PART II

FRAMING AROUND PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS
CHAPTER FOUR

PARTNERSHIP ON PAPER: POWER STRUGGLES AND STRATEGIC FRAMING AROUND INDUSTRIAL FORESTRY IN SOUTHERN COSTA RICA

HELEEN VAN DEN HOMBERGH*

In recent decades, the paper industry has been extending its influence further around the globe than ever before with a view not only to finding natural forests to exploit, but increasingly to using agricultural (or forest) lands to produce fast-growing pulpwod for their mills. Cheap land and labour, as well as climatic conditions which permit fast tree growth, lead paper companies to sign agreements with governments in the South to ‘reforest’ the rural landscape. One of these countries is Costa Rica, which is well-known for its protected areas but which, in the meantime, is being plagued by deforestation and is facing problems in remote rural areas. These problems are due to the impacts of structural adjustment and the crises in livestock and rice production which formed two very important commercial sectors of Costa Rican agriculture. The Osa Peninsula (Figure 4.1) is just such a remote area, in need of employment and agricultural alternatives. Stone Container Corporation (now part of Smurfit Stone Container) was one of the largest paper producers in the world and was in need of new sources of raw material when it entered this zone. A public-private partnership was created in 1989: Stone Container agreed to create a subsidiary, Ston Forestal S.A., and to sow 24,000 hectares of fast-growing *Gmelina arborea* pulpwod on farmlands. In return, the Costa Rican government agreed to facilitate the investment, among other things through infrastructure support and Free Trade Zone conditions for the company’s harbour and chip mill which were planned in Punta Estrella in the Osa Peninsula to process and transport the wood. The company acquired

* Oxfam-Novib and University of Amsterdam, P.O. Box 30919, 2500 GX The Hague, the Netherlands. E-mail: heleen.van.den.hombergh@oxfamnovib.nl; hvd-hombergh@yahoo.com.