⁴ IFIPCC statement, November 2007

⁴⁵ IFIPCC statement, 27 September 2009

⁴⁶ For example: 1) International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of Tropical Forests, The DRC Case Study: The Impacts of the Carbon Sinks of Ibi-Bateke Project on the Indigenous Pgyimies of the Democratic Republic of Congo, 2006; 2) World Rainforest Movement, 'A funny place to store carbon': UWA-FACE Foundation's tree planting project in Mount Elgon National Park, Uganda, 2006

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