

The industrialisation of the Bioeconomy poses risks to the climate, the environment, and people

Civil society groups reject the impact of an exponential growth of the Bioeconomy

In recent years, governments have given support to substitute fossil fuels with biomass for energy, in the name of climate change. Increasingly, they are also considering support for other products made out of bio-materials, which is fashionably named the 'bioeconomy.'

The Biofuture Platform (<http://biofutureplatform.org/about>), an initiative proposed by the Brazilian government and launched with support from 20 countries in 2016, is one example. However, a closer look at this Platform shows that the bioeconomy is simply a cover-up for a significant increase in bioenergy, together with other short lived 'bio-products' whose climate credentials are as bad for the climate as bioenergy. [1] The European Union and several countries (which have not so far signed up to the BioFuture Platform) are also developing 'bioeconomy strategies' with a similar purpose. [2]

The undersigned organisations are concerned that scaling-up the use of bioenergy and other short-lived bio-products (the so-called-bioeconomy) will have detrimental impacts on the climate, human rights, nature protection, and the transition to a low-carbon energy system. We reject the BioFuture Platform and other similar developments for the following reasons:

Bad for the climate:

To meet the Paris Agreement goal of keeping the global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees, we must swiftly phase out emissions and simultaneously increase the amount of carbon that can be removed by forests, grasslands, and soils. In direct opposition to this, the BioFuture Platform advocates transitioning the energy, transport, and industrial sectors to bioenergy and biomaterials. This ignores the science - burning biomass for energy releases as many emissions as burning coal[3], while the production and consumption of biofuels, bioplastic or other biomaterials reduces land available for crops, leads to deforestation and other land conversions, and releases nitrous oxide.

To mitigate the worst effects of climate change, we need governments, NGOs, academia, and the private sector to work together to reduce overconsumption of energy and decarbonize the energy, transport, and industrial sectors - not merely allow the rich to continue over-consuming whilst transitioning to another carbon-intensive resource.

Bad for human rights:

An industrial bioeconomy would increase demand for land to grow biomass. This would drive deforestation and other land use change on a scale that would have devastating impacts on people. A conservative study about the global biomass potential [4] found that for bioenergy to provide five per cent of global energy use, it would require the conversion of an area of land larger than India (386

million hectares). The bioeconomy foreseen by the BioFuture Platform would need even more land to be converted for bioproducts. The underlying assumption is that most the land needed to convert the fossil fuel economy to the bioeconomy would be provided by the global South. But growing demand for biofuels and biomass for heat and electricity, has already led to large-scale land grabbing and the eviction of entire villages, and reduced access to farmland, forest and water resources. [5] Expanding demand will worsen those impacts, especially where forests are replaced by plantations, increasing pesticide poisoning and labour rights violations, and reducing clean water and food sovereignty. In addition, the processing and burning of biomass for energy releases a variety of toxic emissions, posing additional health risks.

Bad for nature and biodiversity:

We are in the midst of a biodiversity crisis, which will be worsened by the BioFuture Platform's proposals to increase demand for land, water, and forests. Demand for palm oil and soy is already accelerating forest destruction in many countries and intensification of agriculture (more chemicals, less fallow land) in Europe and North America is accelerating the decline in insects and birds. [6] Demand for bioenergy has already led to the clearcutting of highly biodiverse forests in the southern US, [7] the Baltic States [8] and elsewhere, and as monoculture plantations advance, agrobiodiversity reduces, and nature suffers. Plantations for bioplastics and other biomaterials will just make these problems worse. We need to be reducing demand for wood and crops, not increasing it. There is also an assumption that production of bioproducts will depend heavily on use of genetically engineered crops, trees, and microbes, all of which pose serious risks to the environment and human health.

