



## Issue 176 - March 2012

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### THE FOCUS OF THIS ISSUE: WOMEN'S RESISTANCE

The “green economy” is a concept that has gained huge momentum largely thanks to its placement at the top of the agenda for the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, better known as Rio+20.

While the concept is dressed up in “eco friendly” clothing, it does not promote any of the structural changes needed to combat the environmental and social problems facing the planet. On the contrary, it opens up new market niches for the flow of big financial capital. Essentially, it is simply another face of the same profit-driven market economy that has created the current crisis.

A great many social movements and organizations around the world are on the alert and fighting back against the advance of the so-called green economy. The March edition corresponding to the month in which we celebrate the International Women's Day, highlights the role played by women in this resistance.

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### OUR VIEWPOINT

- **The invisible resistance of women against the commodification of life**

All around the world there are women struggling every day of the year. Since the 20th century, however, International Women's Day has become a date on which their struggle is commemorated and highlighted. Women on every continent, urban, rural, indigenous, black, lesbian, among so many others, mark this date on the streets, raising their banners, which are countless, against gender inequalities that are manifested at the local and global levels.

Among the milestones in the international women's struggle, we should not forget the *World Conference on Human Rights* held in Vienna in 1993, where it was recognized that the rights of women are human rights. Another key moment was the adoption of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, also known as the Convention of Belem do Para, in 1994. Violence against women, particularly so-called domestic violence, which takes place in the home, is one of the global phenomena that most seriously affects the lives and dignity of women.

Nevertheless, women's lives are impacted by other forms of violence: the "double shift" entailed by paid work combined with domestic responsibilities, the overexploitation of their labour, the feminization of poverty and HIV/AIDS, the loss of their territories to large-scale projects, the pollution and degradation of the rivers and soil on which they depend for their subsistence. There is no doubt that women face a great many enemies, and perhaps the most ferocious of all, after patriarchy, is capitalism. The capacity of this mode of production to commodify life as a whole is felt most acutely by women. Women see the commodification of their bodies, transformed into merchandise, in the media and advertising, and are victims of the trafficking that feeds international prostitution rings. In addition, women must also struggle against the strategies aimed at the commodification of nature, such as the false solutions created for the alleged purpose of confronting the climate crisis.

So-called "environmental" non-governmental organizations and funds take control of collective forest areas and seek to restrict or even prohibit access to them by local communities in order to "preserve" these areas for the trade of "*environmental services*", such as carbon storage in the case of REDD+ projects. In these situations, it is women who suffer most from the constant humiliation and repression that occurs in places where these types of projects are implemented.

When a community suffers the loss of its collectively used territory to projects aimed at the trade in environmental services, one of the invariable consequences is the surveillance and persecution of the community by forest rangers and, above all, public and/or private armed militias. Women, who stay at home to tend to domestic chores, raise crops and care for their children, become the most vulnerable to this persecution.

In addition, in areas affected by carbon or environmental services projects, shifting cultivation or swidden farming tends to be prohibited. This is a common practice among forest communities, in which women play a key role. It ensures a basic supply of healthy food for families and, at the same time, allows them to earn an income by selling surplus crops nearby.

In view of this, it can be concluded that the changes caused by the creation of market

mechanisms for the use of nature violate a basic right: the right to food, and in particular, the right to healthy food. It is also important to remember that changes in dietary habits, through the introduction of industrially processed foods and crops grown with toxic agrochemicals, have led to the emergence of new diseases that were formerly unknown in these communities.

The loss of areas in which food crops can be grown also results in other impacts: many women are forced to go out and sell their labour ever farther away from their homes. But even though they have taken on new tasks in the world of paid work, women continue to be primarily responsible for domestic tasks. The work overload suffered by women has contributed to making them more prone to illness. Diseases like breast and cervical cancer are striking women at increasingly younger ages. High blood pressure, which used to be one of the main health problems faced by men, now affects more women than men.

The greatest irony of all, perhaps, is that although women are the ones most severely impacted, it is their images that are used in publicity to promote carbon trade and other environmental services projects.

We believe that our role, not only on March 8, but every day of the year, is to contribute to raising the visibility of women's struggles and realities, as well as to support the struggles of women's organizations against all forms of oppression, including the new wave of the commodification of life in these times of the *green economy*.

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## **WOMEN ON THE ALERT AGAINST BUSINESS-AS-USUAL DRESSED UP IN GREEN**

**- New crossroads, same actors: The green economy of the powerful, voices of resistance of women**

### ***Business as usual dressed up in green***

Humanity is moving along old paths in new clothes. The current civilization model, which is portrayed as hegemonic but actually corresponds to a small minority of the planet, is dragging it towards its limits, exposing it to multiple crises.

At the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992, the governments of the world recognized that the planet was facing a severe environmental crisis. The famous Bruntland Report gave rise to the concept of "sustainable development", a type of development through which it would be possible to maintain and increase growth without placing future generations at risk. From this point on a series of United Nations conventions were adopted on biodiversity, desertification and climate change, supposedly aimed at stemming the environmental crisis.

