



CFS 51

23-27 October 2023

SIDE EVENTS

Just transition or green grabbing? Land-intensive climate action and protecting the sustainable food systems of IPs and LC

CFS 50 side event summary

Friday, 27 October 2023 | 8:30 – 9:45 a.m. (CEST) | HYBRID EVENT

Joining both online and in person, about 100 participants attended the CFS side event on 27 October 2023, in which a panel of experts discussed land-intensive climate action and its impact on the sustainable food systems of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPs & LCs). Today, new pressures on the land of IPs & LCs, herders and farmers worldwide and corresponding threats to their livelihoods are emerging. Large-scale land deals for wind parks, solar farms but also tree plantations for biological carbon removal take place in the context of global climate action. Although more research into the scope and patterns of these pressures is required, one recent estimate suggests that the demand for additional land needed for carbon-offsetting projects that involve reforestation, implied by the sum of individual country climate pledges, amount to more than 600 million hectares by 2060, roughly a third of current global cropland. The extensive implementation of land-intensive climate initiatives, especially the transformation of various land uses into tree plantations, can adversely affect IPs & LCs. These communities often depend on ecosystem-based agricultural practices like agroecology, which not only enhance the resilience of their food systems but also support local food security, nutrition, and livelihoods. In addition, they play an essential role in protecting important ecosystems.

Against this background, the aims of this panel were (1) to highlight that climate action, food security and land issues cannot be discussed in silos and initiate a dialogue between different stakeholders with a key role for IPs & LCs, and (2) to generate insights and concrete policy recommendations on how to implement and improve safeguards to ensure that IP & LC are not adversely affected by global climate action.

Commencing the panel discussion, Joan Carling, who was honoured with the UN Champions of the Earth Award for her lifetime achievements in 2018 and a steadfast advocate for Indigenous Peoples, reiterated her commitment to their rights in her current role as the Executive Director of Indigenous Peoples Rights International. She first shed light on the issue of IP displacement due to large-scale land acquisitions bringing examples from various countries. Joan Carling emphasized the paradox that, in international fora and declarations, IPs and other LCs are recognized for their role in protecting ecosystems and practicing sustainable livelihoods. Yet, in practice and on the ground, this role is not appreciated. Instead, they often face criminalization and even find themselves imprisoned. She highlighted the inconsistency of policies that frequently constrain indigenous peoples' livelihoods (e.g., gathering food from forests), while failing to acknowledge the contribution of their traditional livelihoods to the preservation of vital ecosystems for centuries. Meanwhile, carbon offset projects and renewable energy initiatives are often prioritized over the rights and practices and indigenous peoples.

Responding to this statement, Aurélie Lhumeau, an expert on climate, value chain and sustainable land management, with more than 12 years in social and environmental management in the land and forest sector, presented her view. Aurélie Lhumeau emphasized the substantial contributions of nature-based climate solutions to global climate mitigation targets. She also stressed that these solutions extend far beyond pure conservation, but encompass sustainable land management and agroecology, supporting local food security and livelihoods. When considering safeguards, she underlined that it is crucial to distinguish between two distinct

sectors. First, mandatory carbon markets, for instance, come with a set of very specific requirements, including the need for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), the inclusion of women in negotiations, benefit sharing, and grievance mechanisms. Aurélie Lhumeau acknowledged that, in practice, these safeguards may often not be effective enough and that there had been already instances in the past where projects were halted due to their failure to meet these standards, including the lack of involvement of IPs & LCs. Second, the voluntary carbon market, has only lately seen a movement towards higher-quality credits with better social and environmental impacts compared to past efforts. For examples, the Integrity Council for Voluntary Carbon Markets aims to set global benchmarks for carbon credits by providing concrete standards for high-quality credits that try to ensure the involvement of IPs & LCs in climate action, while also guaranteeing that projects contribute to their livelihoods.

Having discussed the broader picture, the panel then continued with three perspectives from three farmers' organizations "from the ground". First, Hillary Cheruiyot provided some insight on his experiences in East Africa. He is part of the Eastern Africa Farmers Federation and collaborates with farmers across the region to assist them in ensuring sustainable livelihoods in rural areas. He began by mentioning that the issue of climate change is a huge challenge for the farmers in the region particularly given that they are at the lower end of the value chain. He highlighted that farmers have already started to adapt their practices due to climate change such as changing the planting season and growing trees on their plots. In addition, farmers increasingly switch to drought-resilient varieties but also indigenous varieties that have proven to be a climate resilient alternative. This pressure is exacerbated by large-scale investments including infrastructure development that take place on arable land. This has led to conflict with local communities. For example, land taken by governments has limited the movement of pastoralists increasing competition among themselves and other groups. Such land grabs have also limited the available land for food production demanding higher input intensities on the limited available land to increase agricultural output. As land-based agriculture and productivity is not prioritised, farmers are often forced to migrate. Given this pressure, Hillary Cheruiyot underlined that farmers need more space to raise their concerns and to influence governments and other regional players. Strategic partnerships should also take these concerns into consideration to allow for informed decision-making processes backed by data and other supporting evidence.

