

# NEO-COLONIALISM IN THE AMAZON:



# REDD PROJECTS IN PORTEL, BRAZIL

WORLD RAINFOREST MOVEMENT

## **Neo-colonialism in the Amazon: REDD projects in Portel, Brazil**

World Rainforest Movement (WRM)  
2022

This article is also available in Portuguese, Spanish and French.

This work was made possible by contributions from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), through the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC), the Swiss organisation HEKS/EPER, Olin gGmbH, from Germany, and Swift Foundation, from the USA. The views expressed herein result from information obtained from various sources accessed by the organization and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the contributors or their funders.



**WRM**

World Rainforest Movement (WRM)  
Av. Bolivia, 1962 BIS  
CP 11500 Montevideo, Uruguay  
Phone/Fax: +598 2605 6943 Email: [wrm@wrm.org.uy](mailto:wrm@wrm.org.uy)  
[www.wrm.org.uy](http://www.wrm.org.uy)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CARBON PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES IN PORTEL</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>FOUR PROJECTS IN A SINGLE MUNICIPALITY: COINCIDENCE OR COORDINATED ACTION?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>THE STORY PRESENTED ON DEFORESTATION: THE WORSE IT IS FOR FORESTS, THE BETTER IT IS FOR INVESTORS</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>THE TRADE IN PORTEL'S POLLUTION CREDITS</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>THE COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE REDD PROJECTS</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>LAND CONFLICTS</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>A CHARITY REDD PROJECT FOCUSING ON HEALTH AND EDUCATION?</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>NEO-COLONIALISM IN THE AMAZON</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>24</b>

# Introduction

Since 2008 several forest carbon projects, also called REDD projects (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), have been using large areas of the municipality of Portel, in the interior of the Amazonian state of Pará, Brazil, under the pretext of saving the forest from destruction.

The aim of the project proponents, most of whom are foreigners, is to profit from selling carbon credits to polluting companies in the USA and Europe. The credits allow these companies to justify continuing to burn petroleum instead of seeking alternatives. This will further worsen the climate chaos<sup>1</sup> that is also endangering the Amazon rainforest. This is why, in this article, we call carbon credits what they really are: pollution credits.

For those who buy pollution credits, this is an attractive mechanism for several reasons. Firstly, those who buy credits can portray themselves, alongside REDD project owners, as saviours of the forest. Also, compared to the option of no longer using fossil fuels, it is cheaper and simpler to claim that they have reduced their pollution by protecting the forest.

Behind the claims of project proponents and the buyers of credits, supported by webpages illustrated with beautiful images of the forest and the people living along the river in Portel, there is a million-dollar market. The sale of pollution credits enriches a small group of businessmen; meanwhile, the families living in the project areas, including those with whom we spoke, have no knowledge of this, nor do they know what carbon credits really are—despite all the projects claiming that they were consulted. There are also serious land conflicts. REDD project proponents claim to own land that, in part, belongs to the state of Pará and includes areas where settlement projects are being implemented.

# Carbon projects and initiatives in Portel

The municipality of Portel stands out on the map of REDD projects in Brazil because it contains four REDD projects, registered in the international database of the leading standard for this type of project, VERRA. The registered projects, in chronological order, are:

Table 1 - REDD projects developed in Portel as registered in the VERRA database.

	NAME OF THE PROJECT	PROPONENT	AREA (hectares)	TERM
1	REDD RMDLT Portel-Pará	RMDLT Property Group LTD	194.403	2008-2047
2	Pacajai REDD+ Project	ADPML	148.975	2009-2048
3	Rio Anapu-Pacajá REDD	Brazil AgFor LLC	165.707	2016-2055
4	Ribeirinho REDD+	Friends of the Riverine; Union of Rural Producers of Portel; 1252 riverine families.	205.000	2017-2047

Together, these four projects cover an extensive area of 714,085 hectares, occupying 28 per cent of the entire municipality of Portel, which is equivalent to almost 20 per cent of Switzerland's surface area. And there are indications that more carbon projects are on their way to the municipality. As local residents attest, the Amazon Riverine Institute (Irama) and a company named BR Carbon are approaching communities in the Extractivist Settlement Projects (PEAEXs) of Alto Camarapí, Jacaré-Puru, Acangatá and Acutipereira, to try and make agreements on projects. Similarly, the company REDDA+ has been approaching communities in areas of the rivers Pacajá and lower Anapú that have not yet been enrolled in the projects mentioned above.

## Four projects in a single municipality: coincidence or coordinated action?

The four REDD projects practically form a continuous area within the municipality of Portel (Figure 1). The fact that the areas fit together almost perfectly, like a jigsaw puzzle, indicates the coordination between the project proponents—to the extent that they were designed so that one would not overlap with another, since this is not allowed by REDD project rules. Even so, we found that there is a partial overlap of areas in Project 4 with at least seven plots of land in Project 1, as we will explain later.

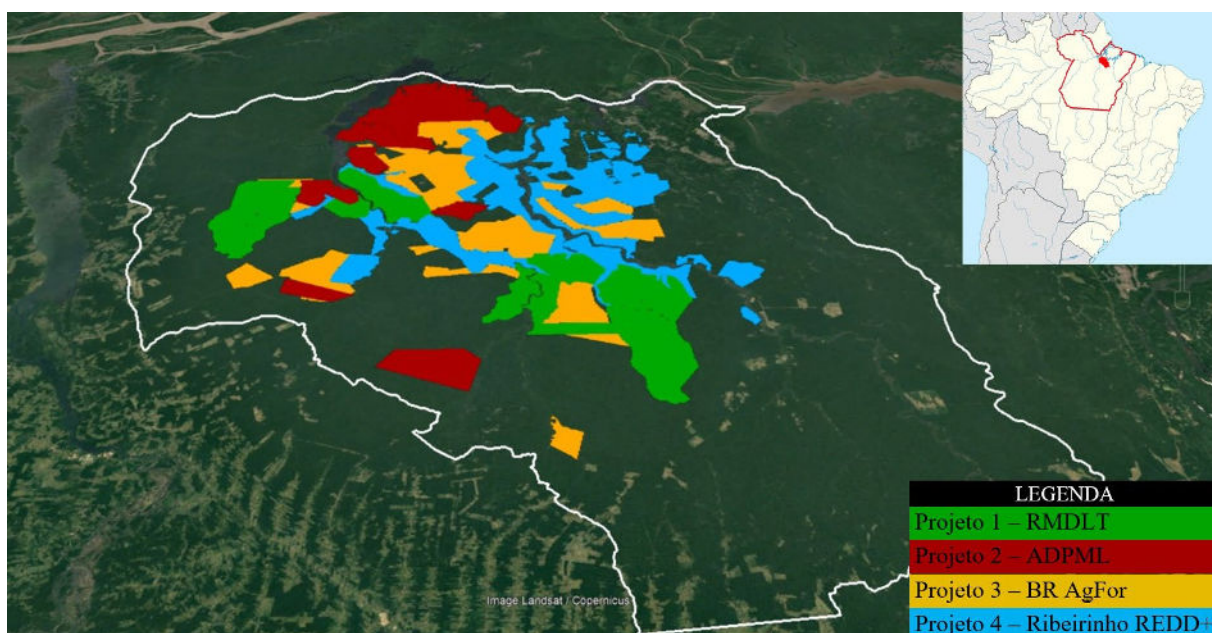


Figure 1 - Representation of the four REDD projects within the municipality of Portel according to geographical coordinates obtained from the VERRA base.