It seemed like the future of the planet had a real chance. However, none of these purported solutions addressed the root of the problem: the capitalist system and its

logic of limitless growth. Vested interests won out, and instead of the change needed, the response was to eagerly embrace and promote neoliberal strategies that have led to the commodification of nature.

Now, 20 years later, as we head for another Rio summit, the environmental crisis is even more acute, and “sustainable development” now bears the label of the “green economy”. Incorporated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2008, the “green economy” advocates switching to renewable fuel but maintaining the same systems of production, trade, finance and consumption.

Without a doubt, this proposal benefits the large capitalist economies, which currently find themselves mired in a severe financial-economic crisis. The “green economy” offers an opportunity for their corporations to resume the accumulation of capital and reap greater profits through both productive and speculative activities. It is a matter of redirecting investment towards nature – transformed into “natural capital” – as well as investing in new, supposedly clean technologies such as those that use biomass and in the “carbon emissions market”.

Within this framework, the concept of payments for environmental services is at the eye of the storm. “The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity” (TEEB), another UNEP initiative, has been instrumental in assigning an economic value to biodiversity – thus overcoming a major obstacle for the promoters of the commercialization of nature.

From this perspective, “environmental services” and “trade in environmental services” play a key role in the “green economy”. According to Silvia Ribeiro of the ETC Group, which is monitoring and researching this process, the result will be “greater commodification and privatization of nature and ecosystems, through the integration of their functions (defined as ‘services’) into financial markets” (see WRM Bulletin 175).

Carbon markets also have a part in this perverse logic. While their origin dates back before the current promotion of the concept of the “green economy”, they are an example of the efforts to commodify and therefore privatize the air, water, forests and biodiversity.

### ***Trade in illusions***

The Kyoto Protocol accepted regulated carbon markets in the framework of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). This means that companies that reduce emissions can sell them, converted into bonds, to other companies who find it more advantageous to use these pieces of paper as a licence to continue polluting.

Carbon markets form part of the so-called “financialization” of nature, in which financial speculation has come to predominate over production, spurred by increasing financial market deregulation, while capital markets – through the issuing of stocks and bonds – have become the main sources of investment.

Carbon market transactions now total more than USD 100 billion annually, with many investment funds and other major financial players now investing in the carbon credits

market including Deutsche Bank, Morgan Stanley, Barclays Capital, Rabobank, BNP Paribas Fortis, Sumitomo, Kommunalkredit, Cantor Fitzgerald.(1)

By 2010, much of the growth in the volume of trade in carbon happened in the secondary carbon derivatives market, in other words, where negotiations take place between financial operators. What started out in the primary market as a project that would supposedly reduce emissions in a country in the South – with those emission reductions sold in the form of certificates to a buyer in the North – ends up as a purely financial activity, with no additional benefit for the climate and for the communities that depend on forests, and which purportedly – according to the propaganda – would benefit from the money they would receive for not using their forests.

A complex financial system has been created, based on the fallacy of establishing a direct equivalence between the fossil released from the subsoil where it was permanently stored for millions of years, and the carbon in the biosphere temporarily stored in plants. Once fossil carbon is released, extracted and burned, it cannot be safely stored again underground, because biological and geological systems do not have the necessary capacity.

In fact, the only solution is to leave the bulk of the coal, oil and gas reserves that have still not been exploited underground. But there are many powerful interests who are opposed to this, and so creative efforts are channelled towards inventing new ways of conducting business with nature and avoiding the changes genuinely needed.

The market, which is expanding into unimaginable areas – such as, in this case, pollution – cannot solve the problem of climate change. On the contrary, it exacerbates it, because it distracts attention from the need to undertake structural change towards a system that is not dependent on the consumption of fossil fuels. It also exacerbates inequality, and allows the countries who owe their growth not only to the exploitation of other peoples but also to their contamination of the atmosphere to elude their historical responsibility.

### ***Forests on the stock exchange***

Forests are currently a hot topic, but unfortunately, not due to genuine concern for their preservation, but rather for their use as the basis for convoluted business dealings.

Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) is a mechanism introduced into the Kyoto Protocol in 2010 through negotiations at the Cancun Climate Change Conference. By placing a monetary value on the carbon stored in trees, based on the argument that this will serve as an incentive for forest preservation in countries of the South, since it will be more profitable to keep trees standing than to clear them, REDD proposes that the emissions supposedly “reduced” by preventing deforestation be traded on the carbon markets.

Aside from the fact that REDD projects entail costly and not very reliable systems for monitoring carbon flow, they have led to a situation where the voracious search for

biomass and carbon credits has set its sights on forest peoples, who are taken in or coerced into complying.

