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Environment

The people of the world confront the advance of capitalism: Rio +20 and beyond

- IV Online magazine - 2012 - IV449 - June 2012 -
Publication date: Sunday 10 June 2012

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Governments from all over the world will meet in R o de Janeiro, Brasil from June 20-22 2012, to supposedly commemorate 20 years since the “Earth Summit”, the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, that established for the first time a global agenda for “sustainable development”. During this summit, in 1992, three international conventions were adopted: the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention on Climate Change, and the Convention to Fight Desertification. Each of these promised to initiate a series of actions destined to protect the planet and all of the life on it, and to allow all human beings to enjoy a life of dignity.

At that time , many social organizations congratulated and supported these new conventions with hope. Twenty years later, we see the real causes of environmental, economic, and social deterioration continuing without being attacked. Worse still, we are profoundly alarmed that the next meeting in June will serve to deepen neoliberal policies and processes of capitalist expansion, concentration, and exclusion that today have enveloped us in an environmental, economic, and social crisis of grave proportions. Beneath the deceptive and badly intentioned term “green economy”, new forms of environmental contamination and destruction are now rolled out along with new waves of privatization, monopolization, and expulsion from our lands and territories.

La Via Campesina will mobilize for this event, representing the voice of the peasant in the global debate and defending a different path to development that is based on the wellbeing of all, that guarantees food for all, that protects and guarantees that the commons and natural resources are put to use to provide a good life for everyone and not to meet the needs for accumulation of a few.

20 years later: the planet and humanity in crisis

20 years after the Earth Summit, life on the planet has become dramatically difficult. The number of hungry people has increased to almost a billion, which means that one out of every six people is going hungry, mostly children and women in the countryside. Expulsion from our lands and territories is accelerating, no longer only due to conditions of disadvantage imposed upon us by trade agreements and the industrial sector, but by new forms of monopoly control over land and water, by the global imposition of intellectual property regimes that steal our seeds, by the invasion of transgenic seeds, and by the advance of monoculture plantations, mega-projects, and mines.

The grand promises of R o '92 have resulted a farce. The Convention on Biodiversity has not stopped the destruction of biodiversity and has strengthened and generated new mechanisms destined to privatize it and turn it into merchandise. Desertification continues to accelerate due to the industrial agriculture and the expansion of agribusiness and monoculture plantations. Global warming “with all of the disasters and dramatic suffering it is already causing” has not slowed, but has accelerated and become more severe.

The great deceit of 1992 was “sustainable development”, which social organizations initially saw as a possibility to confront the root of the problems. However, it was nothing more than a cover-up for the search for new forms of accumulation. Today they look to legitimize a new faade under the name “green economy”.

The “green economy” and other false solutions: a new assault on the people and their territories

Capitalist profit-seeking has generated the biggest systemic crisis since 1929. Since 2008, the hegemonic system has looked for ways out of its structural crisis, searching for new possibilities for accumulation that support its logic. It is in this context that the corporate takeover of agreements on biodiversity and climate change have occurred, and consequently, the development of this new financial engineering called Green Capitalism.

Governments, business people, and the organizations of the United Nations have spent these last years constructing the myth of the “green economy” and of the “greening of technology”. They present it as a new possibility to bring together environmental stewardship and business, but it is in fact the vehicle to obtain new advances of capitalism, putting the entire planet under the control of big capital. . There are various mechanisms that will be advanced by the green economy and all of them will increase the destruction. More specifically,

1. The green economy does not seek to reduce climate change or environmental deterioration, but to generalize the principle that those who have money can continue polluting. Up to now, they have used the farce of purchasing carbon bonds to continue emitting greenhouse gases. They are now inventing biodiversity bonds. This is to say, businesses can continue destroying forests and ecosystems, as long as they pay someone to supposedly conserve biodiversity somewhere else. Tomorrow they may invent bonds for water, natural “views”, or clean air.

2. These systems of buying environmental services are being used to take lands and territories away from indigenous peoples and peasants. The mechanisms that are most forcefully promoted by governments and businesses are the systems known as REDD and REDD plus. They say that these are systems to reduce greenhouse gas emissions produced by deforestation and degradation of the forests, but they are being used to impose, for a ridiculous price, management plans that deny families and rural communities access to their own lands, forests, and water sources. In addition, they guarantee businesses unrestricted access to collective forest areas, enabling biopiracy. They also impose contracts that tie communities to these management plans for 20 years or more and that leave indigenous and peasant territories with mortgage liens, that increases the likelihood that these communities will lose their lands. The objectives of these environmental services are to take control of nature reserves and of the territories that are under the control of these communities.

3. Another initiative of the green economy is to convert plants, algae, and all other organic material (residues, dung, etc.) into a source of energy to substitute for petroleum; what is called “use of biomass”. With agrofuels, this has meant that thousands of hectares that should be covered in forests or producing food are being used to feed machines. If the use of biomass energy is effectively expanded, we will see life in the seas reduced still more because an important segment of marine species will go without food. Our soils will not recuperate the organic material that is essential to conserve fertility and guard against erosion and drought. It will be impossible to feed our animals because the food they need is ever more scarce and expensive. Also, the water shortage will worsen, either directly through the cultivation of agrofuels or because our soils no longer have the capacity to absorb and retain water due to a lack of organic matter.

4. Then, they speak to us of “climate smart agriculture”, the goal of which is to convince us to accept a new Green Revolution—possibly with transgenics—and that instead of demanding effective support to defend us from the effects of climate change, we accept laughable payments that function the same way as REDD. They also seek to impose systems that are highly dependent on large quantities of agrotoxins—like direct seeding that depends on aerial sprayings of Round Up—that they would call “low carbon agriculture”. That is to say, we are obliged to accept a certain type of agriculture that will jeopardize control of our territories, our ecosystems, and our water.