In addition, the fact that several consultancy firms are involved in more than one project strengthens the impression of a likely connection among them. For example, although the proponents of Projects 1 and 2 are different companies, the documents for both projects were prepared by the same consultancy firm, the US-based Ecosystem Services LLC. As a result, most of the project description for Project 2 is merely a copy of the Project 1 project description (precisely 75 per cent overlapping text<sup>2</sup>). Kanaka Management Services Ltd, an Indian consultancy, is also active in both projects. Another Indian consulting firm, 4K Earth Science Private Ltd, is active in Projects 3 and 4.

However, the strongest indication that there is a close connection between the four projects is the fact that American businessman Michael Edward Greene appears in all projects as a project proponent. In Projects 1 and 2, he is explicitly mentioned as one of the proponents, representing his company Brazil Agfor LLC. In Project 3, his company Brazil Agfor LLC is the only project proponent. In Project 4, Greene is not mentioned directly, but participates through the company Amigos dos Ribeirinhos (Friends of the Riverine), to which we will also come back later.

Another entity involved in the projects is the Associação de Ribeirinhos e Moradores de Portel (Association of Riverine People and Residents of Portel). According to the people we interviewed, representatives of this association, which was formally registered in 2018, approach the communities located within the area of each project to sign up for "benefits" offered by the project proponents. According to a motion by the councillors of the Portel City Council<sup>3</sup>, the Association is chaired by Michael Greene—a further indication that he is the main entrepreneur coordinating the four REDD projects in Portel.

Finally, the documentation of the projects is also similar in what is not mentioned. For example: none of the projects clarifies who exactly owns the immense areas of each project; the documents do not conclusively prove ownership of the areas in question. This information is essential to clarify who the supposed owners are; it would also help to understand whether the titles are valid or not. There is also a lack of transparency about the financial accounting of each project. For example, residents inside the project area have no information about how many pollution credits have already been sold and to whom, nor about the value of the investments actually made in Portel.

**In 2011, Michael Greene was the subject of a Dutch TV programme because of his carbon businesses involving the sale of land in Pará. In the programme, he presents himself as a representative of a company, Brazil Property Group, which sells land to foreigners interested in buying pollution credits. Greene claims to understand everything about Brazilian land legislation and even sells, with a notarized title, 43 hectares of forest to the Dutch broadcaster's own programme. Before that, he tells the presenter that if he does not buy the 43 hectares, the area would be destroyed in a few years. At the time, Michael Greene implied that he controls a huge amount of land, claiming to the journalist that he has 600,000 hectares at his disposal, of which 200,000 hectares would be part of the 'carbon project'. Another foreigner, Eddy Loomans, presenting himself on the programme as a 'land salesman', shows the TV journalist the 43 hectares, at the same time as he makes a speech, directly blaming the riverine people for the deforestation in the region. The episode can be seen in full at: <https://schooltv.nl/video/keuringsdienst-van-waarde-in-de-klas-co2-compensatie/#q=co2%20compensatie>**

# The story presented on deforestation: the worse it is for forests, the better it is for investors

Another similarity between the four REDD projects in Portel is that the hypothetical scenarios for deforestation that would have taken place without the projects over the next 30-40 years are very similar. Each project presents the expected deforestation in two scenarios: one with and one without the REDD project, based on the analysis of a so-called reference area that is about 11 times larger than the area of the projects themselves. The choice of this reference area in the Portel REDD projects is also very similar in all four cases.

The story presented in the projects - should the proponents not implement their REDD projects - suggests that deforestation in the region would have advanced on two fronts: one through the roads from the southern region of the municipality, mainly from BR-230, the so-called Transamazonian Highway, and the road called PA-167. The other deforestation front would advance along the rivers where people live along the banks of the rivers. They also state that the deforestation process often begins with the action of logging companies in search of precious woods, followed by what they refer to as 'squatters' - that is, people making a living along the banks of the river [*ribeirinhos* in Portuguese] and other small farmers - who would deforest these areas to plant crops. These areas, in turn—according to the story presented—are generally expropriated later by farmers who transform what is left of the forest into large cattle pastures. The projects predict that the deforestation risk along these two fronts is very high, and that as these two deforestation fronts advance, they will meet, causing a more than 50 per cent increase in deforestation within the REDD project areas over the 30- to 40-year duration of the projects.

However, should REDD project proponents implement their projects, they envision an entirely different future for the forest. They claim that their actions will save it through the removal of "invaders", and through subsequent enforcement with the help of brigades of guards patrolling the forest. Since they consider people making a living along the riverbanks to be a threat to the forest, this population can only continue their current land use on a small part of the project area, immediately along the banks of rivers and streams. In Projects 1, 2 and 3, the area which people are allowed to continue to use over the next 30-40 years corresponds, respectively, to 8.5, 9.3 and 3 per cent of the total project areas. These are the areas where the families apparently already have their houses



and where, according to the project proponents, the deforestation process is already more advanced. Since it is very common for *ribeirinhos* to not possess the title to the land they are formally entitled to, the project proponents claim that they will help them to legalise their land ownership on an individual basis. The project proponents claim that this would create another barrier to possible invaders, such as logging companies that want to enter the forest lands of the projects.

