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The real finance problem is the trillions still flowing into destruction

Merel Van Der Mark, Forest and Finance Coalition

UNEP reports that USD 8.9 trillion in private finance is still being directed toward activities that harm forests and biodiversity, compared to just USD 7.5 billion toward forest protection. And even that tiny “positive” slice is questionable — because it includes carbon offset schemes and supposedly ‘sustainable’ value chains that too often lead to land grabbing, green extractivism and rights violations.

In other words: finance for destruction is more than a thousand times greater than finance for protection — and rising.

Civil society reports — including Banking on Biodiversity Collapse and Mining & Money — confirm that banks and investors are still expanding their exposure to forest-risk sectors. At the same time, global agro-industrial subsidies and export financing remain untouched — directly incentivising nature loss.

Yet despite this, COP after COP, governments are still encouraged to chase “mobilisation of private finance” rather than cutting off destructive financial flows at source.

Meanwhile, voluntary initiatives have failed. From corporate led disclosure frameworks like the TNFD to alliances of financial institutions on Net Zero, these initiatives have not reduced harmful capital — they have mainly delayed real regulation. The Alliance of Banks that were aiming to achieve Net Zero emissions in their financed portfolios, is actually collapsing, showing how fragile voluntary commitments are in the face of profit pressure.

The IPBES Transformative Change report is clear: we must “transform economic and financial systems so that they prioritise nature and social equity over private interest.” That means ending harmful subsidies, enforcing financial regulation, embedding gender justice and Indigenous rights, and designing public-interest governance of finance — not handing nature to Wall Street under the promise of “nature markets”.

With this in mind, we urge Parties at the CBD to take Target 14 seriously.

This means:

- Make it illegal to finance biodiversity destruction — not merely disclose it.
- Redirect public finance by removing harmful agricultural and export subsidies.
- Guarantee direct financing for Indigenous Peoples, local communities and women — not via financial intermediaries.
- Reject carbon and biodiversity offset schemes that allow destruction to continue elsewhere.

We do not need more “nature-based finance products”. We need governments to stop approving finance for destruction — and start protecting people and nature through law, justice and public-interest governance.

Announcement side event:

Beyond Symptoms: Transformative and Systemic Change for Biodiversity, Climate, Agriculture and Ecological Justice

CBDA

Marie Khan Women's Caucus meeting room – 13:15

Nature-based Solutions: Why are states not focusing efforts on systemic transformations to address the drivers of biodiversity loss?

Meenal Tatpati (Women4Biodiversity) & Valentina Figuera Martínez (Global Forest Coalition)

Over the past decade, the concept of ‘Nature-based Solutions’ (NbS) has been promoted within global environmental governance, with several big conservation NGOs and corporations (such as BP, Chevron, Shell, Bayer, and Microsoft) being strong proponents. Initially developed by IUCN, the term has since spread across climate and biodiversity fora, despite evidence showing that some NbS projects can harm ecosystem functions, violate human rights, and justify greenwashing and offsetting schemes.¹ Additionally, many NbS projects do not consider the risk of impermanence, as climate change and other anthropogenic factors can affect ecosystem health.²

But why keep promoting NbS as a solution in international policy processes? Why are states not rather focusing efforts on addressing the direct drivers of biodiversity destruction?

In 2020, IUCN launched the “Global Standard for NbS,” which combines the language of conservation with development and climate action, positioning NbS as a bridge concept. Nevertheless, this approach exposes conflicting notions, since the political and economic transformations needed to halt biodiversity loss will not be achieved by combining an unlimited economic growth and development model with “conservation”.

Human rights, gender and NbS

Attempts to integrate a human rights-based approach and include safeguards within the implementation of NbS poses a contradiction, considering how easily the concept has been co-opted and abused by corporations. “Respecting and protecting human rights” and “securing Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of Indigenous Peoples and local communities” are last on the list of priorities of extractive industries; they are simply interested in offsetting as a tool to greenwash the environmental harms.

Several cases in Colombia—such as Chevron’s El Quimbo and Sogamoso hydropower projects, its REDD+ Conservation Project, and the MAVALLE Forest Project—illustrate how these so-called “Nature-based Solutions” can cause serious harm to Indigenous peoples, local communities, women, and youth. Most of Chevron’s carbon offsets are sourced from these projects. More than 16,000

people from local communities have been affected after the implementation of the Sogamoso Hydropower Project, with 1000 being forced to relocate. Threats, disappearances, and even killings have been reported and associated with opposition to the dam³.

IUCN standard criteria related to “inclusive governance” was clearly not respected. “Mutual respect and equality, regardless of gender”, and upholding the right of Indigenous Peoples to FPIC, two of the other considerations of the IUCN standard criteria, were clearly not priorities either. This is just one example but it is far from the exception.

NbS must not continue to be promoted as a ‘silver bullet’ solution to achieve the goals of the KM-GBF and the Paris Agreement. Parties should focus their time and resources on urgently needed systemic change.

¹ [https://www.cell.com/trends/ecology-evolution/abstract/S0169-5347\(15\)00218-9](https://www.cell.com/trends/ecology-evolution/abstract/S0169-5347(15)00218-9), <https://www.boell.de/en/2024/01/24/nature-based-solutions-trap>, <https://corporateaccountability.org/resources/chevrons-junk-a-genda-report/>



² <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abn9668>

See the online article for links to sources

Announcement side event:

Key considerations for further risk assessment guidance

TWN | FGS | ENSSER

Marie Khan Women's Caucus meeting room – 18:15

The Timber Industry's New Strategy: Gene-Edited Trees

Anne Peterman & Heather Lee, Global Justice Ecology Project

Biotechnology corporations and the pulp and paper industry are advancing a new front in industrial forestry: **gene-edited trees**. After decades of public opposition and international decisions like the 2008 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) call for the *Precautionary Approach* regarding genetically modified (GM) trees, industry and researchers are now attempting to sidestep regulation—and public scrutiny—by redefining what counts as “genetic modification.”

