



WORLD RAINFOREST MOVEMENT

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OUR VIEWPOINT

- [Women and growing mercantilization](#)

THE STRUGGLE OF WOMEN: EVERYONE'S STRUGGLES

- [One of capitalism's false solutions to its crisis: strengthening patriarchy](#)
Today, we watch as the capitalist system undergoes a major restructuring in order to keep the current order of oppression and exploitation in place. In view of the "crisis," the system is making major adjustments to the relationship between capital and labor. The transfer of the costs of capitalist production to women and to the reproductive work that they perform is part of this adjustment.
- [Women's roles, rights and responsibility in natural resources: Some reflections from Mekong Region](#)
In Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar it remains common until today that the wife will be the one who 'owns' the land of the paddy or upland rice fields. Women therefore can be the ones fully responsible for maintaining those resources for the next generations.
- [Changes in family life: Observations on eucalyptus and women in Mato Grosso do Sul](#)
In Mato Grosso do Sul, in the region of industrial eucalyptus plantations, the defence of seeds for life and the fight against agribusiness, and especially pulp-production agribusiness, is a complex challenge, because it is interconnected with issues of autonomy and subalternity.
- [Women & Plantations: Pain or Gain? The Nigerian Experience](#)
The mad rush for land for large scale tree plantations in Africa by transnational companies is fuelling massive deforestation, leading to grave socio-economic and environmental impacts across forest communities and territories of peoples.
- [Women and oil: The struggle for Sumak Kawsay](#)
Cases in Ecuador and Nigeria are just a few examples of how women, and especially indigenous and peasant farmer women, are fighting back against patriarchal power, both in the public arena and in their communities. When it comes to the oil industry, quite often in Latin America it is women who are the first to defend their territory from the threat of drilling projects.
- [Brazil: Sexual exploitation of women and mega-dam construction in the Amazon](#)
SOF, a Brazilian feminist NGO, has produced a new video called "Nosso corpo nos pertence" (Our Bodies Belong to Us), which reflects on the sexual exploitation of women in the current context of the expansion of neoliberal capitalism. The video serves as a valuable platform where the women of the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) can speak out about the sexual exploitation of women linked to mega-dam projects, such as Belo Monte, in the Brazilian Amazon region.
- [Environmental conflicts and women in Africa](#)
A report by Edwin C. Perry, Cheryl Potgieter and Urmilla Bob, "Environmental conflicts and

women's vulnerability in Africa", highlights the links between environmental conflicts and women.

PEOPLES IN ACTION

- [International campaign to define forests for their true meaning](#)
- [International Day in Defense of Peasants' and Farmers' Seeds](#)
- [Protestors denounce pact to transform rural region of Brazil into a "eucalyptus desert"](#)

RECOMMENDED

- [Environmental Justice Atlas](#)
- [Should we build more large dams? The actual costs of hydropower megaproject development](#)
- [First-hand testimony of Andaman tribe reveals sexual exploitation](#)

OUR VIEWPOINT

- Women and growing mercantilization

Today, many big companies have programmes aimed at emphasizing the equality of opportunities offered to women. These are companies that are concerned about showing the importance they give to incorporating women in their business strategies. This concern seems to represent a politically correct stance in a time when, fortunately, there are a growing number of policies in many countries aimed specifically at women, as a way of reducing the inequality they have historically faced. These problems of inequality are far from resolved, however. For example, there are numerous studies which demonstrate that when it comes to formal employment, women continue to earn significantly lower salaries than men, even when they are doing the same work. There are also still very few women to be found in top management positions.

In the meantime, the neoliberal capitalist system, of which the biggest icons are large corporations, is increasingly transforming everything on earth into merchandise, including women. This can be seen just by watching the television commercials on the large privately owned networks that form part of the so-called mass media. And then there are the big companies that have adopted some sort of specific policy for women workers and yet continue grabbing land and forests, at an increasingly rapid pace, in order to exploit more mines, drill more oil, establish more industrial tree plantations or build more large-scale hydroelectric dams on rivers. These companies always cause major impacts on the lives of communities, and above all on the lives of women. This is because women depend specifically and heavily on the forests and rivers – as a number of the articles in this bulletin demonstrate. The arrival of destructive projects in their territories radically changes their lives. However, in most cases, their stories remain unheard, unless someone decides to listen to and record what these women have to say.