In order to monitor the project area, the project proponents say they would hire the villagers themselves to be part of the forest brigades, which is another benefit offered to the villagers. But in a recent 2020 report on Project 1, proponents state that they intend to do surveillance quite differently: they intend to place at least 20 towers with cameras, each 40 metres high, at the entrances to all the secondary rivers in the area, with the cost for each structure said to be USD 200,000. It is clear that these cameras will not only keep an eye on the loggers—as claimed in the project report—but also, and above all, on the *ribeirinhos*, in order to monitor their movements. Although they may say that this is to scare illegal loggers away, the document itself states that "the aim of the structure is to create a big brother atmosphere in the region".<sup>4</sup>

While the advance of deforestation in the state of Pará and in the Amazon in general is an unquestionable fact, the prediction of deforestation made by the project proponents if they were not implementing their projects is quite questionable. Furthermore, the very choice of the areas in question, as well as the choice of the reference area for predicting deforestation—which includes the Transamazonian Highway and its surroundings, with a strong ongoing deforestation process—is also questionable.

When consulted, local residents with whom we spoke found the deforestation projected to take place in the project areas in the absence of the REDD projects to be exaggerated. This is the same conclusion reached by a scientific study analysing the deforestation predictions that several REDD projects in the Amazon have made. The study includes several of the projects in Portel<sup>5</sup>. For project proponents, overestimating the hypothetical deforestation in a scenario without their REDD projects is always advantageous: the greater the predicted hypothetical destruction, the more pollution credits can be sold, and therefore, the more profits they will be able to pocket. This is one of the most perverse elements of the REDD logic: the worse it is for forests, the better it is for investors.

One of the most interesting and pertinent questions people in Portel raised, was this: "Why haven't the REDD projects been designed within the large area to the south of

the project areas? (the area circled in black in figure 2). After all, the imminence of deforestation is much greater in this area – which was still heavily forested at the start of the projects in 2008 – than in the area covered by the projects.

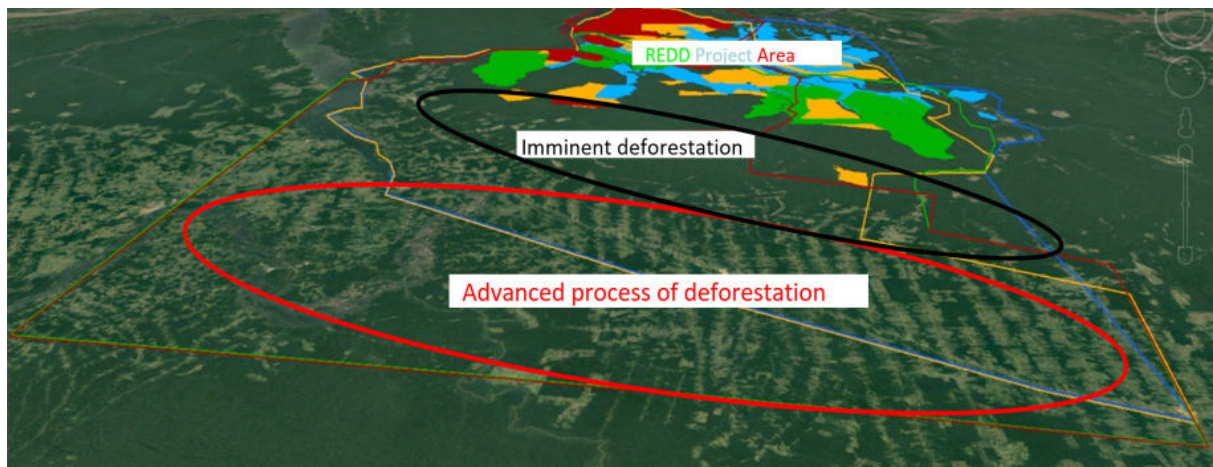


Figure 2: the reference areas of the projects cover region in advanced deforestation process, while the projects' area does not coincide with zone of imminent deforestation risk.

If, as project proponents argue, loggers and farmers in the region advance unchecked – as it is even more the case in recent years under Bolsonaro government – then REDD projects will tend to facilitate deforestation in the areas most at risk, to the extent that they are not where REDD projects are being implemented, and so these most at-risk forests are not part of the area to be protected by a REDD project. In fact, this is already predicted in project documents where proponents describe the deforestation process in the reference areas. The question is: What is the contribution of a mechanism that intends to reduce emissions from deforestation (REDD), if the mechanism is not being implemented in areas where deforestation is in fact advancing the most? The fact that these areas are most at risk is confirmed in a study by researchers who collected data between 2008 and 2017 on heat hotspots - fires - within a region where the REDD projects are located. The area with the highest heat hotspots shown in the study is concentrated just south of the REDD projects.<sup>6</sup>

It is also worth noting that the local government provides incentives for the expansion of agribusiness, which will further encourage deforestation fronts in the municipality. This is evidenced by the fact that, in 2021, the mayor of Portel signed a partnership with the state's agency that promotes agribusiness (Adepará) that "will provide for the strengthening and development of agricultural and cattle-raising activities in the municipality, which stands out in the sector with a *growing* herd of cattle and buffaloes, as well as *new areas* planted with soybeans"<sup>7</sup> [our emphasis]. All this raises serious doubts about the real contribution of REDD projects to slowing the ongoing forest destruction process in Portel.

## The trade in Portel's pollution credits

Project 1 has a planned duration of 40 years, during which time it is expected to sell almost 40 million pollution credits for carbon that the project allegedly prevented from being released into the atmosphere. Since it began, Project 1 has already sold over 7 million pollution credits, according to the VERRA system database. Based on an estimated sale price of US\$ 5 per carbon credit, this amount corresponds to US\$ 35 million earned to date by Project 1 proponents from the sale of pollution credits.<sup>8</sup>

Project 2, with a projected volume of 22 million credits to be issued over its lifetime, has already sold more than 10 million pollution credits, according to the VERRA database. Based on the same sales price estimate of US\$ 5 per credit, the proponents of Project 2 have received US\$ 50 million from the sales.

Project 3, in turn, has already sold 6.3 million credits, equivalent to more than US\$ 30 million.

Regarding Project 4, the most recent project, we did not find information in the VERRA system database about the issuance of pollution credits, which indicates that no credits have been sold yet.

According to VERRA's database, the list of entities that have purchased pollution credits from the REDD projects in Portel includes several large companies. From the aviation sector, there are companies such as Boeing, Delta Airlines and Air France. The latter states that it intends to offset emissions from all its domestic flights with pollution credits from the projects in Portel<sup>9</sup>, among others. Other buyers include Amazon (e-commerce); Repsol (oil), Samsung, Toshiba and Kingston (technology), Takeda (pharmaceutical), Kering (luxury goods), Aldi (supermarket group) and even the Liverpool Football Club. There are also intermediaries that buy credits from the projects in Portel and resell them to polluting companies and all kinds of initiatives, such as festivals, travel agencies, fairs, congresses, among others. These intermediaries include companies such as Stand for Trees, ClimatePartner Allcot and Offsetters Clean Technology.