Researchers are using new gene-editing tools such as **CRISPR-Cas9** to alter traits like wood density, growth rate, and lignin content. Because these edits can be made without inserting DNA from other species, corporations argue that such trees are not GMOs—and therefore escape regulations.

This framing is unscientific. **Gene editing is genetic engineering**. Artificial interventions into the genome can produce unintended mutations and unpredictable traits. Even small edits can ripple through the genome, altering gene interactions over time. In long-lived species such as trees, these risks multiply over decades, potentially destabilizing ecosystems, soils, and forest biodiversity.

The industry's motive is clear: **profit and control over forest resources**. Companies such as Arauco in Chile and Suzano in Brazil are investing heavily in gene-edited eucalyptus for faster growth and easier processing into pulp, paper, bioenergy, and even bioplastics. These trees could expand industrial monocultures into new regions, accelerating deforestation and the displacement of Indigenous and rural communities.

The **Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)**—whose certification is essential for access to global markets—continues to ban GM trees. Yet industry lobbyists are pressing the FSC to redefine GMOs in its policies to allow gene-edited trees. For now, the FSC is holding the line, con-

firmed that gene-edited trees fall within its definition of genetic modification.

Meanwhile, corporate researchers are reframing public acceptance—not safety—as the main barrier. **Sofía Valenzuela**—who researches gene edited trees for Chilean forestry company Arauco—recently stated, “Genome editing opens a new door for us to have these trees in commercial plantations.”

The push for gene-edited trees follows a **familiar pattern**: technological optimism masking social and ecological risk. The forestry industry's promises of “sustainability” echo those made by the GMO crop sector—promises that instead led to deeper corporate consolidation, chemical dependence, and ecological harm.

In a major test case, **FuturaGene**, the biotechnology division of Suzano, has submitted to Brazil's **National Technical Commission for Biosafety (CTNBio)** a request to exempt a gene-edited eucalyptus from regulation. The company claims the GM tree contains no foreign DNA and should be treated as “equivalent to a conventional plant.”

If CTNBio agrees, **no biosafety assessments will be required**, allowing the unregulated release of gene-edited GM trees and further eroding the legitimacy of international environmental governance under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The stakes are extraordinarily high. **Releasing gene-edited trees could irreversibly alter forest ecosystems**—spreading engineered traits into wild populations and threatening Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent communities whose lives and cultures depend on these ecosystems.

Forests are among the planet's most complex and vital living systems. They must not become **experimental fields for industrial biotechnology**.

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Submissions are welcome from all civil society groups.
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UN experts: Corporate agribusiness imperils biodiversity, rights and food sovereignty

Third World Network

The UN Working Group on Peasants and Rural Workers and Special Rapporteur on the Right to food Michael Fakhri warn that corporate concentration in food systems deepens inequality, marginalises small-scale producers, and drives ecological collapse. Fakhri's report *Corporate Power and Human Rights in Food Systems* shows how a few transnational agribusinesses dominate agricultural production, input markets and supply chains—undermining peasants' rights, food sovereignty, and the right to food. The IPBES Transformative Change Assessment identified the same issue of concentration of wealth as an underlying cause of biodiversity loss, creating systemic barriers to transformative change by reinforcing profit-driven models that exploit people and nature.

According to the UN experts, corporate-led food systems shape what is grown, how it is grown, and who benefits from it. These systems have intensified industrial agriculture, greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity destruction, pollution, and human rights violations. Many agrifood corporations are expanding their control through digitalization—amassing and monetizing agricultural data in ways that entrench their dominance and erode farmers' autonomy. Corporate influence extends to policymaking spaces at national and UN levels, allowing private interests to dictate food and agricultural agendas.

In contrast, small-scale farmers, pastoralists, and fisherfolk, who produce over 70% of the world's food, are systematically excluded from decision-making and denied access to land, seeds, and markets. Despite this marginalization, they are central to addressing the climate change, pollution, and biodiversity crises. Through agroecological practices, seed conservation, and sustainable resource management, peasants and rural workers provide viable pathways to restore ecosystems and build resilient food systems. Their traditional knowledge and lived experience are indispensable to transformative change, yet corporate practices such as

land grabbing, seed monopolization, and exploitative contracts continue to displace and disempower them.

The UN experts emphasized that voluntary corporate commitments are insufficient. They called for full implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) through binding laws and robust accountability mechanisms. States must regulate corporate activity, prevent rights violations, and ensure access to justice for affected communities. Furthermore, they urged governments and UN agencies to centre peasants, small-scale farmers, and rural workers in food policy and governance, recognizing food as a human right, not a commodity.

The experts also called for the finalisation of the legally binding instrument to regulate the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises, to make corporations accountable and rebalance power in global food systems. Without such enforceable measures, they warned, corporate impunity will persist—deepening inequality, eroding ecosystems, and threatening the planet's capacity to feed itself sustainably.

Genuine transformation requires dismantling corporate dominance, democratizing governance, and redistributing power to those who sustain life and biodiversity—peasants, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities. Only by confronting these structural inequities can societies achieve equitable, sustainable, and biodiversity-rich food systems.

The *Corporate Power and Human Rights in Food Systems* report is available

here:

<https://docs.un.org/en/A/80/213>

