

# In defence of local livelihoods, the forest and the Golfo Dulce: the campaign against “Ston Forestal” in the 1990s and its historical roots

## En defensa de los medios de vida locales, el bosque y el Golfo Dulce: la campaña contra Ston Forestal en los 1990 y sus raíces históricas

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the birth of and resistance to an industrial forestry project in the Osa Peninsula called Ston Forestal S.A. in the early 1990s. It discusses how the difficult circumstances for farming in the area spurred the project's initial success but then provoked local resistance to the extension of the pulp plantations on farmers' lands. Farmers, tourism entrepreneurs and environmentalists joined forces to oppose the project, which also included an industrial plant, expected to impact upon the area's marine and forest biodiversity. The conflict rose from a local dispute over a piece of land in 1992 to an international environmental campaign in 1994. After a complex political action and reaction process, analysed in the article by means of rural development studies and social movement concepts, the chip mill and harbour work of the company were not built. However, sufficient structural solutions to the crisis in farming and the gaps in nature protection for the Golfo Dulce and its surrounding forest resources seem not to have been found yet.

**Key words:** rural development, Costa Rica, industrial forestry, pulp and paper industry, nature conservation, identity, social movements, campaigning.

**Resumen:** Este artículo trata el surgimiento y resistencia al proyecto industrial forestal Ston Forestal S.A. al comienzo de los años 90, en la Península de Osa. Se discute como las difíciles condiciones para la agricultura en el área, estimularon el éxito inicial del proyecto, pero que después provocaron la resistencia local a la extensión de las plantaciones para pulpa, en tierras de cultivo. Agricultores, empresarios turísticos y ambientalistas se unieron para oponerse al proyecto, que también incluyó una planta industrial, arriesgando un impacto sobre el área marina y la biodiversidad forestal. El conflicto pasó de una disputa local por un pedazo de tierra en el 1992 a una campaña ambiental internacional en 1994. Después de una compleja acción política y procesos de reacción, analizados en el artículo por medio de estudios de desarrollo rural y conceptos de movimiento social, la fábrica de astillas y el puerto industrial de la compañía no fueron construidos. Sin embargo, las soluciones estructurales necesarias ante la crisis en agricultura y de los vacíos en la protección natural para el Golfo Dulce y sus recursos forestales, aún no han sido encontrados.

**Palabras clave:** desarrollo rural, Costa Rica, industria forestal, industria de pulpa y papel, conservación de la naturaleza, identidad, movimientos sociales, campañas.

### Introduction

In the early 1990s, the Osa Peninsula set the stage for a fierce conflict over the use of the Golfo Dulce and the surrounding land. The direct cause was the occupation of relatively fertile agricultural lands, and areas suitable for tourism, by monoculture plantations of the pulpwood tree *Gmelina arborea*. The owner of the plantations was the company Ston Forestal S.A., daughter of the Chicago-based paper giant Stone Container Corporation. They had convinced many farmers since 1989 to lease their land to the company for 6 to 18 years. Often plagued by

economic problems, more than 200 agricultural producers in the south of the country saw no other way than to capture the easy money at once and try and bet on employment and income generation elsewhere. Farmers who wanted or had to stay in the area feared the effects of the out-migration of their neighbours and the monocultures on their agricultural livelihoods.

<sup>1</sup> The article is based on the author's PhD work done for the University of Amsterdam and the Dutch Organization for Scientific Research (NWO/WOTRO) in the years 1994-1999 (VAN DEN HOMBERGH 2004). Since 2007 she works for the Netherlands Committee for IUCN, the World Conservation Union.

When the extension of the plantations already had been going on for some years, environmentalists discovered the plans for the building of a chip mill and harbour work in the Golfo Dulce to chip and transport the wood to the US and possibly Japan. They feared that this intensive use of the Golfo Dulce would harm the pristine marine resources, and in addition – because of the trucks delivering the wood day after day – they argued that the biological corridor between the two parts of the Corcovado National Park would be seriously cross-cut and damaged. Farmers, tourism entrepreneurs and environmentalists from then on joined forces to oppose the Ston Forestal project. As we will see below, the conflict rose from a local dispute over a piece of land in 1992 to an international campaign in 1994, supported by AECO (Friends of the Earth Costa Rica), Greenpeace and the Rainforest Action Network. This presented a potential risk to Costa Rica's green image to which the then President José María Figueres tried to find a solution. After a very interesting political action and reaction process, the chip mill and harbour work was not built. But, as we will have to ask at the end “has a real solution been found for the protection of the Golfo Dulce and the Peninsula's forest resources?”