An article published by the Agencia Latinoamericana de Información (ALAI) news agency in its magazine *América Latina en Movimiento* reports that “indigenous peoples or communities, usually small in size, with little or no experience in dealing with the Western modern world, often with tenuous or no legal ownership of their lands and territories, will face increasing pressure to negotiate their rights over their territories or resources, directly or indirectly, with powerful international actors. (...) Obviously these communities will be in even less of a position to negotiate with adequate knowledge of the complexity of the international process and to unravel its implications. There are not a few cases of communities that have been taken in by seductive promises – true or false – without measuring the consequences for their livelihoods; or of leaders who have given in to the temptation of rapid access to resources, sometimes through the use of bribery. There are also communities with little negotiating power who have been pushed off of their lands, or have accepted derisory conditions. The terms of negotiation are therefore extremely unequal, and when communities resist, their members often face the risk of being evicted, fenced in, or even physically eliminated. The history of the Conquest is thus repeating itself through new forms.”(2)

In Indonesia, while oil and mining concessions continue to expand, and oil palm plantations now cover 11 million hectares and seem destined to keep growing, there are more than 40 REDD projects and grandiose government discourse on the importance of “saving the forests”. The non-governmental organization WALHI/Friends of the Earth Indonesia has categorically stated its opposition to carbon markets and REDD. In an interview with REDD-Monitor, WALHI campaigns director Teguh Surya commented, “ If you want to save your lungs you should stop smoking. The government says that we will save Kalimantan's forests as the 'lungs of the world'. But only 45% . They will exploit the remaining 55%. You cannot save your lungs if you are still addicted to cigarettes. It's impossible .”(3)

In the meantime, REDD credits have still not been accepted by the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS), which currently accounts for 97% of the existing carbon market. This means they must be traded on the voluntary carbon market, which is not regulated – up until now it has mainly served to “greenwash” the image of corporations – and is much smaller than the official Kyoto market, which is still in the REDD preparation stage.

Nevertheless, the actors who have a strong interest in the implementation of REDD continue to carry out a wide range of efforts and to commit copious resources to projects whose execution remains uncertain, given past experience of broken promises, the conditions attached to financing, and the current financial crisis, as highlighted in a recent report by a number of civil society organizations.(4)

### ***Bringing visibility to the gender dimension***

Forests are also much more than mere receptacles of carbon. Above all, they provide livelihoods, sustenance and income to more than 1.6 billion people around the world, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It is

peasant farmers and indigenous peoples who depend most on the forests, and among them, it is primarily women whose survival depends on the supplies they find in the forests.

Of particular relevance here are the socially constructed roles, rights and responsibilities that are assigned to men and women and the relation between the two sexes, giving rise to gender roles. In the division of roles, women have been assigned the task of caring for the home and responsibility for the health and education of their families. For centuries, rural women have been responsible for domestic chores; caring for and feeding their families; and tending the family's crops, including the exchange of seeds and selling the produce grown. But in general, they occupy a socially invisible place.

According to data from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), cited in an article by Esther Vivas, a member of the Centre for Studies on Social Movements (CEMS) at Universitat Pompeu Fabra,(5) in many African countries women represent 70% of the field labour, are responsible for supplying 90% of the domestic water supply, and are responsible for between 60 and 80% of the production of food consumed and sold by the family. They account for 100% of the processing of foods, 80% of the activities of food storage and transportation, and 90% of the labour involved in preparing the earth before planting.

Meanwhile, a report from the Inter Press Service (IPS) news agency, cited in an article by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID),(6) reveals: "Women gather firewood from forests and fetch water from rivers and lakes for household use. They sustain their families and communities with the products of the land. Yet in most African countries, women's legal property ownership rights are not secure. Only 1% of women in Tanzania have legal land titles. In Zimbabwe, up to 20% of women have land titles, but despite this relatively higher number, 'women rarely profit' from their land."

The AWID article explains how the expansion of monoculture plantations for agrofuel production, one of the driving forces behind land grabbing, has led to a situation in Ghana where "the traditional livelihoods of many women who depended on their cultivation of cocoa and oil palms are being eroded as a result of land grabs. Ethiopian widows who are already dispossessed of their land ownership rights, and have to farm on 'marginal lands' are further dispossessed by land grabs as these 'marginal' lands are being grabbed to grow biofuels."

In many cases of changes in land use – which has involved the destruction of forests and other ecosystems to make way for monoculture plantations – the incorporation of women into the paid workforce has saddled them with a double burden. They continue caring for their families while also working outside the home to earn an income, often in precarious employment, earning far lower salaries than men for the same work, which sometimes leads them to work longer hours to increase their income.

In terms of the use of forests, local communities' knowledge of trees and non-timber forest products is complex and rooted in tradition, but in addition, both this knowledge and the use of forests is often gendered, resulting in asymmetrical

distribution of and access to power between men and women, as recognized by the UN-REDD Programme in a recent report.(7) It is worth highlighting the report's reflection that the use of the term "community" as homogeneous, static, harmonious and "un-gendered" units within which people share common interests and needs conceals power relations and masks biases in interests and needs based on, for example, age, class, caste, ethnicity, religion and gender. The report also stresses the need to question gender differences, in other words, what it means to be a man or a woman in a given context. It refers to statistics on agriculture and forestry which reveal that women work longer hours than men, frequently in activities related to subsistence and family care. This translates into less time to attend and participate in other activities that could contribute to greater involvement and access to information

Moreover, there are also gender differences in rights and access to land, based on customary practices and legal constructs. This inequality is crucial given that land is a vital resource for food production.

