

**Consultation response: Healthy and Sustainable Food: Reducing the Environmental Impacts of the Global Food System on Human Rights**

**Introduction:**

FoEI is the world’s largest grassroots environmental justice organisation. We have been working on the linked crises of environmental destruction, social injustice, and human rights abuses for several decades with grassroots communities and social movements. We advocate for a transformation of food systems towards environmental, social, economic and gender justice based on the Human rights and collective rights of peoples through transitioning to agroecology for food sovereignty.

In this submission we are focussing on one particular, new and concerning aspect of environmental crises and food systems : ‘false solutions’ to the climate and biodiversity crises which will also have a massive negative impact on sustainable food systems and Human Rights while enabling agribusiness to claim that they can reduce their environmental impacts without systemic structural change.

**Impacts of Land based climate mitigation strategies - Negative emissions technologies**

Large scale land based schemes for carbon removal from the atmosphere are fast becoming a central theme in the response to the climate crisis. Corporations and Governments are hoping land can sequester millions of tonnes of carbon, to offset[[1]](#footnote-1) their still rising emissions and help us reach ‘net zero’[[2]](#footnote-2) climate targets. The basic concept of “net zero” can be captured in an equation: greenhouse gas emissions minus removals of greenhouse gases, balancing out to zero.

Almost all of the plans for ‘net zero’ are based on offsetting and they not only deflect climate action further but also require eye watering areas of land. For example estimates of the land required globally to deploy bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS) range from 100 to 3000 million hectares. [[3]](#footnote-3) Even the more benign sounding ‘Nature Based Solutions’ for climate change estimate 14 million hectares of destructive monoculture tree plantations and a whopping 678 million hectares of land for reforestation.[[4]](#footnote-4)

It’s not clear who will claim ownership of these areas of land or where they will come from, but we can guess based on recent announcements by fossil fuel corporations. ENI, is involved in a gas extraction project in Mozambique and has been implicated in kicking 550 families off their land and blocking fisherfolk from the sea. At the same time ENI has committed to planting 20 million hectares of forest in Africa to achieve net zero by 2030. For the communities living on the land and forest this is essentially a double land grab – once for gas extraction and again to offset it.

**Net zero allows business as usual environmental destruction to continue**

Several fossil fuel companies and agribusiness including Shell, Eni, Nestle and JBS have made pledges to achieve ‘net zero’ emissions to show their ability to contribute to the Paris agreement on climate change.

But these net-zero pledges obscure the need for the phaseout of fossil fuels and industrial agriculture with the distractions and seductions of the carbon market and offsets. “Net zero” allow these actors to maintain the status quo. And the status quo will certainly worsen the climate catastrophe and pose grave threats to peoples collective rights over their land and territories with a new wave of land grabbing through enclosures for conservation projects but also via the commodification and integration of nature into financial markets – what we call the financialization of nature.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Net zero pledges themselves will hamper attempts to transition towards just and sustainable food systems by putting more land in the hands of financial actors and corporations. It also allows agribusinesses to continue business as usual. For example JBS is of the largest global meat corporations and is one of the largest food system contributors to climate change. They are implicated in ongoing destruction of the Amazon as well as bribery and corruption charges. [[6]](#footnote-6) [[7]](#footnote-7)Their recent pledge towards net-zero is predication on continued expansion of their business, but reducing emissions intensity (emissions per unit of product) and investing $100 million by 2030 in research and development projects to reach net-zero. [[8]](#footnote-8)

An investigation into net zero commitments by Nestle by GRAIN states, “*In December 2020, Nestlé launched its “Net Zero Roadmap”, committing to reduce its emissions by 50% by 2030 and to "net zero" by 2050. The majority of these emissions occur in its supply chain, especially in the sourcing of dairy, meat and commodity crops (coffee, palm oil, sugar, soybeans, etc).**[14](https://grain.org/en/article/6634-corporate-greenwashing-net-zero-and-nature-based-solutions-are-a-deadly-fraud%22%20%5Cl%20%22sdfootnote14sym) Nestlé's annual Scope 3 emissions are roughly double the total emissions of its home country, Switzerland.**[15](https://grain.org/en/article/6634-corporate-greenwashing-net-zero-and-nature-based-solutions-are-a-deadly-fraud%22%20%5Cl%20%22sdfootnote15sym)*