## Background of the project

In the late 1980s, the Costa Rican government signed an agreement with Stone Container Corporation to produce pulpwood in the poor southern zone of the country, including the Osa Peninsula. The political reasoning was to create jobs in an area with a high unemployment rate, to find alternative uses to the often abandoned and unproductive agricultural lands, and to contribute to the diversification of Costa Rican export by industrialising a forest product. In addition, the 24.000 hectares of pulpwood that were to be sown by the company, under their Costa Rican name Ston Forestal S.A., would add to the figures of “reforestation”. The latter would be a welcome asset to a country plagued by deforestation and criticism because of it<sup>2</sup>, and therefore “reforestation” proved to be an argument with quite some political weight in the conflict that soon would emerge over the project's land use implications.

The project designers used a strategy that was increasingly employed in Latin America (GORDILLO DE ANDA & BOENING 1999, ZOOMERS & VAN DER HAAR 2000). The pulpwood species *Gmelina arborea* was sown on farms that were not bought, but leased instead, for 6 to 18 years, enough for one to three harvesting cycles of the fast-growing species. This was insisted upon by the Costa Rican government to avoid large ownership of land by a foreign company. There would be considerable

resistance to this in an area where the United Fruit banana company had ruled for so long and had left social and economic despair after their sudden withdrawal in the early 1980s. For the paper company, leasing instead of buying had the advantage as a temporary try-out of a new strategy of raw material production, while potential environmental costs (for example soil degradation) would be externalised to the farmers, the region and the country. However, conflict could not be avoided by just changing agricultural land use in the southern zone to industrial tree production this way. Especially because the leasing arrangements meant a *de facto* expropriation, at least for a considerable time, and more importantly impacted upon many others beyond those farmers who leased out their lands.

## Touching a wasp's nest: conflict over natural resources around the Golfo Dulce

It was in a village called Agujas de Terrones on the Osa Peninsula where the land use conflict was sparked off. It was 1992 and the company had been sowing *Gmelina* for 3 years obtaining over 10.000 hectares of land. An abandoned farm on the coast was invaded by squatters. Part of the farm was located in the zone known as “zona marítimo terrestre”, the inalienable public property strip of 50 to 150 metres from the sea. To be able to use it, one has to pay a canon each year, and because the “owner” of the farm had failed to do so he had lost his user right in 1990. Squatters used this moment to occupy the attractive strip of land, organised in part by land speculators in the nearby village. Many really were in need of land to cultivate, others were occupying a piece to obtain a good price for the plot from foreign land buyers or tourists who loved to have a view on the beautiful adjacent Golfo Dulce. The owner had already tried to get rid of the squatters twice, but few days after they had invaded the farm. In Costa Rica, one has to pay for the police to do the dislocation work, which is a costly matter. Ston Forestal S.A. made an attractive offer to the owner: the company would pay for the police, and with some extra money obtain the lease of the farm for 12 years. This would keep the farm out of the hands of both squatters and the bank, because on the one hand the Costa Rican law would offer protection against squatters if the land was under “forest use” (the *Gmelina* plantation), and on the other the owner would have a sudden amount of money to pay his debts. About fifty policemen were said to have burnt the “ran-

<sup>2</sup> Costa Rica is well-known for its conservation policies and National Parks but meanwhile had one of the highest deforestation rates in Latin America by that time, because of which most trees outside national parks lived an uncertain life (CARRIÈRE 1990).

chos" on the farm, and arrested the squatters, threatening to kill some of them. Most of the squatters were held in detention for several days, during which Ston Forestal tractors came and destroyed what was left of the ranchos, trees and crops on the farm, to sow *Gmelina*.