In addition to these stories, there is an impact that is even less visible but must be acknowledged and denounced: the sexual exploitation of women connected to mega projects like dam construction in the Amazon region. These dams do not only represent the violation of thousands of hectares of forest that end up underwater. Their construction also represents violations and aggression against women who, for lack of other options, are obliged to place their bodies at the disposal of the thousands of labourers who work day and night on these construction projects, and

are also victims of exploitation. It is very difficult for these women to escape from this situation or report the abuses that they suffer, because they are usually coerced or threatened to keep them from doing so. Women who are subjected to these conditions by force lose all of their freedom.

It is important that companies offer equal employment opportunities, but the logic of the capitalist system is not aimed at seeking equality. For example, as the capitalist system continues its expansion over the rainforests with its large-scale operations and mega-projects, it seeks to – and succeeds in – benefiting a small few, to the detriment of a great many others, especially women. As a result, this system ends up reinforcing the patriarchal system. The consequences for women are increased poverty, greater inequality, and less freedom.

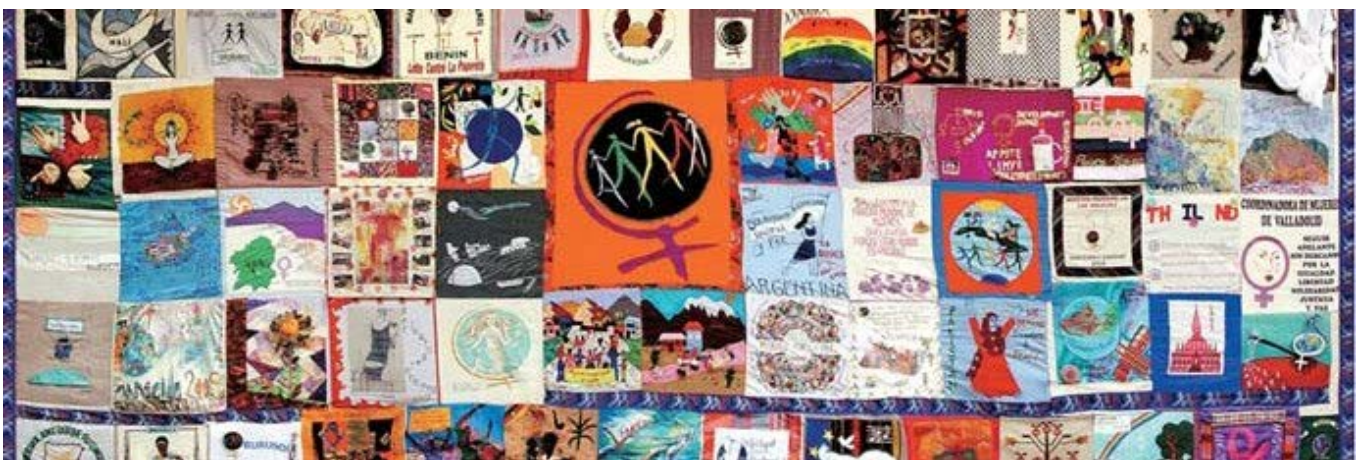
But there is more to the story than losses and negative impacts. Women are fighting back, and this needs to be highlighted as well. This is what has inspired us to produce this March bulletin to celebrate March 8, International Women’s Day, by sharing stories of women fighting for freedom and for justice, defending their territories and their forests with incredible strength. Across Latin America, Africa and Asia, more and more women are speaking out, organizing and bearing witness to what is happening in their communities with their forests, and they are making demands.

We have always sought to reinforce the important role of women in all struggles, because we know that the active participation of women is needed to make them everyone’s struggles. It gives us great satisfaction to dedicate this 200th issue of the WRM Bulletin to the struggle of women.

[index](#)

THE STRUGGLE OF WOMEN: EVERYONE’S STRUGGLES

- One of capitalism’s false solutions to its crisis: strengthening patriarchy



Today, we watch as the capitalist system undergoes a major restructuring in order to keep the current order of oppression and exploitation in place.

In the current accumulation process, known as “accumulation by dispossession,” [8] everything is turned into a commodity – water, air, forests, seeds and services like education and healthcare. Inequality and the concentration of wealth are on the rise, and the ones who are paying the price of capital’s crisis are society’s poor and middle classes. According to the ILO (International Labour Organization), in 2009, the worst year of the crisis so far, while unemployment rose more than 10% in

relation to 2007, the rich (people with more than US\$1 million in investment capital) increased their total wealth by 18%).

Now, in view of the "crisis," the system is making major adjustments to the relationship between capital and labor.