Bad for a just transition from the fossil fuel economy:

The BioFuture Platform's vision distracts attention and resources away from real, proven solutions to climate change and entrenches energy, social and economic injustices around the world. It would encourage further bioenergy subsidies at the expense of genuinely low-carbon renewable energy such as wind and solar power which must be immediately scaled up in a manner which respects community rights. "Modern bioenergy" (biofuels and biomass for heat and electricity) promoted by the BioFuture Platform is primarily used in the global North and by the energy-hungry industries who should be reducing consumption. Bioenergy gives them a get out clause from dealing with their wasteful consumption.

The undersigned groups call on the 20 countries and the multilateral organisations that are signatories to the BioFuture Platform to end support for bioenergy and other short-lived bioproducts. We call on other governments to refrain from supporting the Platform and its demands. We call instead for governments to propose meaningful and equitable responses to the climate crisis which respect human rights, focus on proven low carbon technologies, reduce overconsumption and waste, and protect forests and other ecosystems.

References:

[1] biofutureplatform.org

[2] See ec.europa.eu/research/bioeconomy/index.cfm?pg=policy&lib=strategy for the EU Bioeconomy Strategy review.

[3] See biofuelwatch.org.uk/biomass-resources/resources-on-biomass/ for a list of scientific studies which show that energy from burning wood is far from carbon neutral.

[4] Biomass Energy: The Scale of the Potential Resource, Christopher B Field et al, Trends in Ecology and Evolution, February 2008; Note that the 5% figure is based on global energy use in 2005. It translates into 27 EJ

[5] According to an ActionAid report, EU investors acquired 6 million hectares of land in sub-Saharan Africa for biofuel production by May 2013, yet the EU has imported very little feedstock for agrofuels from Africa, suggesting that the hype around bioenergy alone was a major driver behind those large land-grabs, which led to the eviction of entire villages, and to many communities losing access to their farmland, forests and water resources

actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/adding_fuel_to_the_flame_actionaid_2013_final.pdf

[6] See for example e360.yale.edu/features/insect_numbers_declining_why_it_matters

[7] See for example dogwoodalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/NRDC_2014-2017Booklet_DigitalVersion-resize.pdf

[8] See climatechangenews.com/2018/01/16/logging-surge-threatens-quarter-estonias-forest-warn-conservationists/

Signatory civil society organisations

International:

- ActionAid International
- Global Forest Coalition
- Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN)
- Soroptimist International
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Regional:

- Birdlife Europe and Central Asia
- Corporate Europe Observatory - EU
- Fern - Europe

National:

- Acción por la Biodiversida - Argentina
- Amigos de la Tierra Argentina - Argentina
- Kalang River Forest Alliance - Australia
- Bellingen Environment Centre – Australia
- Bob Brown Foundation – Australia
- Kalang Progress Association - Australia
- "System Change Not Climate Change" - Austria

- Aliança RECOs – Redes de Cooperação Comunitária Sem Fronteiras - Brazil
- Movimento Mulheres pela P@Z! - Brazil
- Grupo de Trabalhos em Prevenção Posthivo (GTP) - Brazil
- Oykos Capacitação - Brazil
- No One Left Out (NOLO) - Cameroon
- Struggle to Economize Future Environment (SEFE) - Cameroon
- Ecology Action Centre – Canada
- Journalists for Human Rights
- Blue Dalian - China
- China Environmental Paper Network - China
- Green Longjiang - China
- Scholartree Alliance - China
- Snow Alliance - China
- Wuhu Ecology Center - China
- COECOCEIBA - Amigos de la Tierra Costa Rica - Costa Rica
- Red de Coordinación en Biodiversidad - Costa Rica
- Czech Coalition for Rivers - Czech Republic
- Forests of the World - Denmark
- NOAH - Friends of the Earth Denmark
- EcoHaina - Dominican Republic
- CESTA - Friends of the Earth El Salvador
- Estonian Forest Aid (Eesti Metsa Abiks)
- New Wind Association - Finland
- Finnish Association for Nature Conservation - Finland
- Ilmastovanhemmat (Climate Parents) - Finland
- Kepa – The Finnish NGO Platform
- Luonto-Liitto - Finnish Nature League
- Canopée - France
- Les Amis de la Terre - France
- Worldview – the Gambia
- Arbeitsreis Regenwald und Artenschutz (ARA) - Germany
- BUND Kandertal - Germany
- Rettet den Regenwald e.V. - Germany
- Seeds Action Network - Germany
- Denkhause Bremen - Germany
- The Development Institute - Ghana
- Abibiman Foundation - Ghana
- Plataforma Internacional contra la Impunidad - Guatemala
- All India Forum of Forest Movements - India
- Centre for Environment Education Himalaya - India
- Indigenous Perspectives - India
- JIKALAHARI - Indonesia
- Kaliptra Andalas - Indonesia
- KKI WARSI - Indonesia
- Link-AR Borneo - Indonesia
- WALHI-Friends of the Earth Indonesia
- Yayasan Citra Mandiri Mentawai - Indonesia