# The communities within the REDD projects

Those who read the documentation of REDD projects in Portel face difficulties in understanding exactly how many *ribeirinho* communities and families actually live within the boundaries of each project, especially in the case of Projects 1, 2 and 3. The numbers that eventually appear are related to a number of families who were approached by, and/or benefited from the projects. It is not possible to know, for example, how many families rejected participation in the projects—despite indications in the documentation that project proponents have faced resistance from part of the population. Meanwhile, the reports make statements to the effect that there are no negative impacts for the communities, and that communities were consulted about the projects. As with other such consultation exercises, the REDD project proponents defined the format and content of this consultation.

In addition to the VERRA seal that facilitates the sale of pollution credits, the projects also sought a label that supposedly certifies that the REDD projects provide additional benefits for biodiversity and for affected communities. This is a standard called CCB (*climate community & biodiversity*). The CCB works as if it were an additional certificate. This makes the project more attractive to potential buyers of pollution credits, which is obviously one of the main reasons, if not *the* main one, that project proponents pay to have an audit against the CCB standard and obtain the CCB logo.

One of the benefits for the communities, prominently mentioned in the documentation, is a stove (figure 3). According to the project documentation, this is an "improved" stove, more efficient in the sense of releasing fewer emissions, thus reducing the contribution of the *ribeirinho* communities to the problem of global warming. The WRM team heard from dozens of women and men about the uselessness of these stoves. It was surprising that people interviewed were unanimous in stating that the stoves are useless for them. People commented that they didn't use, or even threw out their stoves because they are not useful for their way of cooking food. Moreover, donating an "improved" stove gives the impression that project proponents are more concerned with villagers' contribution to global warming than with the enormous contribution of the buyers of the pollution credits, such as the airlines, who continue to shamelessly destroy the climate with their "pollution credits".



Figure 3 - Stove that, according to dozens of interviewees, had little use and that many people threw out.

Another activity presented as a "benefit" are training courses on "alternatives" to the practice of shifting cultivation, which is reduced in the REDD projects basically to the planting of cassava. The alternatives proposed in the REDD project documentation - beekeeping, agroforestry systems, black pepper, etc. - may be good or bad, depending on how and by whom they are proposed, designed and implemented, among others. In this case, it seems they were proposed as fixed formulas, in a top-down manner, without the families being able to be protagonists of the process. Equally problematic is the attempt on the part of the REDD project proponents to change the way of life of the *ribeirinho* population, based on a vision that considers shifting cultivation ("slash and burn") to always be a harmful practice, since it emits carbon by burning an area of the forest. This perspective ignores the benefits of the system, such as its regenerating and circular character, and it distracts attention from the fact that agribusiness expansion is the biggest cause of forest fires which annually increase the devastation of the Amazon. Besides, many see that critique of shifting agriculture reflects the colonial, dominant view of "experts" - generally white and western - that fire is something fundamentally evil that needs to be fought.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the stoves and promises of capacity building, the most prominent activity and "benefit" is undoubtedly the project proponents' proposal to register the Rural Environmental Cadastre (CAR) for people living in the project areas. The CAR is a

mandatory self-declaration requirement in place since 2012, when the new Forest Code came into force in Brazil. Its goal is, among other things, to map the environmental conditions of rural properties in Brazil, and to ascertain the size of their legally required set-aside and permanent preservation areas, which is legally established depending on each biome. Since it was introduced, the CAR has been strongly criticized, especially in the Amazon, for becoming the latest land grabbing tool for large landowners<sup>11</sup>, including the new "landowners" of REDD projects.<sup>12</sup>

According to a report by the Indian consultancy, Kanaka, the CAR area in REDD projects in Portel initially consisted of one hectare per family—a derisory size for the Amazonian context<sup>13</sup>. In India this might be a reasonable size for a rural property, but not in the Amazon. Subsequently, project proponents seem to have realised that one hectare really was an unwise proposal, reflecting what appears to be a lack of familiarity with the realities of land use in the Amazon. So they increased the area to about 100 hectares. Even so, for a basically extractivist population like *ribeirinho* communities, 100 hectares still may not be sufficient to realise their extractivist way of life, today and in the future. Possibly without knowing, by accepting the CAR, the families are agreeing to the implicit condition that from now on, they need to keep their survival activities restricted to the area of their CAR, without permission to enter the rest of the REDD project areas. According to reports from families, only by agreeing to this condition would they gain access to the other benefits promised by the REDD projects, such as the (useless) stove, the training courses or employment as forest guards, and a basic food basket. This "offer" of benefits for residents borders on a form of blackmail.

Furthermore, the way CARs are explained in the project documentation induces a misunderstanding. **Legally, the CAR is not a property land title.** However, project proponents present the CAR registration as if it were a process to obtain a land title. This creates the impression in the *ribeirinho* communities that by participating in the project, they will receive the right to ownership of the land they live on, as exemplified in figure 4, relative to Project 4. The project documentation also suggests that after 30-40 years, at the end of the projects, families would gain the 'official title' to the land—leaving room for a false interpretation that private companies would have the competence to grant land titles. That competence rests with the Brazilian State.

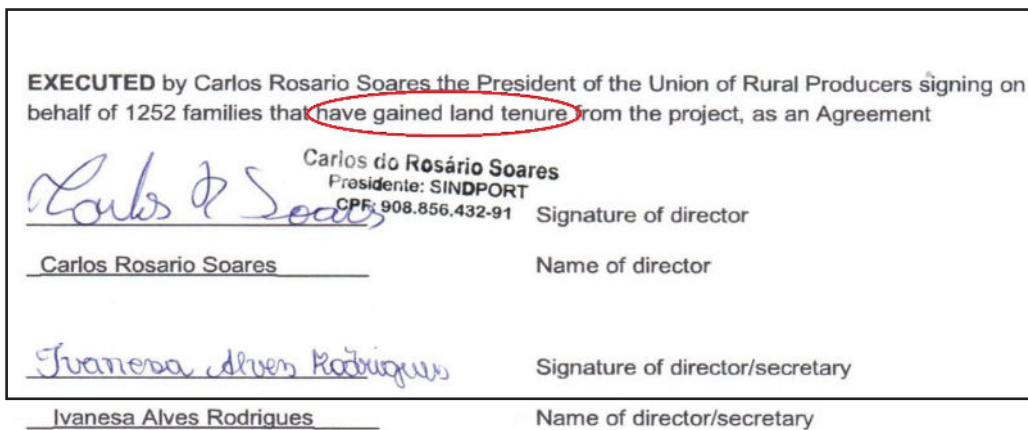


Figure 4: excerpt from the Verra Registry Communications Agreement document dated 29/09/2021 (Project with the VERRA ID 2620), signed by an alleged representative of 1,252 families who would have "received land tenure from the project".