*Nestlé's climate plan does not involve a reduction in its sales of foods based on dairy, meat and other highly-emitting agricultural commodities. To the contrary, its climate plan is based on a projected growth of 68 per cent for both its sourcing of dairy and livestock products and of commodity crops between 2020 and 2030.**[16](https://grain.org/en/article/6634-corporate-greenwashing-net-zero-and-nature-based-solutions-are-a-deadly-fraud%22%20%5Cl%20%22sdfootnote16sym) It claims, however, that this growth in production will be more than compensated by the deployment of climate-friendly technologies and changes to farming practices among its farmer suppliers...*

*Nestlé's Roadmap is pretty much a carbon copy of the other net zero pledges that have been streaming forth from agribusiness and fossil fuel corporations over the past year or so. All of them are based on the continued growth in sales of their highly polluting products, offset by payments to others to suck carbon back into the ground, primarily by protecting forests that are in danger of being cut down or by planting trees on degraded lands.” [[9]](#footnote-9)*

**Investigating ‘Nature Based Solutions”**

Collectively these ‘natural’ solutions for climate, biodiversity crises are being termed ‘Nature Based Solutions’. The concepts of nature-based solutions (NBS) and natural climate solutions (NCS)[[10]](#footnote-10) have gained prominence in both climate and biodiversity debates over the last year or so. Claims such as that from the United Nations that “*Changing our land practices alone could deliver 30 per cent of the emissions reductions that we need to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement on climate action by 2030*” have been repeated by key decision-makers, some conservation NGOs, and business leaders. Yet NBS as a concept is so broad and general and includes everything from peatland restoration to monoculture plantations.

NBS has also become the new buzzword in sustainable agriculture. The promotion of NBS in agriculture raises several issues of concern. The main scientific analysis that forms the basis for justifying NBS assumes the removal of vast areas of land from agriculture through ‘sustainable intensification’ of farming in order to free land for tree planting or reforestation. [[11]](#footnote-11)However ‘Sustainable Intensification’ (SI) is essentially intensification with some greening. It does not envisage the transformation of food systems that many experts agree is needed. SI includes reducing tillage through the use of GMOs and pesticides, but also “less emissions per unit of production” or essentially intensification, GMOs, gene editing, and bioenergy crops.

Without such sparing of land for NBS via agricultural intensification, NBS is essentially implausible at large scale. However several intensification techniques are themselves huge threats to climate and biodiversity protection such as gene drives, increasing fertilizer use or factory farming of animals. Sustainable Intensification is also based on hugely contested science, such as mitigation potential of soil carbon sequestration, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of ruminants, bioenergy carbon balances etc.

Indeed NBS in agriculture is being used as the answer of agribusinesses to replace the increase prominence and demands for agroecology by social movements, civil society, experts and institutions with a “Junk” version of agroecology which keeps the status quo of corporate control, productivity obsession and market based solutions.[[12]](#footnote-12)

**Real solutions for Peoples’ rights**

Decentralised solutions to the climate crisis based on ecological, autonomous management, traditional knowledge and governance by Indigenous people, forest peoples, small scale food producers of their own land and territories such as agroecology and community forest management (CFM) already exist and are gaining importance.[[13]](#footnote-13) [[14]](#footnote-14) CFM is the best way to protect forests and ecosystems that naturally store carbon, and agroecology can reduce the use of fossil fuels, increase yields and store carbon in soils.

Community Forest Management (CFM) offers an alternative to the industrial forestry practices that have devastated forests and driven severe social injustices. It blends appropriate technology, ancestral knowledge and community practices relating to resource use. However, CFM is not just a technical approach, it is also a major opportunity for communities to exercise political control of their territories and resources. CFM is an effective and economically viable alternative to destructive industrial logging and offers a win-win solution to biodiversity loss and climate change.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Agroecology in the framework of food sovereignty offers an alternative to industrial agrocommodites that are a leading cause of land rights violations and land grabbing. It also encompasses a political approach for small scale food producers to produce food ecologically, drastically reducing emissions, protecting biodiversity and ensuring their collective rights and access to and control over their commons. [[16]](#footnote-16) [[17]](#footnote-17) [[18]](#footnote-18)

The Collective rights to Land and associated rights to what we call ‘territories’ such as Right to Water, right to self- determination, womens’ rights and how they are conceptualised in CFM and agroecology are central in tackling the structural causes of the environmental crises.