Despite their key role in subsistence, women can be more seriously impacted in times of food crises. FAO points to evidence that in 2008, when food prices rose sharply, in some countries female-headed households were more vulnerable than those headed by males, because they spend a larger proportion of household income on food and because they were less able to respond by increasing food production.(8)

According to research by Arabella Fraser, cited by Esther Vivas in the abovementioned article, access to land is not a guaranteed right for many women. In numerous Southern countries laws forbid this right, and in those countries where legal access exists there are often traditions and practices that prevent women from property ownership, which means they also have no control over the sale of land or how it is transmitted to children. In the same article, a member of the Karnataka State Farmers Association of India, which forms part of the La Via Campesina network, explains that peasant women in India have almost no rights and are considered an "addition" to males. "Rural women are the most untouchable of the untouchables within the social caste system," she maintained.

The same situation with regard to access to land exists in much of Africa, where women do not have inheritance rights, which means that if they are widowed, they end up losing their land and other assets. However, African women are fighting back and organizing to confront the recent upsurge in land grabs and to demand the right to ownership and control of land and natural resources. Kenya recently adopted a national land policy that cements women's land ownership rights and Tanzania has a law that requires women's participation in local land administration bodies. Meanwhile, in 2009, the African Union adopted the Framework and Guidelines on Land Policy in Africa, which calls on states to ensure equitable access to land and recognizes the role of colonization in cementing patriarchy in land ownership laws by "conferring title and inheritance rights on male family members" and permitting discrimination against women on matters of personal law (marriage and inheritance), as reported in the above mentioned AWID article.

Agribusiness, which has found new routes for expansion in the context of the green economy, has entailed the dismantling of family economies, local markets and

sustainable land use. Large-scale mechanized production on monoculture plantations and the loss of forests has led to the loss of sovereignty for many local communities. Women's ties to the forest, their role as providers and their importance within the community have all been violently altered, not as the outcome of a sought-after and conscious process of change, but rather as the result of an abrupt externally caused rupture. The market "solutions" of the appropriation of the land, water and air doubly affect women due to their lack of rights and greater vulnerability.

### ***Women, subjugated but not silent***

Among the "environmental services" formats ready to be sold on the carbon market, REDD and REDD+ have emerged with particular force. In order to put their best foot forward, the promoters of these mechanisms propose addressing the situation of women through gender mainstreaming in project formulation, as advocated in the abovementioned UN-REDD Programme report. REDD is therefore presented as a fait accompli, in which it is necessary to participate in order to make it better. And gender representation will earn it even greater backing...

The privatization of what were once common goods shared by communities – land, water, forests – frequently leads to an intensification of migration, which hits women particularly hard given their historical responsibility as family caregivers. Migration characterized as a process of "urbanization disconnected from industrialization" (see the article by Esther Vivas) pushes ex-peasant women to the cities, which then feeds them back to the marginalized periphery where they live off the informal economy. Women are an essential component of these national and international migratory flows, which result in the dismantling and abandonment of families, land, processes of production and ways of life.

The uncertain and undoubtedly meagre payment for the "environmental service" provided by forests is a perverse incentive in the case of communities that are already hemmed in by the destruction caused by the advance of agribusiness. Surreptitiously, this form of commercialization of life threatens the sacred bond that has ancestrally tied indigenous peoples, above all, to nature, through a cosmology that has historically converted them into guardians of the forests. Behind REDD lies the loss of access to forests and their use by communities and indigenous peoples. And given the roles and functions of rural and indigenous women, this will especially impact on them, as described earlier.

This is why other voices are rising up, demanding the right to say no to REDD! It was precisely during the 16th Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 16), which incorporated the REDD mechanism, that women and organizations from around the world joined together to reaffirm the importance of safeguarding the rights of women and to state their opposition to REDD initiatives. The arguments put forward in the statement they issued, which we contributed to disseminating at the time (see [http://wrm.org.uy/subjects/women/Position on Women and REDD.html](http://wrm.org.uy/subjects/women/Position%20on%20Women%20and%20REDD.html)), remain as relevant today as ever.