When the police had forcefully entered one of the "ranchos" a pan with hot water fell off the fire in the tumult and was spilt over a young boy, severely scalding his right hand. It was the son of a poor landless farmer and wage labourer, who afterwards tried in vain to claim his right for indemnification for what had happened to his child. The court told him there was lack of proof that the company was responsible for this, and the company itself denied their involvement in the case. Because of this the injured right hand of the poor boy became a physical and symbolic injury at the same time. Open violence is not easily accepted in Costa Rica (BIESANZ et al. 1998), and protection of the "campesinado" by the state has been regarded as a right by many (RODRIGUEZ CERVANTES 1993). The fact that policemen were mobilised to protect the interests of a transnational company against those of the peninsular people caused great indignation, and it provoked bad memories as I will argue later. In this dispute over land, Ston Forestal became the most visible enemy. One of the persons who joined the local protest committee that was formed then, explained:

"So what does Ston do, if it is making the Costa Ricans its martyrs, These people were Costa Ricans too. I saw the bits and pieces of the houses, the clothes that were thrown away! (...) The children having nothing at all to eat, and there was no help. And that hurts, because I am from a free Costa Rica, a Costa Rica of love and peace, it hurts that they did something like that (...)" (interview author in Osa Peninsula 1996).

Beside the cultural values of non-violence and a supportive policy to agriculture, there were a number of area-specific historical factors related to severe conflict over resources that led peninsular land users and entrepreneurs to oppose the Ston Forestal project and the way it was backed by the state.

The Osa Peninsula is an area of immigration. Only a few inhabitants have deep roots in the area; most have come in not more than a generation ago. They were attracted by land being available, were fleeing from conflict over land elsewhere in Costa Rica, Panama, or Nicaragua, were being pushed out as labourers from the banana sector, and/or were in search for abundant gold found in Osa's vast forests. The area came to know significant conflict over natural resources long before Stone Container entered the area. In the 1970s, a foreign timber company bought almost a third of the whole

peninsula and met with fierce resistance from farmers and squatters who refused to give up their agricultural use of the lands for the company's forestry plans (CHRISTEN 1994). It became a violent conflict with repression of local farmers who had to flee into the forest to save their lives. After long struggles, the communist party, who backed the farmers' land takings and land defence, the national government and the company pushed the conflict to solutions. In summary, the company was offered a land swap and was finally expropriated, and their land was divided over the Land Bank to be re-distributed to farmers, plus a state-owned national park and buffer zone for forest conservation. Conservationists of US and Costa Rican origin, who highly valued the forest resources because of their interesting biodiversity, had convinced the government to set aside a part as national park, in which no other activity than state-led tourism is allowed. A buffer zone forest reserve was added in which logging is prohibited without special permission. The national park and buffer zone measure almost 100.000 hectares in total, which is two thirds of the whole peninsula. The Land Bank also obtained considerable land resources of varying quality. There was peace in the area, albeit for only half a decade.

In the second half of the 1980s, when the influx of both individual gold seekers and mechanised gold companies into the forest led to an unsustainable pressure even on the national park, the government proclaimed a situation of national emergency, and forcefully expelled the gold seekers and companies (CAMACHO SOTO 1993). The expelled farmers demanded money and land, which in part was given to them by means of small, often poor quality, soils by the Land Bank. It was felt by many that the companies – rather than the individuals who worked with pans to find gold – had been responsible for the damage done, and that despite this, small gold panners had to bear the cost without due indemnification.

Hence, the conflicts over "land versus timber" and over the "forest versus gold", were two examples in which only after fierce protest the government had sought solutions after a period of backing – foreign – companies. These memories were without doubt revived when Ston Forestal linked up with state force to impose its project in the squatters' area. But the memories also contributed to a vision embodied by farmers' leaders in the area that local livelihoods have to be defended against foreign interests, and that the land has to be worked rather than to be given away for low prices to plant trees. Trees which – as history had taught them – they risked not be allowed to cut after the leasing agreement was over!

The resistance to the project among the peasantry was further fuelled by a country-wide sense of betrayal of

the “campesinado” who after decades were losing their state’s support and its negotiated solutions to their production problems (VALVERDE 1992, ROMÁN 1994). “Land and credit for the poor” had been a long standing political slogan in Costa Rica but became an empty phrase in the late 1980s (RODRIGUEZ CERVANTES 1993). In line with many other countries in Latin America (THIESENHUSEN 1995) under pressure of structural adjustment agreements, the Costa Rican state felt itself obliged to withdraw their subsidies to agricultural production – which had for example the shape of fixed prices for beans to the farmers – and to diversify their exports (MONGE GONZÁLEZ & GONZÁLEZ VEGA 1994). The competition with surrounding countries concerning rice, beans and cattle production pushed prices down and the remote southern area suffered more from this than other locations in the country. Weak agricultural organisations and management capability, high transport and machinery costs, low access to information about markets and agricultural alternatives, untrustworthy middle-men and other factors contributed to the bankruptcy of many – especially larger – cattle and rice farms in the area, and the poverty of those working on their lands (HERRERO ACOSTA 1992, PDR et al. 1995, VAN DEN HOMBERGH 2004).