Next, Fanny Métrat, a farmer in the south of France, shared her experience as a small-scale farmer and her involvement with the Confédération paysanne, a French farmers' union as well as Struggles for Land. She advocated for a transition to agro-ecological practices and the preservation of natural resources to ensure long-term survival. She distinguished between peasant and industrial livestock farming, emphasizing the importance of the former in regions where no other form of agriculture is viable and its role in carbon sequestration and soil fertility. Fanny strongly criticized the financialization of nature and carbon and biodiversity markets, which can lead to land grabbing and has adverse consequences for farmers and society. She called for strong support from public policies and rejected private sector involvement. She critiqued false solutions such as geo-engineering, GMOs, and technocratic approaches to agricultural and food crises, advocating for peasant agro-ecology as a sustainable alternative. She also opposed the artificialization of land through projects like ground-based photovoltaic installations and advocated for using buildings instead. She emphasized the need for a just transition that addresses both climate and social justice issues. In her last statement, she called for international solidarity among farmers' organizations, researchers, and citizens' movements to influence policies and advocate for the right to land. This includes agrarian reform, land redistribution, and access for young people and women to promote genuine food sovereignty and climate justice.

The next speaker on the panel, Nikka Rivera, who is the coordinator for the Land Rights Program and Young Farmers' Agenda at the Asian Farmer Association for Sustainable Rural Development, brought forward different cases of green grabbing. She presented cases of large-scale land acquisitions in the Philippines, in Balabac, Palawan, and from Laos, in Borikhamxay province. In the Philippines, ancestral lands of the Molbog and Palaw'an Indigenous peoples were converted into plantation and farmland, displacing IPs and depriving them of their livelihoods. A further extension of the project, prohibited also Indigenous fishers from accessing their ancestral waters, leading to conflicts and clashes of interests. Despite a favourable ruling for indigenous peoples in 2012, the involved company continued its operations receiving also additional investments because of their engagement with seaweed farmers and marketing their product as coming from "sustainable" farming. The situation remains dire, with Indigenous Peoples continuously threatened. In Laos, a carbon offsetting project

involving a rubber plantation registered with the Verra's Verified Carbon Standard also resulted in conflicts related to land allocation and price setting. During field surveys, partner organisations recorded conflicts with local communities in the area. Potentially intentional fires were reported which destroyed 224 hectares - nearly a quarter of the offsetting project since the inception of the project. In response to high conflict, the government deployed soldiers and police to secure the plantation. In addition to these projects, Nikka Rivera also mentioned the presence of individuals making false promises to communities with respect to carbon offset projects. However, many of these projects do not materialize due to their lack of legitimacy, causing frustration and desensitization within the affected communities regarding such initiatives.

Aurélie Lhumeau then commented on the experiences on the ground from her perspective. She emphasized that these case studies show the need for increased transparency and inclusivity, in particular greater engagement of IPs & LCs and the establishment of proper grievance mechanisms. As an illustrative example, she cited the case of REDD+ in Brazil, where the process not only relied on the statements of developers but also included input from various stakeholders, including IPs & LCs throughout all processes. IPs & LCs had, for instance, also the opportunity to request more information or extend consultation periods, fostering a more inclusive approach. Furthermore, Aurélie Lhumeau stressed the importance of strengthening ownership of activities, as investors often lead these initiatives. Here, greater involvement of IPs & LCs can enhance ownership. Quality assurance also emerged as a significant issue, with a need for more data triangulation. In this context, initiatives like the Voluntary Carbon Market Integrity Initiative already promote greater integrity within the sector. In conclusion, Aurélie Lhumeau emphasized that nature-based climate solutions can make substantial contributions, potentially accounting for up to one-third of current climate mitigation targets and that they remain an important tool in this global effort.

In her final statement, Joan Carling reiterated the insights shared by Nikka Rivera and Fanny Métrat. She went on to emphasize that the persistence of land grabbing can be attributed to the lack of legal recognition of IPs & LCs' land rights in many regions. Often, companies obtain land from the government under the assumption that they are operating within the legal framework. It is hence imperative to recognize IPLC land rights and implement land reforms; otherwise, numerous initiatives may continue to contribute human rights violations. Joan Carling also underscored the urgent need for the establishment of mechanisms to enable meaningful decision-making by IPs & LCs at all levels. It is crucial to consider that IPs & LCs may not always assign a monetary value to natural resources, and their perspective on nature should not be disregarded in decision-making processes. Since many green energy and carbon-offset projects are driven by private sector actors, the implementation of strong regulatory frameworks for businesses including a zero-tolerance stance on human rights violations, human rights due diligence, and effective accountability mechanisms is essential to prevent a continuation of business as usual. This becomes even more critical because governments often present green investments as national priority projects, allowing them to bypass certain safeguards. Lastly, it is imperative to ensure the security of environmental and human rights defenders, combating criminalization.

Jann Lay concluded the panel with five major take-aways from his perspective: (1) The side event clearly highlighted the risks for IPs & LCs that can result from land-intensive climate action. While carbon-offsetting projects aim to address climate change and receive international funding and support, they are – because of their scale and the regions and areas that they can potentially target – very likely to have unintended negative consequences. (2) Effectively and legally recognizing land rights for IPs & LCs remains key. (3) International declarations and guiding principles have to make a difference on the ground. (4) IPs & LCs need to be put in the driver's seat of land-intensive climate action. This requires ownership, accountability, meaningful consultation, and effective grievance mechanism. (5) More stringent regulation is required that does not tolerate any infringements on human rights (zero tolerance).



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Speakers:

Joan Carling (IPRI)
Hillary Cheruiyot (EAFF)
Aurelie Lhumeau (IFAD)
Fanny Métrat (Conf' Paysanne
/Struggles for Land Forum)
Nikka Rivera (AFA)

Moderator: Jann Lay (GIGA/LMI)

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