The transfer of the costs of capitalist production to women and to the reproductive work that they perform is part of this adjustment. Reproductive work is work done to take care of others – such as preparing food, cleaning, etc. - carried out mainly in the home and by women. Women are the ones who manage scarcity and instability in their homes. Thus, in most cases, they are the ones who take care of people when the number of beds is reduced, hospitals or daycare centers close or when lunches are not provided by schools.

The relocation of the production of goods is linked to the relocation of care work, as an enormous contingent of women from the South and poorer areas migrate to the North or richer regions to take care of children, the elderly and the sick, while no one takes care of them.

In countries where repression of the struggle for rights is more severe, working conditions are even more dramatic. Episodes like the fire and collapse of the garment factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh on April 24, 2013, which took the lives of 1,127 people, the majority of which were women, clearly illustrate this.

Control over women's bodies and their lives

Patriarchy, combined with capitalism, not only attempts to appropriate women's work, but also the very source of women's ability to work: their bodies. During capitalism's initial phase (primitive or original accumulation), the system used not only the sexual division of labor but also control over sexuality for its own advancement. Heterosexual marriage and motherhood were established as the norm, with prostitution being encouraged at times, while at others, women in prostitution and those who knew of contraceptive practices were persecuted.

The market economy based on the exploitation of women's unpaid work corresponds to a market society that presupposes the organization of workers in nuclear families. We can prove that over the past two decades, there has been a steady increase in conservatism, which promotes women's role in the family in order to justify overloading them with work and make women believe that they alone have to assume the responsibility of providing care. At the same times, conservative groups are exerting increasing pressure to eliminate public policies providing support for social reproduction (in countries where such policies exist) or to stop these kinds of policies from being approved. At the same time, there is growing pressure to get women to leave the labor market, as a way of lowering the unemployment rate. The mechanisms currently in use include offering lower wages to women and imposing cuts in public services that result in both greater unemployment among women (who are the majority of public sector employees) and in women assuming additional care-giving functions at no cost to the State or the private sector.

The domination of women's bodies is more complex today - a time when contrasting images of the body, from burqa-covered to nude, may create the same sense of oppression. Is it the "body for itself" or the body as an object of desire for the other, the "other" typically being a male? When feminist discourse on the autonomy of women – expressed as the historical slogan, "My body belongs to me" – is co-opted by the system and converted into "My body is my business", it clearly transforms the body into a thing, into an object that can be bought and sold. In addition to the growing influence of religious institutions - be they Catholic, evangelical or Islamic - on the regulation of public life, we are also seeing the

rejection or reversal of rights relating to women's autonomy and their emotional and reproductive life. At the same time, however, LGBT movements in many countries have succeeded in getting same-sex marriages legalized and winning adoption, inheritance and other rights. Yet these measures are facing strong resistance from conservative sectors that are becoming increasingly aggressive towards lesbians, gays and transgender people.

Militarization, criminalization and violence

In 2001, the sales of the arms industry reached US\$ 410 trillion. 44 US-based corporations accounted for 60% of this amount, while 29% corresponds to 30 companies with head offices in Western Europe. Even the slightest decline in sales leads these corporations to begin employing strategies to move into Latin America, the Middle East and Asia and increase the use of technologies for social control, while creating an illusion of greater security. Militarism cannot be reduced to its economic dimension and extends the imposition of military values (belief in hierarchy, obedience, the resolution of conflicts by force, etc.) to all of society. These values are clearly patriarchal and their most grave expressions are the use of sexual violence and the increase of prostitution, including young girls, which is linked to the presence of the army.

The increasing level of control over society is made obvious by the growing criminalization of resistance, which often results in the distortion of the very instruments we create to defend justice, memory and respect for human rights. The reactions of Guatemala army officials to the sentencing of Ríos Montt, the dictator responsible for genocide and sexual violence against the Ixil people, is one example of this. Military leaders responded by accusing historical activists of being "terrorists" and either taking legal action or inciting parts of the population to turn against them. All of this is part of a process to deny the defense of rights.