### **A company and its counter-coalition on the battle ground**

When the Ston Forestal project started in 1989, promoted with the slogan “Sow progress, harvest well-being”, it was looked at with interest by almost anybody in the region, for any alternative that would offer some help in sustaining rural livelihoods in the remote area would be welcome. Most land users were ready for a “new rurality” (for discussion, see KAY 2005), in the sense that additional employment was sought in the wider environment, not only as wagedworkers but also in construction, shops, eco-tourism and agribusiness. However, the multiple strategies that farmers employed did not prevent the disappearance of agricultural use of the land. Large former rice and cattle farms were offered on a golden plate to the company, sometimes for prices of only US\$ 15 per hectare. In combination with a number of smaller farms of families who were indebted or otherwise ready to leave the area, the project obtained 13.000 of its planned 24.000 hectares by 1993. In its eagerness to establish itself, the company opted for any land in the beginning, but after a while actively sought flat, fertile, mechanisable and well-accessible lands, such as the area where the squatters in Agujas were living. This resulted in the company managing between 25 to 30 percent of the best accessible agricultural strip of the Osa Peninsula before organised protest began in 1993 (VAN DEN HOMBERGH 1999, 2004).

The squatters incident and some other small conflicts that occurred had led to the formation of a protest committee of family members of the injured boy and others who felt threatened by the company’s project. When their protests were not leading anywhere, they recruited the help from AECO, the Asociación Ecologista Costarricense, a group of ecologists who later would become active members of the world-wide confederation Friends of the Earth International. In 1992/93, they started to organise hearings in the Peninsula and managed in 1994 to push the protest to higher levels and a negotiated solution, to which I will return later.

Resistance among farmers grew, especially when in 1994 prices of rice and cattle improved a little, and farmers could not re-obtain their own land or hire their neighbours’ land to cultivate. Among the opponents were larger ones, but resistance grew especially among those for whom leasing out their small, bad quality plots had never been a real option, but who did feel the effects of the out-migration of their neighbours. This, because especially in this remote area, and particularly in a situation of a withdrawing state, their larger neighbours had offered useful access to ecological, financial, politico-juridical, and other types of capital (cf. BEBBINGTON 1999) necessary to survive in the area. In practice this had meant free or cheap transport to the villages, informal credits, buying of the beans before the harvest in times of harsh cash shortages, an informal land market, some economic movement in the villages and political contacts in the city to obtain projects for electricity, roads or buildings. It was therefore especially in the co-operatives of small farmers where the organisers of the protest gained ground. Also because these organisations were targeted by the ecologists and the farmers’ leaders to indeed oppose the project. They were silently backed by the Land Bank, who did not prevent their clientele from leasing their lands to the company, but instead made quite clear that they risked losing the ownership rights to their plots forever due to this “inappropriate use of agricultural land”.

### **“Campesinos, empresarios and ecologistas”: identity melding, strategic framing and campaigning with the land question**

Inspired by social movement thinkers such as Tarrow (1994) and McAdam et al. (1996), and combining and improvising on their concepts, I analysed the campaigning work against Stone Container Corporation’s investments by means of a number of building blocks of movement development. These are: (i) the mobilisation and construction of collective identity and identifica-



tions (ii) strategic framing or applied discourse development (iii) collective action (iv) the use and sustenance of webs of mobilisation and (v) the creation and use of political opportunities.

Among these building blocks I came to emphasise the role of strategic framing (ZALD 1996) as a very important ingredient to conflict transformation and campaigning. I introduced the term “framing orientations” (VAN DEN HOMBERGH 2004) to capture the useful emphasis on different elements in the strategic discourse towards different stakeholders in multi-level campaigning, and the necessity to adapt these elements according to the course of events and reactions. Another term I found useful in connection to this is “identity melding” (ibid.) to emphasise the fact that only where there is sufficient ground for collectivity can collective identity mobilisation and formation take place, but among an often very diverse constituency, using – or melding together – those elements that have compatibility with the overall political goal, is the best a social movement organisation can attain. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to unravel the exact configuration of the conflict over land and land use policies, and how counter-coalitions were formed to oppose the Ston Forestal project. It suffices to mention a few aspects here.