- Cevi de Udine - Italy
- Solidarietà e Cooperazione/CIPSI -Italy
- SONIA/"SOciety for New Initiatives and Activities" for a Just New World - Italy
- Coordinadora de Pueblos y Organizaciones del Oriente del Estado de México en Defensa de la Tierra, el Agua y su Cultura - Mexico
- Frente Amplio No Partidista en contra del Nuevo Aeropuerto y otros Megaproyectos en la Cuenca del Valle de México - Mexico
- Grupo Mesófilo A.C. - Mexico
- Forest Observatory - Morocco
- UNAC - Uniao Nacional de Camponeses - Mozambique
- Association of Collaborative Forest Users Nepal
- Forest Environment Workers Union Nepal (FEWUN)
- National Forum for Advocacy, Nepal (NAFAN)
- Rural Area Development Programme (RADP) - Nepal
- Food Justice Working Group - Netherlands
- Gender and Water Alliance - Netherlands
- Groene Zon - Netherlands
- Milieudefensie / Friends of the Earth Netherlands
- Netherlands Platform Gentechnologie - Netherlands
- Network Vital Agriculture and Nutrition - Netherlands
- Forest Peoples Programme - Netherlands and UK
- "Colectivo Voces Ecológicas (COVEC) - Panama
- HEÑÓI - Paraguay
- Pastoral de la Tierra del Vicariato Apostólico de Yurimaguas - Peru
- Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment (Kalikasan PNE)/Friends of the Earth Philippines - Philippines
- ZERO - Associação Sistema Terrestre Sustentável - Portugal
- Ole Siosiomaga Society Incorporated (OLSSI) - Samoa
- South Durban Community Environmental Alliance - South Africa
- AFRICANDO - Spain
- GRAIN - Spain
- Salva la Selva - Spain
- Verdegaija - Spain
- Protect the Forest - Sweden
- Les Amis de la Terre-Togo
- Regional Center for International Development Corporation - Uganda
- National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) - Uganda
- Development Alternatives - UK
- EcoNexus - UK
- Gaia Foundation - UK
- Genetic Engineering Network - UK
- The Corner House - UK
- The Real Farming Trust - UK
- Biofuelwatch - UK and USA
- Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project - USA
- Dogwood Alliance - USA
- Friends of the Earth US - USA

- Global Justice Ecology Project - USA
- Greenenvironment - USA
- Heartwood - USA
- Keep The Woods - USA
- Mangrove Action Project- USA
- Natural Resources Defense Council - USA
- Oakland Institute - USA
- Partnership for Policy Integrity - USA
- Pivot Point - USA
- Rainforest Relief - USA
- RESTORE: The North Woods - USA
- Save Our Sky Blue Waters - USA
- Southern Environmental Law Center - USA
- Tribe of the Oak - USA
- Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN) - USA
- Stand.earth - USA and Canada