***Therefore it is key that your report differentiates between false solutions to the ecological crises - including some land based climate mitigation schemes and market mechanisms for climate and biodiversity protection and the financialisation of nature which can worsen the progressive realisation of human rights - and real solutions strongly based in Human Rights approaches and which are in line with the VGGTs, UNDROP and UNDRIP such as Community Forest Management and Agroecology in the framework of food sovereignty.***

***The implementation of CFM and agroecology as environmental justice solutions requires an increase in the demarcation of land under collective communities’ control and community based territorial management in line with UNDROP, UNDRIP and VGGTs.*** ***However we would caution against focussing efforts to ensure customary rights and collective rights to land solely on carbon benefits as the financialisation of nature could transfer control of territories away from communities even if they still legally own them.***

***Importantly, protecting land tenure and ensuring collective land rights should no longer be simply seen as safeguards added onto environmental policies but should be one of the fundamental way States can ensure sustainability and environmental protection.***

1. ‘Carbon offsets claim to compensate for the emission of carbon dioxide via other activities such as planting trees. In reality, this allows the buyer’s emissions to continue, instead of requiring them to cut their emissions at source. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The basic concept of “net zero” can be captured in an equation: greenhouse gas emissions minus carbon drawdown equals zero. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “The risks of relying on tomorrow’s ‘negative emissions’ to guide today’s mitigation action” Stockholm Environment Institute 2016 <https://mediamanager.sei.org/documents/Publications/Climate/SEI-WP-2016-08-Negative-emissions.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Griscom et al, 2017 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For an analysis of the problems with net zero see, FOEI, "Chasing Carbon Unicorns: The deception of carbon markets and “net zero”": February 2021: <https://www.foei.org/resources/publications/chasing-carbon-unicorns-carbon-markets-net-zero-report> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. JBS: The Brazilian butchers who took over the world

 <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2019-07-02/jbs-brazilian-butchers-took-over-the-world> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Fanning the Flames

*The corporations destroying the Amazon and worsening the COVID-19 pandemic*

<https://stories.mightyearth.org/amazonfires2020/index.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. BS Makes Global Commitment to Achieve Net-Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2040

<https://jbsfoodsgroup.com/articles/jbs-makes-global-commitment-to-achieve-net-zero-greenhouse-gas-emissions-by-2040> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. **Corporate greenwashing: "net zero" and "nature-based solutions" are a deadly fraud**

<https://grain.org/en/article/6634-corporate-greenwashing-net-zero-and-nature-based-solutions-are-a-deadly-fraud> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Note that for the purpose of brevity, the acronym NBS is used throughout this briefing to denote both nature-based solutions and natural climate solutions – even though, to some commentators, there is a slight difference between the two [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Griscom et al, 2017 <https://www.pnas.org/content/114/44/11645> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. TNI & FOEI, ‘Junk Agroecology’: The corporate capture of agroecology for a partial ecological transition without social justice," 13 October 2020: <https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/38_foei_junk_agroecology_full_report_eng_lr_0.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition” HLPE, CFS July 2019 <http://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-hlpe/en/> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. “Community Forest Management - An opportunity to preserve and restore vital resources for the Good Living of human societies” FoEI, April 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. “Why Community Forest Management matters” FoEI 2015 <https://www.foei.org/resources/publications/publications-by-subject/forests-and-biodiversity-publications/community-forest-management-lobby-briefing> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. “Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition” HLPE, CFS July 2019 <http://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-hlpe/en/> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. “The 10 Elements of Agroecology” FAO, 2018 <http://www.fao.org/3/i9037en/I9037EN.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. “Declaration of the International Forum for Agroecology Nyéléni, Mali February 2015 <http://www.foodsovereignty.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Download-declaration-Agroecology-Nyeleni-2015.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)