The ecologists of AECO did a thorough framing and identity melding job. The Osa Peninsula, as said, did not have strong elements of communality because of the diversity of backgrounds and land use linkages to the area and the individualistic ways of working. However, by intense face-to-face identity building (CALHOUN 1993) and strategic framing work with farmers’ co-operatives they managed to create some strong collective identifications which were strategically employed in the protest campaign. “Campesinos”, defending their and their communities’ rights to a sustainable livelihoods were the most important of them. As discussed above, because of the difficult economic situation, the push towards modernisation and diversification, the breaking of the Costa Rican political support for the “campesinado”, their “campesino” identity had been under pressure. Nonetheless, the campaign leaders in AECO – in close co-operation with and inspired by local farmer leaders in Osa – managed to reinforce the Costa Rican, positive, pride-giving identity of “campesino” and “labriego sencillo” (humble worker), adding elements as defenders of farmers’ rights against foreign industry, including the right to healthy natural resources.

The latter element was remarkable given the antagonistic history with nature conservation in the area. The establishment of the park and buffer zone had not been lucrative at all for many in the zone. After being resettled and prevented from entering the forests to

search for land, timber, gold, bush-meat or other commodities, only relatively very few land users managed to get jobs in the tourism sector, as guards, taxi drivers waiters, “cabina” or restaurant holders, as these jobs often were occupied by the better educated. Training made available by the government made little difference to this, although aspirations among some of the peasants were still high.

Tourism entrepreneurs however did see the threat of the Ston Forestal project just like the peasants, because of its dull-looking monoculture plantations, but more so because of the industrial work that the company planned to install at the shore of the attractive Golfo Dulce. They feared that the unattractive view, the traffic involved and possible pollution would potentially harm the whole tourism sector in the area.

It was a matter of strategic framing to meld the identifications of both types of actors, by showing that Ston Forestal was an enemy both to agriculture and to nature conservation, and that the highly diverse forest resources were an important potential source of income for the poorer sector of the locality. The forests could obtain a higher value for the locality by claiming more local benefits of the growing ecotourism industry in the area, by developing models of sustainable forestry instead of selling out one’s timber too cheaply to middlemen, and by ensuring the forests’ roles in soil and water conservation for agricultural purposes. AECO, local farmers’ leaders, managed to create opposition to the project in the area as common ground for a variety of actors. The campaign was a success as a vehicle for local “socio-environmental movement building” – as AECO itself used to call it – in the sense that many of those united in the protest campaign identified with the label “ecologist” after the campaign, and, in practical terms, the campaign prevented the industrialisation and slowed down the plantation development considerably, and later halted further expansion.

By offering proper discourse to the various stakeholders, an axis for collective action and identity melding, information about political opportunities and how to use them, AECO and their international ecologist also managed to carry the conflict to a higher level. Their campaign obtained sufficient visibility and political relevance for the Costa Rican government to be forced to change the project’s conditions. Supported by useful allies among Greenpeace, Rainforest Action Network, and European ecologist groups, they obtained a remarkable political success especially because of the biodiversity discourse. Their argument that the Osa Peninsula is home to the last remnant of tropical rainforest on the Pacific Coast of Central America played an important role, and that the Ston Forestal project’s truck transport,

most of all, would cut through a biological corridor threatening the maintenance of this highly diverse national park. Also, the Golfo Dulce, as argued elsewhere in this book, is a unique fjord-like marine resource, and would be irreparably damaged in case of oil spills or other pollution by the industrialisation and transportation of the pulpwood. These conservationist arguments formed the most successful counter-arguments.

With high level support, the agreement with Stone Container Corporation was renegotiated in 1994 to include the following elements: (i) the industrial plant and harbour would not be built in the Osa Peninsula, but elsewhere (ii) any environmental damage would be compensated by the Chicago-based mother company, (iii) a monitoring commission with participation of local environmentalists would be formed to keep track of the project's development. This is an interesting case of countervailing power to transnational industrial investments. However, concerning the land use question, the protesters still met with strong political barriers.