For their part, on International Women's Day this year, the World March of Women denounced "the new round of looting and appropriation of natural resources" and

stated their rejection of “the consumer culture that impoverishes communities, creating dependency and exterminating local production.” They stressed, “We continue on the march, to resist, and to construct a world for us, for others, for our peoples, for all living things and the environment. These actions continue to confront the onslaught of the lethal capitalist paradigm with its false solutions to the crises and its fundamentalist, conservative ideology.” And finally, their declaration concluded, “we demonstrate our resistance and our self-defence through our bodies and our territories. We strengthen our struggle for structural changes in our lives and we will continue on the march until we are all free! We call for the networking between our movements and the strengthening of alliances with other movements, for it is in this way that we will construct a free world. ”(9)

In Brazil, on March 1, 1,150 women from the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST) occupied a eucalyptus plantation owned by Suzano Papel Celulose (10) in the extreme south of the state of Bahia. The occupation formed part of a series of actions organized by La Via Campesina Brazil to mark the international day of women's struggle. Its aim was to denounce the unemployment, poverty, social inequality and expulsion of the rural population caused by monoculture eucalyptus plantations, which have taken over lands that were once forests. Another 2,000 women marched through the streets of the city of Curitiba (11) protesting against agribusiness, the violence of capitalism and patriarchy, the approval of the new Forest Code (which paves the way for the further advance of agribusiness – see WRM Bulletin 166) and the green economy promoted by big capital.

In their opposition to the advance of agribusiness, women are raising the banner of food sovereignty.

The monopoly held by a group of transnationals with the support of governments and international institutions (the World Bank, IMF, etc.) that promote policies that benefit them (privatization, forced opening to the global economy, free trade agreements) has taken control of the production of food and turned it into just another business.

As the organization GRAIN points out, the problem is not a lack of food, but rather a lack of access to it. In 2008, worldwide grain production had tripled since the 1960's, while the global population had only doubled. It is the prevailing production, trade and pricing policies that condemn people to hunger in the midst of abundance.

In the face of this situation, food sovereignty has become a process of popular resistance whose conceptualization makes it possible to bring social movements together around commonly agreed goals and actions. Food sovereignty prioritizes local autonomy, local markets and community action, and incorporates elements like agrarian reform, territorial control, biodiversity, cooperation and health. It seeks to regain the right to decide what, how and where to produce what we eat. And as Vivas aptly notes, there is an inherent feminist perspective incorporated in food sovereignty.

Power will continue to seek formulas and opportunities to perpetuate itself, but resistance will continue to find voices, and among them, those of an ever growing number of women.

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- 2- "Pueblos selváticos en la encrucijada", Sally Burch, América Latina en Movimiento, El cuento de la economía verde, <http://alainet.org/publica/alai468-9.pdf>
- 3- Interview with Teguh Surya, WALHI: "We are against REDD. We are against carbon trading," Chris Lang, March 9, 2012, redd-monitor.org, <http://www.redd-monitor.org/2012/03/09/interview-with-teguh-surya-walhi-we-are-against-redd-we-are-against-carbon-trading/>
- 4- "O mercado de carbono não é a solução que promete ser para governos, florestas e populações do hemisfério sul", published in February 2012 by various civil society organizations, [http://www.fern.org/sites/fern.org/files/carbonleaflet\\_25nov.pdf](http://www.fern.org/sites/fern.org/files/carbonleaflet_25nov.pdf)
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- 6- "Africa's Latest Land Rush: The Effect of Land Grabs on Women's Rights", AWID, February 10, 2012, <http://awid.org/News-Analysis/Friday-Files/Africa-s-Latest-Land-Rush-The-Effect-of-Land-Grabs-on-Women-s-Rights>
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- 9- World March of Women Declaration - International Women's Day 2012, [http://www.marchmondiale.org/news/mmfnwsitem.2012-03-05.8809414578/en?set\\_language=en&cl=en](http://www.marchmondiale.org/news/mmfnwsitem.2012-03-05.8809414578/en?set_language=en&cl=en)
- 10- "Mulheres do MST ocupam fazenda da empresa Suzano, no município de Alcobaça-Bahia", MST, <http://www.mst.org.br/Mulheres-camponesas-ocupam-fazenda-da-Suzano-Papel-e-Celulose-no-sul-da-Bahia>
- 11- "Marcha reúne 2 mil mulheres do campo e cidade em Curitiba por Código Florestal", Camilla Pinheiro and Pedro Carrano, <http://www.mst.org.br/node/13026>

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## **- Honduras: Women fighting for land against a backdrop of violence and murders**

Men and women peasant farmers in the Bajo Aguán valley in Honduras are suffering violent repression after organizing and taking action to regain control of their land, which had been granted to them as part of a thwarted agrarian reform process dating back to the early 1970s.

The Agrarian Reform Law passed in 1972 gave rise to the settlement of a region that until that time had not been devoted to agricultural production: Bajo Aguán. It paved the way for the expansion of monoculture plantations of oil palm in the region, initially geared to the cosmetics and food industries, and currently promoted for the production of agrofuels as well.

As part of this process, the creation of working cooperatives was fostered and loans were provided for the planting of oil palms. With the support of international financial institutions and the Honduran government, highways and other infrastructure were constructed to facilitate access to these lands.

