



PRESS RELEASE: 3 December 2010

Biofuels, Bioenergy and Biochar: False Solutions Lead to Land-Grabbing

**Side Event: ETC Group, Biofuelwatch, EcoNexus, African Biodiversity Network/Gaia
Friday Dec 3rd, 20:15–21:45
Room Sandía, Cancunmesse**

Industries and governments are joining forces to create policies that support the use of crops and other “biomass” (trees, agriculture “residues,” manure and more) as substitutes for coal, oil and gas – not just for energy and fuels, but also for the production of plastics and chemicals. While presented as “green, clean, and renewable,” the shift from petroleum to biomass is, in fact, worsening climate change, increasing deforestation and biodiversity loss, degrading soils and depleting water supplies. Further, the new “bio-based” economy threatens livelihoods, especially in the global South where it encourages “land grabs.”

At the same time that a massive demand for biomass is being created, using lands for carbon sequestration (as offsets via REDD, for example) is being promoted. Creating an industrial demand for biomass is clearly incompatible with slowing deforestation, and yet, predictably, industry players are pushing to ensure that the expansion of industrial monocultures plantations and practices associated with growing, harvesting and using biomass will be rewarded by offset-financing.

"The example of biofuels should serve as a warning", said Silvia Ribeiro from Canada based ETC Group. "They have resulted in increased deforestation, hunger and land grabs, without reducing carbon emissions. Biotech companies are now pursuing 'synthetic biology' to create artificial microbes that can convert plant biomass into all manner of fuels, chemicals and products. This is shortsighted and risky. We have no regulatory structures to oversee the production and use of synthetic life forms. What will happen if biomass-digesting, engineered microbes are accidentally released into the environment, as is likely?"

"Creating new demands for plant materials will never solve the problem of climate change" stated Rachel Smolker from Biofuelwatch. "Incredibly, some are now advocating that we burn massive quantities of plant material to make charcoal (aka biochar) and bury it in soils.

Proponents make all sorts of claims about the capacity of biochar to sequester carbon, for which there is little scientific basis, and they fail to consider the impacts of dramatically increasing the demand for plant matter."

Finally, Teresa Anderson from the Gaia Foundation said that "false solutions add insult to injury for people in the global South. Small farmers, indigenous peoples and pastoralists are not the people who caused climate change, yet they are already suffering the consequences. Now these false solutions are making them suffer even more as they face eviction from their lands to make way for biofuels and the bioeconomy. Our new report "*Biofuels - a Failure for Africa*" exposes the false claims made about biofuels, and how they are failing farmers and Africa as a whole."

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FOR MORE INFO:

On biofuels:

See Gaia Foundation/ African Biodiversity Network report: *Biofuels – A Failure for Africa*, available here: <http://www.gaiafoundation.org/content/biofuels-failing-africa-report-ethiopia>

On the "bioeconomy:"

See ETC Group's newly released report: *The New Biomasssters*, available here: <http://www.etcgroup.org/en/node/5232>

On biochar:

See Biofuelwatch's briefing: *Biochar For Climate Mitigation: Fact or Fiction*, available here: <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/docs/biocharbriefing.pdf>

See also:

African Biodiversity Network and Gaia Foundation's joint briefing: Biochar Landgrabbing: The Impacts on Africa, available here: http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/docs/biochar_africa_briefing2.pdf

Biofuelwatch's handout: *Offsetting tar sands emissions with biochar?* (English and Spanish), available here:

http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/docs/biochar_and_tar_sands_handout.pdf
and
http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/docs/biochar_and_tar_sands_espanol.pdf