### **Back to rural survival: capital, employment and new paths of development**

The protest against displacement of agriculture by the Costa Rican policies, symbolised by the Stone Container project, did not find much of an echo among the state. In short, there were two main reasons for this. First, there was too much of a consensus among the decision-makers about the neo-liberal economic model and too much political indifference to the bankruptcy of agriculture in such marginal areas as the Osa Peninsula caused by it. Second, there was too much confusion among decision-makers about the benefits and risks of plantation forestry as a strategy to "reforest" the marginalised rural landscape. In the first few years, the Costa Rican environmental minister fiercely supported the project as a reforestation and employment project and a useful attempt to integrate forestry and industrialisation in the country. CARRERE & LOHMANN (1996) mention a list of defensive frames to industrial pulp plantations in developing countries, most of which could be found back in the PR work of both Stone Container and the Costa Rican ministries that backed the project. CARRERE & LOHMANN (1996) also mention a list of potential social and environmental impacts of larger scale monoculture plantation schemes, such as tenure problems and unemployment, as well as soil degradation and fertility decline, but by that time in Costa Rica there was no interest among the decision-makers in such arguments.

What were the benefits and threats of the project perceived in the locality itself at the time of the protest

and afterwards? Beside the campesino identity question dealt with above, the issue of employment played a large role in the debates. As off-farm employment played an important role in the area already, it was because of the employment most of all that the local population was divided about the Ston Forestal project. Wouldn't the plantations, and the industrial work planned by Stone Container to process and transport the chips from the pulpwood, generate an interesting number of jobs and more economic activity in the area? Inhabitants with a truck, chainsaw or those earning an income with the sale of food and drinks near the main road, tended to favour the company's investments. In their PR the company spoke of 2000 jobs<sup>3</sup>, or even "3500 jobs, directly and indirectly"<sup>4</sup>, but in their agreements on paper in Costa Rica they claimed much less. In their communications with the Costa Rican government Stone Container had promised 700 to 1200 jobs<sup>5</sup>, or "more than 700 jobs", 705 being the minimum number to obtain a Free Trade Zone preferential treatment including tax exemptions on import products<sup>6</sup>. Many farmers and wagedworkers indeed were recruited in the first 3 years for the clearing and sowing of the 13.000 hectares cultivated with *Gmelina*, but the pulpwood plantations simply require too little maintenance to offer many longer-term jobs for the uneducated from the zone. After dismissal many of the plantation workers started to doubt the sustainability of the project's benefits.

When I did my research in 1998, the official number of Ston Forestal employees was 245, more or less an equivalent of one person for each farm leased (225 in total) or one employee for every 56.6 hectares of *Gmelina* sown in the area. The low numbers without doubt were also influenced by the course of the project, among which the protests against the plantations and the economic malaise of Stone Container itself. In the Osa Peninsula, where the protests had been most fierce and the largest farms had been leased, there were only 22 workers for 2.500 to 3.500 hectares of pulpwood on about 30 farms. At the end of 1998, half of them were fired, and the remaining 11 persons became watchmen, which resulted in one local employee for each 295 hectares of plantation. This employment figure in any case was worse than with the extensive cattle-ranching and mechanised rice cultivation that had taken place on the same lands (VAN DEN HOMBERGH 2004). Among

<sup>2</sup> Costa Rica is well-known for its conservation policies and National Parks but meanwhile had one of the highest deforestation rates in Latin America by that time, because of which most trees outside national parks lived an uncertain life (CARRIERE 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Ston News 8-3-94, San José, Costa Rica

<sup>4</sup> Annual Report Stone Container Corporation 1995, Chicago, USA

<sup>5</sup> Ston Forestal, Environmental Impact Assessment Study of chip mill and harbor work 1993, San José, Costa Rica

<sup>6</sup> La Gaceta no 102, 28-5-92, San José, Costa Rica

others because of this, the resistance to the project did not cease after the industrial work in the area was cancelled, and various farmers' leaders interviewed between 1994 and 1998 said with regret that "the struggle was only half way".