Thus, the confusing explanation of the CAR generates misinterpretation and misuse of this document. This is evidenced by the way intermediaries and buyers of pollution credits talk about the CARs. ClimatePartner, for example, a German intermediary company that sells credits from REDD projects in Portel, states in its advertising that the project is about "providing the riverine people, the residents of the Amazon, with the rights to the land that belongs to them".<sup>14</sup>

## Land Conflicts

A woman that the WRM team visiting the area interviewed said she agreed to the REDD project registration of the CAR because it was the only way she could receive the other 'benefits' of the project; but she added that, in her case, having the CAR registration is of no use at all. This is because she lives in one of the Agro-Extractivist Settlement Projects (PEAEX) set up by the State of Pará. Three such Settlements are being implemented in the municipality of Portel, each with its process duly prescribed (including the CAR registration) by the Land Institute of Pará (ITERPA).

This woman's testimony points to a land conflict: the overlap of land that is part of these PEAEXs with REDD projects. In total, the PEAEXs occupy more than 250,000 hectares in the municipality of Portel:

- Deus é Fiel Settlement, 35,759.88 hectares, 100 families organized in the Association of Agro-extraction Workers of Alto Pacajá (ATAAP) - Iterpa process 2010/137915;
- Joana Peres 2 Settlement, 115,524.96 hectares, 694 families organized in the Rural

Residents Association of the Joana Peres II Gleba (AMAGJOPP), Iterpa process 2021/1235996;

- Dorothy Stang Settlement, 105,663.24 hectares, 365 families organized in the Gleba Joana Peres II Extractivist Rural Residents Association - Dorothy Stang Part II, Iterpa process 2021/1218656.<sup>15</sup>

These settlement projects are the result of a struggle by these communities to secure their territories. They involve a long process of community organisation and pressure on the responsible State bodies. They include activities such as the identification of the territory, public hearings and the recording of information about the activities of logging companies and other invaders. These are long processes, given that they usually face opposition from local political interests, including loggers, large landowners and agribusiness in general—whose possibilities to expand their activities are reduced.

More recently, REDD project entrepreneurs have become an additional adversary for these residents' and workers' associations; they try to superimpose their REDD projects over the land of these settlements, whose story began well before the arrival of these foreigners and their REDD projects in Portel. In this respect, REDD projects are similar to logging and agribusiness companies, in that they do not accept when people organize to take legitimate control of their territories where they have lived for generations<sup>16</sup>.

Michael Greene's claims and statements in documentation on the REDD projects with which he is associated go even further. The "Riverine REDD" project (Project 4) documentation makes the unsubstantiated claim that the Workers' Union is financed by illegal loggers and uses false pretexts to create new settlements, so that "illegal loggers become the president of massive areas that are now community titles"<sup>17</sup>. This is a falsehood. It reveals the arrogance of foreign project proponents and their lack of commitment to the forest populations' struggle for land. As mentioned, the name of one of the settlements pays tribute to Sister Dorothy Stang, who joined the struggle of the forest populations and peoples. Her support of the struggle of the *ribeirinho* communities and rural workers contributed to the creation of agro-extractivist settlements as an alternative to the deforestation caused by loggers and large land owners across the Brazilian Amazon. Sister Dorothy was murdered because she was seen as a threat to these groups, just like many other workers' leaders who have been killed when they began to organize their communities and demand their rights. Even today, for many residents, threats to their lives continue to be a reality in Portel and other municipalities of the region.



The settlement projects also confirm the arbitrary nature of the REDD project proponents' definition of the CARs as a maximum of 100 hectares. In the settlement projects mentioned above, for example, the areas belonging to each family are more than double that size. These families have organised themselves to advance their struggle collectively, including through the registration of a (collective) CAR. The REDD projects also pursue the CAR registration, but in a way that individualises families, reinforcing an individualist logic of land use, including within communities. For example: since 2016 (before the REDD projects started their registration processes), the families of the 'Deus é Fiel' settlement project have had their collective CAR, for an area of over 35,000 hectares—duly registered and active in the government's official system.

In addition to the collective CAR registration of the PEAEX, the conclusion of these settlement processes - now in the final phase at ITERPA (the body responsible for all state land issues) - represents a challenge to the Portel REDD project proponents. The conclusion of this process will invalidate private property titles that have been generated or obtained in an irregular manner. As part of the legalisation protocol, ITERPA published the geographical coordinates of the three settlement projects in the State Official Gazette on 11 May 2022, giving a deadline of 10 June 2022 for any possible claims of property rights to the areas in question. Comparing the location of these areas with the areas included in the REDD projects, we come to a surprising conclusion: more than 80 per cent of the 257,000 hectares of public land allocated to settlements is being misused by the four REDD projects mentioned in this article. This is at least 200,000 of the total 714,000 hectares that REDD project proponents have included in their projects and claim to have legal control over.

In the regularization process of the PEAEX 'Deus é Fiel', for example, there are 15 rural property registrations, listed in figure 5, overlapping with the area of the settlement.

**REGULARIZAÇÃO FUNDIÁRIA DE PEAX**

51°52'0"W                      51°44'0"W                      51°36'0"W                      51°28'0"W

INFORMAÇÕES PARCELAS SIGEF					
ID	DETENTOR	IMÓVEL	SITUAÇÃO	MATRÍCULA CARTORIAL	PARC
1	Jonas Akila Morioka	São Joaquim	Certificada	nº 247 (não confirmada)	5961db2d-4f93-4c37-
2	José Roberto Mareco Barroso	Fazenda Atua	Certificada	nº 1.570 (confirmada)	626b33e5-b88b-47d8-
3	Jonas Akila Morioka	Laguinho	Certificada	nº 270 (não confirmada)	91dbd60d-87c1-4fff-
4	BLB Florestal Representação	Menino Deus - I	Certificada	nº 204 (não confirmada)	c0ae8520-58ea-4f2e-
5	Cruzeiro Engenharia Florestal	Prairha	Certificada	nº 226 (não confirmada)	498d38b3-1265-4f8e-
6	Megatown Trading S.A.	Aru - Parte 2	Certificada	nº 167 (não confirmada)	555dc16e-3ef9-4936-
7	Megatown Trading S.A.	Aru - Parte 1	Certificada	nº 167 (não confirmada)	2c98f46-b63e-41fe-
8	Jonas Akila Morioka	São Pedro	Certificada	nº 189 (não confirmada)	763845fd-81d1-4785-
9	Floyd Promoção e Representação	São João do Pracajura	Certificada	nº 223 (não confirmada)	e06c3ae5-f0c1-4223-
10	Megatown Trading S.A.	Aru - Parte 1	Certificada	nº 167 (não confirmada)	461f4bed-fd29-49fb-
11	Cruzeiro Engenharia Florestal	Marinahu	Certificada	nº 253 (não confirmada)	0b02b87d-5edd-4413-
12	Brasil Preservação Ambiental	São Raimundo II	Certificada	nº 219 (não confirmada)	a01abbc2-6e0b-4cfe-
13	Brasflor Preservação Ambiental	Gurupa	Certificada	nº 249 (não confirmada)	e6a83289-f603-4d1e-
14	Jonas Akila Morioka	Furinho do Pracajura	Certificada	nº 250 (não confirmada)	6d110cc7-2640-465a-
15	Brasflor Agroflorestal e Preservação	Engasgado	Certificada	nº 203 (não confirmada)	d2448fbf-27b9-480f-

