

India: Support forest dependent communities against plantations expansion!

Posted on Sep 20, 2016

WRM together with the All India Forum of Forest Movements, and the Campaign for Survival and Dignity are mobilizing against the CAF Act (also known as the CAMPA Bill). This new Bill was recently approved by the Indian parliament. We apprehend it will result in gross violations of forest dwelling communities' rights and in a massive expansion of industrial tree plantations.

Please **support the action by endorsing the letter to be sent to relevant Ministries in India rejecting the CAF Act**. Send your name, organization and country no later than September 30 to the following email: india@wrm.org.uy.

Plantations are not forests!
The WRM Team.

ACTION ALERT on the International Day of Struggle against Tree Plantations (21 September)

Respect and protect the Forest Rights Act in India!

In July 2016, the Indian Parliament passed the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill, known as the CAF Act, which we apprehend will result in gross violations of forest dwelling communities' rights and in a massive expansion of industrial tree plantations.

The CAMPA Bill, or the CAF Act, as it stands, contributes to the violation of the 2006 Forest Rights Act (known as FRA), a landmark and historic statute passed by the same Indian Parliament for recognizing the rights of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers in the country. The Bill particularly undermines the provision in FRA for empowering community institutions like the Gram Sabhas (assemblies in forest villages) to monitor, control and, if necessary, stop any development project in the forest areas in their jurisdiction. (1)

The Compensatory Afforestation, Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) was originally set up to administer the funds that the State collects by means of the Compensatory Afforestation Fund. Since more than 20 years, any activity resulting in deforestation must "compensate" for the damage by paying to establish a tree plantations area that is "equivalent" to the destroyed one. This process of so-called Compensatory Afforestation Fund disguises the fact that a forest can neither be compensated by monetary means nor recreated through plantations – a forest is not only a collection of trees! Besides the money for afforestation, the CAMPA fund also receives money accruing from the payment of NPV (net present value) of the forest area being denuded. The idea behind is that because it takes time for the trees to grow, forest destroyers, in the meantime, should also pay for all the "goods and services" that the cleared forest would have provided for an interim of 50 years. This so-called Net Present Value, which includes timber, fuelwood, carbon sequestration, soil conservation, water recharge and other "ecosystem services", is somehow calculated for every patch of forest. But this money doesn't go to the affected communities whose livelihoods and cultures are destroyed along with the forests. The money is put in the CAMPA Fund mainly for promoting tree plantations, which will also severely affect local communities. Currently, there is US\$ 6 billion dollars accumulated in this Fund, and it will continue to increase, as deforestation linked to extractive industries is rampant in India.

The government pretends to use the CAMPA funds for establishing enormous afforestation plans, not only through the Compensatory Afforestation activities, but also with the so-called Green India Mission, which plans to establish 5

million hectares of tree plantations. The CAMPA money has not and will not stop deforestation. Rather, it encourages clearance of more forests by justifying deforestation as long as a premium is paid to “compensate” the damage.

The CAF Act hands over almost the total control of the CAMPA funds to state forest departments. This could empower them and the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change to utilize the funds for any purpose they deem fit, thus, excluding and hurting the interests of communities who lose the most from both deforestation and afforestation, and once again violating the principles of the FRA.

Social movements for forest communities’ rights in India now demand that the implementation of the CAF act must be done only with the consent of the community-level village assemblies or Gram Sabhas through an inclusive, participatory and democratic process that respects and protects forest dwelling communities in the country.

(1) For further background information on the CAMPA Bill and the Compensatory Afforestation Fund, [read the article from the WRM bulletin of August 2015](#)

We encourage you to support the struggle of Indian forest movements and people by endorsing the letter to be sent to the Ministry of Environment and Forests and to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. The letter to be sent is included below:

LETTER TO BE SENT

To:

Anil Madhav Dave
The Minister of State, Independent Charge
Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change
Government of India

Jual Oram
Minister of Tribal Affairs
Government of India

We, the undersigned, are writing to express our support to forest and forest dependent peoples in India who reject and denounce the passage of the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Act, known as the CAF Act, which will result in violations of forest people’s rights and in the expansion of industrial tree plantations.

The Indian Parliament and Government of India must not violate the Forest Rights Act (FRA), a landmark law that aims to correct a historical injustice done to the millions of indigenous and forest dwelling communities by recognizing their rights.

The Parliament and Government must not violate the rights of community institutions like the Gram Sabhas under the FRA, which enable them to stop any project if it harms their cultural or natural heritage, as well as to take steps to protect and conserve forests, wildlife and biodiversity.

The CAMPA funds should be used to strengthen the implementation of the Forest Rights Act rather than for promoting the expansion of industrial tree plantations. Industrial tree plantations can never compensate for the destruction of a forest. On the contrary, monocultures further intensify environmental degradation while plundering the necessary elements that forest and forest dependent communities need for their livelihoods and cultures.

We urge the Ministry of Environment and Forests and related official institutions to guarantee that the implementation of the CAF Act is done only with the true and fair consent of the Gram Sabhas.

On September 21st, the International day of Struggle against Tree Plantations, we reaffirm that Plantations are not Forests and we therefore reject the CAF Act!