5. One of the most perverse aspects of the false solutions that are promoted in international negotiations is the restriction of access to and use of water for irrigation. Using the pretext that water for irrigation is scarce, it is suggested that water be concentrated in “high value crops”; meaning that export crops, agrofuels and other industrial crops are irrigated while food crops are left without water.

6. The promotion of technological solutions that are not solutions at all is also part of the agenda of the discussions in Rio. Among the most dangerous are geoengineering and the acceptance of transgenic crops. Up until now, none of the solutions proposed by geoengineering have demonstrated any real capacity to solve climate problems. On the contrary, some forms of geoengineering (like the fertilization of the seas) are so dangerous that there has been an international moratorium declared against them. To accept Genetically modified organism (GMOs), we are told that crops resistant to drought and heat will be created, but the only thing new in GMOs are more herbicide-resistant varieties, which are bringing back to the market highly toxic herbicides like 2,4-D.

7. The most ambitious plan and the one that some governments identify as “the major challenge” is to put a price on all the goods of nature (like water, biodiversity, the countryside, wildlife, seeds, rain, etc.) to then privatize them (arguing that conservation requires money) and charge us for their use. This is called the Economy of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB). It is the final assault on nature and life, but also on the means of work and the lives of the people whose livelihoods are based on agriculture, hunting, and fishing.

This “green” capitalism has the rural commons, agriculture, land and water particularly in its sights. We are already suffering from its effects in the form of land grabs or monopolization of land, privatization of water, the oceans, of indigenous territories, the national parks and nature reserves; all these processes are being accompanied by the forced expulsions of peasant and indigenous communities.

The real solution: put peasant and indigenous farmers at the center

We, peasants and indigenous peoples, are the ones who are concentrated in the highest levels of poverty because we have been deprived of land and we have been constrained by law or by force so that we cannot cultivate and exchange freely. Nonetheless, we are people who have been resisting expulsion from the countryside, and still we are more than 90% of the rural population. Our forms of agriculture cool the planet, care for ecosystems and secure the food supply for the poorest.

Every real solution happens to impinge upon the unbridled profits of capital, put an end to the complicity of governments and supports forms of production that effectively care for the planet. Food Sovereignty is at the heart of the necessary changes, and is the only real path that can possibly feed all of humanity. Our proposals are clear and introduce real solutions:

1. We should exchange the industrial agroexport food system for a system based on food sovereignty, that returns the land to its social function as the producer of food and sustainer of life, that puts local production of food at the center, as well as the local markets and local processing. Food sovereignty allows us to put an end to monocultures and agribusiness, to foster systems of peasant production that are characterized by greater intensity and productivity, that provide jobs, care for the soil and produce in a way that is healing and diversified. Peasant and indigenous agriculture also has the ability to cool the planet, with the capacity to absorb or prevent almost 2/3 of the greenhouses gases that are emitted every year.

2. The land currently in the hands of peasants and indigenous peoples is around 20% of all agricultural land in the world. And yet I, on this land the peasant and indigenous families and communities produce slightly less than half of the world's food. The most secure and efficient way to overcome hunger around the world is in our hands.

3. To secure food for all and restore the earth's normal climate, it is necessary to return agriculture to the hands of peasant communities and indigenous peoples. To do this, we must have urgent, integrated, sweeping agrarian reform that ends the extreme and growing concentration of land that affects all of humanity today. These agrarian reforms will provide the material conditions for agriculture to benefit all of humanity and thus , the defense and

protection of peasant and indigenous agriculture is up to all of us. In the short run, it is necessary to halt all transactions, concessions, and transfers that result in concentration or monopoly control of land and/or the displacement of rural communities.

4. Peasant and indigenous systems of agriculture, hunting, fishing, and shepherding that care for the land and the food supply should be supported adequately with public resources that are not subject to conditionalities. Market mechanisms—like the sale of carbon and environmental services—should be eliminated and replaced with real measures like those mentioned above. Ending pollution is a duty that no one should be able to avoid by paying for the rights to continue the destruction.

5. The legitimate use of what international organizations and enterprises now call biomass is to feed every living being, and then to be returned to the earth to restore its fertility. The emissions that come from wasted energy should be reduced through saving and eliminating waste. We need renewable, decentralized sources of energy, within reach of the people.

We are mobilized to unmask Rio +20 and green capitalism

We, peasants, family farmers, landless peasants, indigenous peoples and migrants, men and women, decidedly oppose the commercialization of the earth, our territories, water, seeds, food, nature, and human life. We reiterate what was said at the People's Summit in Cochabamba, Bolivia: "Humanity faces a grand dilemma: to continue the path of capitalism, predation, and death, or undertake the path of harmony with nature and respect for life."

We repudiate and denounce the green economy as a new mask to hide increasing levels of corporate greed and food imperialism in the world, and as a brutal "green washing" of capitalism that only implements false solutions, like carbon trading, REDD, geoengineering, GMOs, agrofuels, bio-char, and all of the market-based solutions to the environmental crisis.

Our goal is to bring back another way of relating to nature and other people. This is also our duty, and our right and so we will continue fighting and calling on others to continue fighting tirelessly for the construction of food sovereignty, for comprehensive agrarian reform and the restoration of indigenous territories, for ending the violence of capital and restoring peasant and indigenous systems of production based on agroecology.

NO TO THE FALSE SOLUTIONS OF GREEN CAPITALISM

PEASANT AGRICULTURE NOW!