Figure 5 - Areas in overlap with the 'Deus é Fiel' settlement project.

Among these registrations, four are in the name of Jonas Akila Morioka. Despite not appearing by name among the REDD project proponents, Morioka and Michael Greene are shareholders in the same company, Telheiros Serviços de Apoio, which in turn controls Cruzeiro Engenharia Florestal, another company owned by both. Cruzeiro Engenharia Florestal holds two land registrations within the settlement project. In addition, Jonas Morioka is the director of another company, Megatown Trading, which appears with 3 registrations on the list. Michael Greene, in turn, owns Brasflor Preservação Ambiental, another company with a registration on the list; and two more names of companies with practically the same registration are also on the list. Finally, Floyd Promoção e Representação Ltd, which also appears on the list as the owner of one of the 15 land registrations in the settlement, has Zaqueu Hideaki Alencar Morioka, one of the project proponents, as its managing partner in Project 2.

This small sample shows that people linked to the REDD projects claim to own the vast majority of the land in dispute, either directly or through companies in which they are involved. It also points to the possible strategy they use - Michael Greene in particular - of not appearing as the owner, but registering land in the name of companies in which they participate in one way or another.

Jonas Akila Morioka, who appears with four registrations in his name and other registrations in the name of companies in which he participates, published a document online in which he denies owning a much larger area in Portel than the 110,000 hectares that he claims to legitimately own – which is already huge.<sup>18</sup> The report he defends

himself against points to his involvement in judicial issues related to land grabbing<sup>19</sup>. The list of lands presented in figure 5 proves that the lands he controls surpass the 110,000 hectares held in his name; the question is to what extent. In the list of rural properties in Portel obtained from the National Rural Cadastre System (public consultation<sup>20</sup>), there are 58 properties totalling 174.6 thousand hectares in Jonas' name as an individual. This is not counting properties in the name of companies in which he has a stake.

## A charity REDD project focusing on health and education?

The most recent Project 4 really differs from the other REDD projects, in the first place because of its proponents:

- a) Friends of the Riverine
- b) Union of Rural Producers of Portel
- c) 1,252 *ribeirinho* families

According to the documents presented, the two entities involved are presented as non-profit organisations. However the entity Friends of the Riverine is registered in Brazil as a corporate legal entity (CNPJ 39.879.582/0001-63 under Legal Nature Code 230-5); therefore it is in a different legal framework than non-profit organizations. According to public access records, the company was founded in the State of São Paulo in 2020 by Michael Edward Greene, with him as the sole owner. This is inconsistent with the fact that the same entity repeatedly presents itself as a charitable non-profit (*Friends of the Riverine 501c3 Not-for-Profit*) throughout the project documents available in the VERRA system. This mismatch seems serious, considering the financial sums that the project will mobilise.

The other project proponent is the Union of Rural Producers of Portel, a union of agribusiness employers - not to be confused with the Union of Rural Workers (STTR) of Portel. In addition to these two project proponents, this project is different because its partners include Portel public authorities: the Municipal Chamber and the Municipal Secretariat of Education.

The project is also unique in that it presents a list of no fewer than 1,252 families as

proponents of the project, supposedly represented by the president of the aforementioned union. These 1,252 families in theory have benefited from the CAR registration and, according to the project description in Portuguese (only two pages long, in contrast to the 304-page project description in English), will receive help "to complete a REDD project by developing and implementing a management plan. This plan will include a rigorous monitoring and enforcement plan." However, another document makes clear that the person who holds the rights over the pollution credits that VERRA will issue in the course of this fourth REDD project is the president of the Portel Rural Producers Union - Carlos de Rosário Soares, who was a candidate for councillor in the last municipal elections (2020). He supposedly represents the 1,252 families who, according to the document, have signed ("duly signed") an "agreement with REDD Carbon Credit Project" (figure 6). However, in the VERRA database, there is no document showing the alleged signature or legal consent of the 1,252 people listed. Supposedly, these 1,252 families gave rights to the president to represent them in the development and marketing of the REDD project, as well as in making decisions on the pollution credits it expects to generate and sell.