Later, in the 1990s, the Law on the Modernization and Development of the Agricultural Sector paved the way for the concentration of land ownership in the hands of local large landholders, such as Miguel Facussé, who further promoted the expansion of large-scale monoculture oil palm plantations in a large area of northern Honduras, especially in Bajo Aguán. Families that had been granted land ownership through agrarian reform were sometimes induced and other times forced to turn their lands over to these large landholders.

Many of these families, faced with the loss of their livelihoods, began to organize in peasant movements to demand from the government what they considered to be their right to the land. Beginning in 2000, after drawn-out and unproductive negotiations, the peasant farmers decided to take back their lands, initiating a process of the recovery of lands planted with oil palms that they claimed as rightfully theirs.

The 2009 coup in Honduras deepened the land conflict in the Bajo Aguán, and human rights violations became so severe that various human rights organizations began to monitor and denounce the situation internationally. An international mission visited the region and issued a report on the human rights situation, which stated that “the repression is manifested through different actions and omissions by the state, which range from the violence exercised by the police, military and private security forces employed by the landholders, to the use of the legal system to intimidate and discourage the fight for land.” (1)

In 2011, a number of national and international social and human rights organizations and peasant movements in the Aguán region created the Permanent Human Rights Observatory in the Bajo Aguán to provide support, observation and monitoring to prevent human rights violations.

#### **NEWS UPDATE**

In the early morning hours of March 12, Marvin José Andrade, a peasant farmer from the community of Cayo Campo, located next to the campesino settlement of La Lempira, was found murdered. His corpse, discovered on a turn-off from the highway, was severely burned and showed signs of torture. Residents of the community report that he had received death threats from security guards employed by nearby large landholder businessmen.

Campesino community leaders and members of the Permanent Human Rights Observatory in the Bajo Aguán have reported receiving new death threats, in spite of which they say they will stand firm in the defence of life and the preservation of the basic human rights of our communities and peoples.

### **Women fighting for land: Stories of resistance**

This history of the struggle for land is interlaced with a great many unheard stories of women who have fought in their multifaceted roles as mothers, wives, leaders and workers.

“Women live in a climate in which all of their rights are liable to violation: they have no access to farmland or any other means of production that would provide them with a livelihood. Faced with this situation, women are obliged to seek out alternatives for their survival: breaking down gender barriers, fighting alongside their fellow male peasant farmers, joining in all of the tasks required by their current situation.

“Women are constantly harassed by private security guards and members of the police, army and navy forces. They are afraid to go out to work, which negatively impacts on their financial income, exacerbating their situation. During evictions and hostilities they are victims of violence against their bodies and their loved ones.” (1)

During a recent visit to the country to participate in the International Gathering for Human Rights in Solidarity with Honduras, held in February of this year, we were able to visit a number of local communities, settlements of peasant farmers, where we spoke with Consuelo and Guadalupe. We believe they symbolize the struggle waged by so many women for land, dignity and a better future for their children and for other peasant families.

*Consuelo, woman, mother, activist, La Lempira settlement, Bajo Aguán, Honduras. Member of the United Campesino (Peasant Farmer) Movement of the Aguán (MUCA).*

“Five years ago I decided to join the movement for the recovery of our lands. The campesino movements emerged around 20 years ago to defend and recover lands in the Bajo Aguán. Since then the repression has been unrelenting, and since the coup in 2009 it has become even worse. Of all of the agreements that have been signed, not one has been fulfilled. They promised us the sale of occupied areas of land and uncultivated land in the recovered areas, but this has not happened. They are asking very high prices for land that was once agrarian reform land, they have not allowed us the grace period that we requested, and the interest rates they charge for the land are extremely high.

“The persecution is constant and acute, and the situation is becoming increasingly worse with death threats. There is psychological torture above all, because the members of movements who belong to different land recovery enterprises

[campesino organizations similar to a cooperative] are prisoners in the settlements. We don't have the freedom to circulate outside of the places where we have been located, since we run the risk of being murdered or kidnapped.

“Here in the region everyone knows the threats are coming from the big landholders, because they are suddenly the owners of everything, they have the money, the weapons, they have it all. They are the ones primarily responsible for the persecution, the murders and the main acts of violence against campesino men and women. We call René Morales and Miguel Facussé the owners of death because they decide when someone is going to die, so they are practically in charge of death, they are the ones who make those decisions.

“The lives of women who are struggling in campesino movements or different organizations to bring about change in our country or in our homes are very difficult, because we have always been targets of violence. They say that we women are the weaker sex. But in fact we are the ones who are fighting on many different fronts, for the right to land, against the privatization of education and health care, among other struggles. We as Honduran women have built up our self-esteem and we continue to struggle to bring about change in our country and to give our children a better life. Even if we have a partner, when children are hungry they go to their mothers and say, 'Mama, I'm hungry.' And so we the women are the ones confronting the situation, we are the pillars, and we are the main targets of violence.