Access to various types of capital (cf. BEBBINGTON 1999 a.o.) played an important role for farmers to be in favour or against the project, and whether or not they benefited from it. Indebtedness among small and large farmers, and the availability of lucrative projects elsewhere, were important push factors to lease their lands to the company (economic/financial capital), next to the bad quality of the farm and limited access to other natural resources (ecological capital), weak organisations and knowledge levels (human capability). Also, limited access to social and politico-juridical capital, such as conflicts in the village or the family life cycle stage, for example the need for education for the children in the city, and dependency of promoters of the project, led farmers to get involved with the company<sup>7</sup>. Although larger farmers in nominal terms had more to gain or more to lose by signing their leasing contract with Stone Container, in livelihood security terms the promise or threat for the smaller ones was larger. They did not have the financial capital to invest elsewhere, and their multiple livelihood strategies were dependent on economic activity in the area itself, including farming, wage work on other farms, and additional jobs in construction, transport or a small shop. This points to the vulnerability of social capital as an entrance point to sustainable rural livelihoods (cf. criticism of KAY 2005). It is indeed important to underline the value of networks and relations for rural livelihood as the above illustrates. However, if after the state also the neighbours – with whom family dependency or "clientelist" relations exist – lose interest in agriculture in the area and no alternative projects by NGOs or other agencies take their place, the access of the resource-poor to the other types of capital than the social and political, necessary to survive in the countryside, may get lost. This is especially so because often peasants cannot compete with cheap production methods of traditional crops (such as rice, maize and beans) nor can they easily step into new production systems of non traditional crops, frustrating their participation in a "new rurality" (cf. KAY 2005).

Many farmers in the Osa Peninsula are stuck on the threshold to new paths of development, neither being able to move forward to being market-orientated producers, nor back to their "campesino" existence. This means in general that state-led redistributive land reform is important, but less meaningful if no supportive

measures are in place to obtain access to other types of capital to invest and participate in markets (THIESENHUSEN 1995, ZOOMERS & VAN DER HAAR 2000). When land redistribution becomes market-led and includes non-traditional actors such as agro industry, the redistribution risks to stimulate the impoverishment of those staying behind without support in the country side or moving away from their lands without alternative incomes (a.o. BORRAS 2003).

What was called for by the ecologists and local farmer leaders was neither a retreat of the State nor a full re-establishment of the old import-substitution model, but rather a reorganisation of state intervention in the area (cf. ZOOMERS & VAN DER HAAR 2000). Among the proposals were (1) enabling sustainable small-scale agriculture by accessible credits and support for the marketing and processing of their products, (2) supporting the organisation of small forest owners to establish wise use and value-added processing of their timber, and (3) allowing and stimulating more involvement of local inhabitants in the lucrative eco-tourism sector in the area. Some of the proposals were worked out much later in the framework of establishing a biological corridor in the area with controlled sustainable economic activity. Such type of land use planning, allowing for multiple land use, spreading risk for both the area and its inhabitants, could be very promising. Agriculture would get a more secured place next to nature conservation, tourism, industrial forestry and other types of agribusiness.

Four years after the protest campaign had ended in a new agreement between the Costa Rican state and the paper giant, the opponents of the Ston Forestal project found a strange bed fellow in the global market for pulp and paper to further frustrate the extension of the *Gmelina* plantations. The low prices and extreme competition in the pulp and paper market forced Stone Container Corporation into a merger with Jefferson Smurfit in 1999. Smurfit had less interest in the Ston Forestal project, apparently because they were less in need of the symbolic green capital this "reforestation" project meant to its environmentalist shareholders, nor of the actual raw material to be produced there. Probably also the resistance to the project played a role for them to avoid production risk. Ston Forestal was sold to Honduran and Costa Rican entrepreneurs who opted for a variety of uses of the *Gmelina* wood, including wood for pallets, furniture and pencils, in potential leaving somewhat more added value in the area itself than in case of use for pulp. However, in the meantime producers of "palma africana" (oil palm) were already entering the southern area to convince the farmers that only they could offer the final solution to their econom-

<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately it goes beyond the scope of this article to elaborate this in more detail. See VAN DEN HOMBERGH 2004.

ic problems by offering to use their lands. Oil palm has been expanding rapidly since. Will history repeat itself? What will tourism development do over the coming years?

The only real economic options for the farmers is being enabled to maintain part of their "campesino" way of life and farm sustainably. More local benefits from a sustainable type of tourism, proper land use planning and a suitable protection status of the Golfo Dulce would offer real solutions to the conflict the project Ston Forestal caused on a longer term.

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