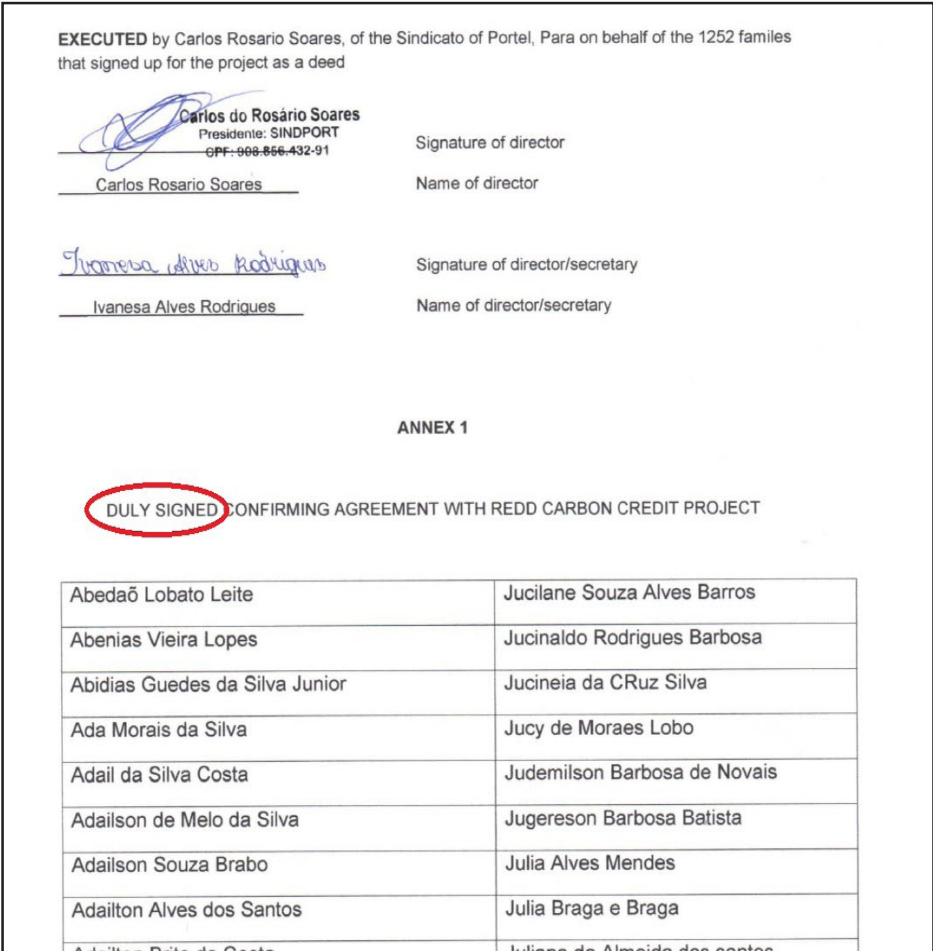


Figure 6 - Extract from document stating that all 1252 families have duly signed, confirming their agreement with the REDD carbon credit project.

Apparently, there was no legal authorization from the families to participate in the REDD project, nor do they have any idea that their land is part of an initiative that will generate millions of dollars in revenue. The only thing the families we spoke to seem to know is that they signed "a paper" authorizing the elaboration of the CAR registration in their name and the receipt of a stove, basic food basket and/or training; however, this "paper" makes no reference to carbon credits or to REDD<sup>21</sup>.

This REDD project also stands out because it looks more like charity community infrastructure than a REDD project—when it states that it intends to build 60 new schools and 30 mini health clinics. After all, REDD was created to reduce emissions from deforestation, so project activities should have this focus. Why, then, does this project propose to take over the role of the Municipality of Portel to invest in public policies for health and education?

This may be partly explained by the non-acceptance of the first REDD projects by a significant number of families. The documentation for older projects makes no mention of how many families rejected the inclusion of their lands in those earlier REDD projects, but according to people with whom the WRM team spoke, there were quite a few. Based on this, one possible explanation for promises of large investments in health and education is an attempt to increase the endorsement of *ribeirinho* families who have not yet joined the REDD projects.

Another indication that Project 4 seeks the approval of families who have already been approached and rejected the proposal to add their lands to the REDD project, is the fact already mentioned that this project overlaps with one of the older REDD projects, in this case Project 1 (see figure 7).



Figure 7 - Overlapping areas between Project 1 (green) and Project 4 (blue) around the Anapu River

If this is the new strategy of the project proponents, it is a serious matter. Access to public health and education policies - which is the population's constitutional right and the public authorities' duty to provide - cannot be made conditional based on the acceptance of a private project. Especially a private project that blames the ribeirinho population, among others, for deforestation, restricts their use of their territories to 100 hectares and consequently changes their way of life drastically - all to guarantee millions of dollars in profits for REDD project proponents.

Furthermore, the blending of a private corporate project with public policies, and the involvement of the municipal government and councillors who are usually vote-thirsty, is even more worrisome. After all, it is nothing new that the opening of a new school or health post, or the distribution of a basic food basket, despite having the potential to address social problems, also frequently serves vested and hidden interests. To illustrate this worrisome mix of interests, we quote part of the congratulatory motion<sup>22</sup> that three Portel councillors made to the Association of Riverine and Residents of Portel, currently chaired by Michael Greene:

"The Association will build 20 schools with Basic Health Units simultaneously, scheduled to start on 02 April 2022. It is also planned to deliver more than 2000 units of artesian wells, 12,000 units of basic food baskets, 2,000 units of tool kits, among others. Noble fellows, recently I accompanied the Association's performance [...], where I could see the importance of the work developed for the municipality of Portel".

It is worth noting that at no time the motion for congratulations mentions REDD projects or the sale of pollution credits worth millions of US dollars. Thus, another question arises: how is the construction of these public works and the other assistance projects that the councillors envisage being financed, if Project 4 has not yet managed to register tradable pollution credits in this market, as Projects 1, 2 and 3 have?

## Neo-colonialism in the Amazon

Of all the issues raised regarding REDD projects in Portel, the most serious one seems to underlie all the initiatives and permeate all their stages: The reproduction of a colonial and racist vision, often imagined as something only of the past.

Portel is the name of a Portuguese city, created by colonizers who came to Brazil 500 years ago to dominate a territory, where more than 1,000 distinct indigenous peoples are estimated to have lived. The colonisers took Brazilwood, gold and other riches, pillaging the country at all costs, decimating or enslaving people for their own benefit, and leaving some "benefits" to appease the population.

Today, foreigners are again landing in Portel to enrich themselves. Now, they seek to dictate the use of the forest, because they turn the carbon stored in the Amazon forest trees into pollution credits. These credits are worth gold, even though they are a product nobody can see; they are the new "Brazilwood", but unimaginably more abstract, and likely to exist only on paper. While the Portuguese had to dominate and demonize the indigenous peoples, the REDD project proponents dominate the *ribeirinho* communities, and blame them for deforestation as much as they blame the expansion of agribusiness – as if their land use and way of life were comparable to each other. External REDD project owners define how *ribeirinho* communities should and can live, today and in the future. However, they do this in a much more sophisticated and marketable way for buyers of pollution credits and for the public opinion in general. After all, whips and chains no

longer work so well for the lucrative business of extracting wealth from colonies – a business that has been continually reinvented for over 500 years.

There are many more colonial and racist elements that emerge from this story. For example, one of the proponents of Project 1 is a company registered in Switzerland. One wonders: Would these extensive areas of REDD projects in Portel - whose combined areas amount to approximately 20 per cent of the territory of Switzerland - be a foreign territorial appropriation that the people of Switzerland would accept? And would the people of the countries where the other businessmen who seek to profit from the sale of pollution credits from Portel come from, accept it? No, certainly not. Southern countries like Brazil serve exactly this purpose.