“I worked for Facussé for seven years, and I can tell you that the work there is not decent work. They would give us two-month contracts and then propose that we continue to work under the table, without contracts. I did different types of jobs: fertilizing the oil palms, gathering the palm fruits that fell to the ground during the harvest, in the nursery, and in the extraction plant in the production of oil, vegetable fat and margarine. When we were spraying chemicals in the fields, all they gave us were gloves. I got poisoned when I was working there, and when it happened the second time I had already become asthmatic, my lungs had been weakened from inhaling chemicals. I went to a doctor and she told me I was poisoned, because the toxins had entered my bloodstream, and she gave me a form for three days of medical leave. The company engineer ripped up the form and I continued working until one day he realized that my health was getting worse and he told me to go home until I was better. When you don't work you don't get paid, the people working there are totally exploited, it is very hard to be sick and not get paid. When I joined the movement for the recovery of land I decided to stop working there.

“Eight months ago they started up a persecution against me and against my children. They have been investigating who my relatives are here in the region. One day one of Facussé's guards asked a friend of mine for my whereabouts. She didn't tell him anything, but the guard told her that everyone who had worked for Facussé would have to be killed. They watch my house, they have followed my daughters while they are walking to school, they watch them every day. One time, when one of my daughters left school, a truck started to follow her. When she threw herself into the ditch at the side of the road to save herself from being run over, they stopped and rolled down the window, and pointed a gun at her to threaten her and asked for information about her mother. They laughed at her when they saw how scared she

was. They asked her questions about her mother and the rest of the family, they asked her where I worked, and they threatened her that if she was lying they would kill her. Trying to intimidate her they told her, we are going to kill you and we're going to take your mother far away from you and we're going to kill her too. They have terrorized my daughters so badly that they both failed a year in school because they are always so nervous and frightened."

*Guadalupe, woman, mother and widow, Guadalupe Carney settlement. Her late husband, a member of the Campesino Movement of Aguán (MCA), was killed in November 2010 in the community of El Tumbador in Bajo Aguán, Honduras. (3)*

"There were five campesinos and more than 200 of Miguel Facussé's security guards were waiting for them. They attacked them from two sides, leaving them no way out. The shooting continued for three hours, because they chased them until they had killed them all. They were unarmed, all they were carrying were machetes to work with. The guards themselves planted guns on them after they killed them so they could take pictures of them that way, so that everyone would say that the campesinos have guns.

"I was the last one to find out that my husband was dead. The community mobilized to remove them from the fields where they were killed, because Facussé's guards tried to burn them with gasoline so that we couldn't hold a wake for them in our community. Then we found out that Facussé wanted to pay off their deaths, he offered money to the families to get their bodies back, so that the families wouldn't make any demands. As if they were animals that he had killed and was paying for. He was trying to get off free. We refused, and said that what we wanted was justice against him, because the money wouldn't bring our men back. By offering us money he was accepting responsibility for their deaths.

He can do anything he wants because he has money, and that isn't right. I would like to see him brought to justice, to show that we are worth something too, that he's not the only one who matters, that is what I want more than anything."

It was inevitable that Guadalupe would relive her pain while talking about the events of that November, nine months after the recovery of the El Tumbador estate. She turned her comments back to the present day to talk about her school-aged son who "was very close to his father. Sometimes he can't sleep. I tell him that he died for the land. We talk about him all the time, and now he understands everything a bit better.

"After we organized to recover the land in 2000, we put together a number of enterprises with people we knew and settled in here. We started by setting up champitas [makeshift houses built with wood and plastic sheeting]. The land was measured into plots and each family was given a quarter of a plot. We cleared the land, recovered the oil palms that were already there and planted other crops on our plots. You should not always plant the same thing. We also share the land at the top of the hill among all the members of the settlement to grow what each family considers necessary."

Left alone at the head of the household and her family, Guadalupe was forced to take on a huge burden of responsibility. In addition to taking care of her son, she began

to work outside her home in a farming cooperative. She raises hens and turkeys, takes care of her plot of land where banana trees, oil palms, avocados, cassava, corn and other crops provide her with the means of survival, and attends meetings of the movement.

“The soldiers are here day and night, always keeping watch over the community. They are always observing who comes and goes, like they are controlling the whole community, who comes in, who goes out. They've always got an ear out, listening to what we say or do to report back to those who are against the community, in other words, René Morales' and Miguel Facussé's people. And Facussé's guards are always around, too. They wear different uniforms every day, sometimes blue, sometimes white, so that people won't recognize them when they see them on the highway. The fear is always present, until my son gets home from school, when I leave at four in the morning on my bicycle to go to work, constantly. People are afraid to walk on the highway, afraid of them, because when they see you alone they can kill you; it happened to a neighbour of mine, they followed him and before he got home they shot him.”

When we ask Guadalupe how she sees herself in the future, she answers, “I can't see myself anywhere else, my son and I will continue to fight for what we have started here, like he did [her husband]. I would like our lands to be free, to be able to work in peace.”

### **Women's struggles and hopes**

In spite of all the difficulties, the women of Bajo Aguán are organizing and growing stronger. In the framework of the International Gathering, a women's workshop was held “because we understand the importance of seeing each other and talking to organize, to feel and have more power, to know about and learn from our struggles, to understand and to fight against patriarchy, to join all of our forces in the struggle, to feel appreciated, to lose our fear and defend ourselves.”