Women are also forced to contend with patriarchal violence. We know that violence against women is a tool used to control our lives and our bodies. Violence against women has been given greater visibility in recent years, particularly sexual violence committed in public places, and has rallied women – as well as men – to action. The past few years have been marked by images of the Egyptian police dragging a female activist along the street and by the gang rape and subsequent death of a young Indian woman. In both of these cases, the mainstream media was full of cultural explanations, while there was very little reflection on the structural causes of this type of violence. The rare analyses of the topic spoke of how the fact that women have won the right to occupy more space in public life – at the price of enormous personal and collective efforts – has triggered an extremely violent call to patriarchal order. Even though women's unemployment is higher than men's in most parts of the world, women are accused of "stealing" men's jobs, just as we were at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

In face of this situation we, the World March of Women, envisage ourselves as a strong, permanent, feminist, anti-capitalist movement that is present in many more countries, that builds an internationalism rooted in local struggles and puts an end to the isolation of communities who directly suffer the impacts of militarisation and the advance of capital into all areas of life. A movement that acts in alliance with other mixed movements, which, in turn, commit themselves to fighting patriarchy both in their practices and discourse. A movement capable of building specific alliances with other women's organisations, while constantly reaffirming our political positions. A movement that, by strengthening international solidarity, strengthens local struggles.

World March of Women, http://www.worldmarchofwomen.org/index_html/en?set_language=en&cl=en (article sent by Miriam Nobre, WMW, e-mail: minobre@sof.org.br)

- Women's roles, rights and responsibility in natural resources: Some reflections from Mekong Region



In Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar it remains common until today that the wife will be the one who 'owns' the land of the paddy or upland rice fields. . Women therefore can be the ones fully responsible for maintaining those resources for the next generations.

To explain the rights and role in natural resources of women in Southeast Asia can be complex. In Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar – where groups identified as 'Tai' ethnic and also other many ethnics live closely with natural resources in their subsistence agriculture livelihood - we often learn that women are playing key roles in owning land, for example. It is part of a culture where men move in to a woman's family after they married, and help in the rice field of their in-laws, before the woman's family gives some land to them. It remains common until today that the wife will be the one who 'owns' the land of the paddy or upland rice fields, whether the land is with formal land certification or not. The husband or men in the family in many communities accept the fact that the women are the ones who own the property of the family. Women therefore can be the ones fully responsible for maintaining those resources for the next generations.

But there is much more diversity beyond the way women own agriculture land in the role and ownership of the women across Southeast Asia. In the region, natural resources still provide the major sources of people's life. Apart from communities based on agriculture, there are many communities living from hunting and gathering for subsistence, and not relying directly or very much on agriculture. Many communities living along the main river of the region such as the Mekong River can only live by fishing from the river and gather food from natural forests nearby their village. In those communities, people sell fish and non-timber forest products in order to get money to buy rice, which they are not able to cultivate themselves.

Back in 2008, TERRA conduct the research on economic, social and ecological changes resulting from commercial tree plantations in southern Lao PDR. We found interesting data on how much the change in land use and resources used can affect women directly. As the report described "Before the rubber concession arrived, villagers collected wild products for example mushrooms, bamboo, rattan shoots, vegetable leaves and small animals, insects, fish, shrimps, shellfish for sale and for consumption. Areas which were rich sources of wild produce for people in all six villages studied, before the establishment of the rubber estates, the rice fallows

and rice field, the streams and their banks, the deciduous dipterocarp forests, the evergreen rainforests and the use forests. Produce from these areas, which were harvested for sale, were useful in supplementing the household economy. Important semi-wild crops include broom grass, which villagers used to reap from the swidden fallows and once a year to make an income. One household in Oudomsouk village was able to make \$588 per year from selling dried grass. Other household can make up to \$235 per year from selling wild produce. This source of income was lost when the rubber company took over the rice fallows and various forest areas within and around the villages". The activities described in the report, including the gathering of food and products from forest and along the bank of creeks and stream nearby, and to gather broom grass, which is then prepared for sale – are all the roles of women.

Similar scenarios of how women use and lose the resources continue until today. In TERRA's most recent work in six villages along the Mekong and Sesan River in Northern Cambodia during 2013, interviews with the women group in the village reflect clearly on the women losing rights and role in owning, using and getting food and earning income for the family because of the change of river and also natural forest. Women in Koh Hep village, an island within the Mekong River where 106 families live, report that in paddy rice fields, only plowing is mainly done by man and apart from that, women in the family will do everything similar to men. Also because they engage in fishing along the nearby river shore, women can identify clearly which fish they found more often, and which ones have already gone in the past years. Women who spend all day long to gather some food from forests nearby the village, and come back in the evening to put the hooks along the shore to fish found that they are now getting less and less from both forests and river. As women are also responsible for the vegetable plot allocated along the Mekong river bank from fence-making to growing watermelon, cucumber and other crops they sell, they also describe that the unnaturally big flood and drought of the Mekong River in the past decade also destroyed the river bank and income from it. In December 2013, some families who grow watermelon lost 100% of their produce to the flood when river levels rose by 2 meters very quickly in the peak month of the dry season.