Finally, the REDD experience in Portel shows that this mechanism works well where the overarching public policies to reduce deforestation and to strengthen the wellbeing of the peoples and populations that depend on the forests are not in good shape. REDD is one more expression and incentive in the current neo- or ultraliberal era, where, among other things, capital takes advantage of the ongoing dismantling of policies that monitor and punish loggers, large landowners and other agents in Brazil that promote large-scale deforestation. Meanwhile, the weakening and/or privatization of public policies on health, education and assistance to small rural producers, indigenous peoples and the *ribeirinho* population allows this capital to now present itself as a "charity organization". All the while, this greenwashing project continues to accelerate the planet towards climate chaos.



# References

- (1) Is all carbon the same? Fossil carbon, violence and power <https://www.wrm.org.uy/15-years-of-redd-is-all-carbon-the-same>
- (2) According to the tool available at [www.check-plagiarism.com](http://www.check-plagiarism.com)
- (3) Congratulatory motion by the Portel City Council, issue 001/2022, 09 March 2022
- (4) ID 977 Monitoring Report Summary 2018 to 2020, version 3.4, p.15.
- (5) PNAS. Overstated carbon emission reductions from voluntary REDD+ projects in the Brazilian Amazon: <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2004334117>
- (6) REDD+ NA AMAZÔNIA: Monitoramento de Incêndios Florestais e Áreas Queimadas: [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Paulo-Tavares-21/publication/327939646\\_REDD\\_NA\\_AMAZONIA\\_Monitoramento\\_de\\_Incendios\\_Florestais\\_e\\_Areas\\_Queimadas/links/5bae3335299bf13e60525eb6/REDD-NA-AMAZONIA-Monitoramento-de-Incendios-Florestais-e-Areas-Queimadas.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Paulo-Tavares-21/publication/327939646_REDD_NA_AMAZONIA_Monitoramento_de_Incendios_Florestais_e_Areas_Queimadas/links/5bae3335299bf13e60525eb6/REDD-NA-AMAZONIA-Monitoramento-de-Incendios-Florestais-e-Areas-Queimadas.pdf)
- (7) DM Anápolis. Adepará e Prefeitura de Portel firmam parceria o fortalecimento do setor agropecuário <https://www.dmanapolis.com.br/noticia/16855/adepara-e-prefeitura-de-portel-firmam-parceria-o-fortalecimento-do-setor-agropecuarian>
- (8) Regarding the sale value of carbon credits, the lack of transparency prevents us from knowing the exact value of the negotiations. There are sales well below, but also well above the \$5 per credit estimate.
- (9) AirFrance. La compensation de 100% des émissions de CO2 des vols domestiques d'Air France débutera le 1er janvier 2020: <https://corporate.airfrance.com/fr/communique-de-presse/la-compensation-de-100-des-emissions-de-co2-des-vols-domestiques-dair-france>
- (10) For a more in-depth look at this issue, see <https://agroefogo.org.br/> and the bulletin “Good fire or bad fire, who decides? A reflection on fire and forests” at <https://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletins/issue-238>
- (11) Mongabay. Justiça decide que agricultores devem deixar terras reclamadas por desmatadores: <https://brasil.mongabay.com/2017/06/justica-decide-agricultores-devem-deixar-terras-reclamadas-desmatadores/>
- (12) REDD Montitor. Ecomapuá Amazon REDD Project, Brazil: Pública investigation reveals Ecomapuá Conservação is selling “illegal” carbon offsets from land it does not own, without transferring the money to local communities: <https://redd-monitor.org/2022/05/09/ecomapua-amazon-redd-project-brazil-publica-investigation-reveals-ecomapua-conservacao-is-selling-illegal-carbon-offsets-from-land-it-does-not-own-without-transferring-the-money-to-local-commun/>
- (13) CCB Monitoring report RMDLT Portel-Pará REDD Project, 2012-2017, p.10. <https://registry.verra.org/app/projectDetail/VCS/977>
- (14) “[...] den ‘Ribeirinhos,’ den Amazonaswohnern, die entsprechenden Landrechte offiziell zu verschaffen.” <https://fpm.climatepartner.com/tracking/project/details/12841-1805-1001/1086/de>
- (15) Diário Oficial do Estado do Pará, issue 34.966, 11 May 2022, pages 67-92
- (16) A good example is in one of the reports for Project 3, the project of the company owned by Michael Greene. This report mentions a meeting scheduled in the capital Brasília with the person responsible for land affairs at the Federal Government to try to reverse the creation of a 15,936-hectare settlement, created in 2010 in the municipality of Portel, but which was never implemented. According to the report, such a settlement would supposedly lead to deforestation and therefore, during Bolsonaro’s government, the cancellation of the decree creating it was proposed. <https://registry.verra.org/app/projectDetail/VCS/2252> – Rio Anapu-Pacaja Monitoring Report version 3.4, p. 44
- (17) Document entitled “PD Ribeirinho Project – upload” (page 151), available at <https://registry.verra.org/app/projectDetail/VCS/2620>. The excerpt abbreviates the name of the entity to “Syndicate of Workers”, referring, apparently, to the Union of Rural Workers of Portel (STTR), which is also accused in other documents (for example in the monitoring report “Pacajai REDD+ ProjectCCB PD 220421\_v3.1”, page 13, available at <https://registry.verra.org/app/projectDetail/VCS/981>).
- (18) Jonas Morioka. A verdade das terras de Jonas Morioka: <https://www.jonasmorioka.com/sobre>
- (19) Ver-o-Fato. EXCLUSIVO – 886 mil hectares em Portel à venda por R\$ 40,8 milhões: “fantasma” da grilagem volta a atacar: <https://ver-o-fato.com.br/exclusivo-886-mil-hectares-em-porte/>
- (20) National Rural Registry System: <https://snrc.serpro.gov.br/snrc-web/consultaPublica.jsf?windowId=6d5>
- (21) The “paper” to which the ribeirinhos refer is most likely a document prepared by the Associação dos Ribeirinhos e Moradores, available at <https://ribeirinho.org/documentacoes/>, with the title “Questionnaire”. But according to the text, the document is actually an authorization. Despite its name, the Associação dos Ribeirinhos e Moradores was created in São Paulo, in 2018, having Jean Felipe Pessoa Borges as president at the time, who is also a lawyer for AGFOR Florestal companies, of which Michael Greene is a managing partner. However, the association's website makes no mention of them, nor of REDD projects, or of who funds their activities. The association's activities are cited in the project documentation as well as in marketing materials in Europe for the sale of pollution credits generated in Portel (<https://fpm.climatepartner.com/tracking/project/details/12841-1805-1001/1086/de>).
- (22) Congratulatory motion by the Portel City Council, issue 001/2022, 09 March 2022