“We who are from Aguán and from campesino organizations fight alongside our male comrades for the land, and together with them we confront the repression and violence of the police, army and security guards. We are faced with burying our partners, brothers, fathers and even our own sons, grieving for them, and moving forward. The fear caused by the repression gives us nightmares, troubled sleep, headaches and other illnesses, it makes us nervous to speak, to walk, to live our daily lives. But we surround ourselves with other women to deal with this situation, we make arrangements to take turns taking care of one another, to sleep, to eat and to talk to see how we can move forward. And we are moving forward. All of us, men and women, are in this struggle together.” (4)

This article was prepared by WRM based on its participation in the International Gathering for Human Rights in Solidarity with Honduras, February 2012.

(1) Report prepared after the visit by a mission of human rights organizations to the region of Bajo Aguán, Honduras, December 8-11, 2010. The full report is available in Spanish at <http://wrm.org.uy/paises/Honduras/HondurasMisionDDHH-2010.pdf>

(2) International Gathering for Human Rights in Solidarity with Honduras, held in Tocoa, Colón, Honduras, February 17-20, 2012. For more information and the Final Declaration of the gathering go to <http://www.mioaguan.blogspot.com/>

(3) For more information on the massacre in El Tumbador see “Masacre y barbarie en el Bajo Aguán”, at [http://www.re-uita.org/agricultura/palma\\_africana/masacre\\_y\\_barbarie\\_en\\_bajo\\_aguan.htm](http://www.re-uita.org/agricultura/palma_africana/masacre_y_barbarie_en_bajo_aguan.htm)

(4) Declaration from the workshop “Bodies, Struggles and Hopes of Women” held in La Confianza, Colón, Honduras, February 16, 2012, prior to the International Gathering for Human Rights in Solidarity with Honduras. The full text of the declaration is available in Spanish at <http://www.mioaguan.blogspot.com/>

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## PEOPLE IN ACTION

### **- Public response of WRM to Forest Trends**

The article: “Environmental services and the promotion of the commodification and financialization of nature: Forests, tree plantations and the green economy” published in last WRM bulletin N° 175, raised a complaint from the NGO Forest Trends. The complaint concerned the information given in such article on the lack of public input for the approval of a law promoting trade in environmental services in Acre, Brazil.

WRM's response reaffirms its statement and clarifies how the law was approved “without the due debate with sectors of society directly impacted by the law, that is, the men and women of the countryside and forests.” Read the full public response at [http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/175/Response\\_to\\_Forest\\_Trends.html](http://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin/175/Response_to_Forest_Trends.html)

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### **- Action for rivers and against dams**

March 14 is the International Day of Action For Rivers and Against Dams, when several voices raise against destructive water development projects including dams, reclaiming the health of watersheds, and demanding the equitable and sustainable management of rivers.

International Rivers Network (IRN) has been fostering global action in this struggle. This year IRN shared the more than 120 actions planned in at least 45 countries ranging “from festivals, press conferences, kayaking events, river clean-ups, protests, religious gatherings, the launching of campaigns against hydroelectric dams, and more”. A map of these actions can be visited at IRN's website: <http://www.internationalrivers.org/en/node/7094>

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## **- Southern countries and forests should expect no good from carbon markets**

Several social organizations from different parts of the world have signed and published the briefing “Carbon markets will not deliver for Southern governments, forests and people

The document warns Southern governments that no expectation should be put in a global carbon market that includes forest carbon or ‘REDD’ credits. The main reasons are that the European Union's Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS) - the largest carbon market - will not include forests until at least 2020, and the performance of carbon credits as a commodity has been a failure. Also, in case “there was a forest carbon market, little money would go to forests” because, as any other commodity market, “most of the money would enrich those who trade or speculate in the commodity whilst producers would receive a limited percentage of the final cost”, and “even if funds would go to forests they would not go to ‘high-risk’ countries” (including many African countries) because “investors put their money where risk is lowest and return is highest.”

The briefing can be read at

[http://www.fern.org/sites/fern.org/files/carbonleaflet\\_25nov.pdf](http://www.fern.org/sites/fern.org/files/carbonleaflet_25nov.pdf)

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## **- Call for moratorium and precautionary oversight of synthetic biology**

A broad coalition of organizations from around the world released the first global civil society declaration to outline principles that must be adopted to protect public health and the environment from the risks posed by synthetic biology and to address its economic, social and ethical challenges.

Until these governance principles are in place, the coalition is calling for a moratorium on the release and commercial use of synthetic organisms and products on the grounds of the dangers posed by this “extreme genetic engineering” which writes genetic code to create new genes, genetic traits and possibly entire life forms from scratch.

The full report is available for download at: [www.foe.org/principles-for-synthetic-biology](http://www.foe.org/principles-for-synthetic-biology)

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