Though most women are not quite sure about the reason of the changes they perceive in the flow of the Mekong river, they are very suspicious about the large hydropower dams built upstream by China, and also those built in Vietnam along the Sesan River. In the particular case of Koh Hep Island village on the 8 square kilometres island in the Mekong river, people are also suspect that they might lose all their agriculture land, if all, or even only some of the big hydropower dams in the set of 13 dams planned to be built in Laos, in the frontier of Thailand-Laos and Cambodia actually happen.

Losing land for large scale rubber plantations or losing the river to dams are similar for women, as it means the loss of livelihood and rights to protect themselves and their family. Today, we see more and more faces of women in the meeting on large scale plantations and hydropower dams in the region. This should mean that women's roles, rights and responsibility over their resources and livelihood will have to expand, from household level to community, national and regional – and that women become the power of the ongoing campaign that we are all involved in.

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[index](#)

- Changes in family life: Observations on eucalyptus and women in Mato Grosso



“It is the rural women’s movements that have been at the forefront of massive public actions aimed at fighting back against the big corporations in the agri-food sector (pharmaceutical laboratories that produce transgenic seeds and toxic agrochemicals) and defending biodiversity.” (SILIPRANDI, 2013, p. 239)

Numerous events reflect the growing protagonism of women in the economy and, more recently, in political debate. In Brazil, one of the most visible examples of this political struggle was the action undertaken by the Peasant Women’s Movement (MMC), a member organization of La Via Campesina, in 2006, when close to 2,000 women occupied the Aracruz Celulose eucalyptus seedling production laboratories in Rio Grande do Sul. The aim of this action was to denounce the expansion of the “green desert” created by industrial eucalyptus plantations and the resulting expulsion of peasant communities. It was an act in defence of peasant agriculture as a promoter of biodiversity and foundation of food sovereignty. In this way, these women defended seeds for life, in the sense that “seeds are the beginning and the end of peasant farming production cycles. They are a collective creation that reflects the history of peoples and their women, who have always been their creators and the ones primarily responsible for their protection and improvement” (Martins; Stedile, 2011).

However, the defence of seeds for life and the fight against agribusiness, and especially pulp-production agribusiness, is a complex challenge, because it is interconnected with issues of autonomy and subalternity. In the eastern region of the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, women have devoted less time to the protection of seeds and more to employment in the pulp industry – particularly because in this region, almost no space has been opened for the oppressed, except for those spaces that have been forged through struggle.

Figures from the 2011 Fibria Sustainability Report indicate that there were 897 direct employees of the company in the Três Lagoas Unit in the state of Mato Grosso, of whom 90 were women. This means that women accounted for 10.03% of the total workforce employed by this unit in industrial and forestry activities, which is slightly below the average percentage of women in the workforce employed by Fibria as a whole, which is 12.73%.

Direct employment by Fibria in Brazil 2009 to 2011

	Total number of workers	Women workers	% of women

2009	4749	675	14,21
2010	5037	726	14,41
2011	4006	510	12,73

Source: Fibria – Sustainability Report (2011)

It should be stressed that approximately 80% of the female workforce employed by the pulp and paper company works in the nurseries where the eucalyptus seedlings are produced. According to the company, since this is an activity that requires extreme care in the handling of the seedlings, women are ideally suited to it because of their delicacy and patience: they are the guardians of the cloned eucalyptus seedlings. This seems to be the secret for obtaining good results in the production of seedlings: exploiting the subjective concept of femininity.

Figures from the Três Lagoas Unit also reveal another issue: the limited participation of the female workforce in the industrial sector and forestry sector of Fibria's operations. Women are assigned to specific tasks. However, due to the prevalence of outsourcing in this industry – according to the same report, the total number of outsourced workers is 2,590, much higher than the number of workers directly employed by Fibria – the female workforce in the eucalyptus-pulp complex is also largely employed through outsourcing, mainly because these are the companies where the workers in the forestry sector are employed (in planting, cultivation and harvesting).

It should be stressed that most of these subcontractor companies come to Três Lagoas during the periods of planting, ant control and debudding, and then move on to other places. The result is a proliferation of temporary and precarious work contracts, for periods of just over a year, according to the testimony of women in the district of Arapuá in the municipality of Três Lagoas. The women who are hired are from the rural community of Arapuá and the rural settlements close to the eucalyptus plantation zones. They work in this activity because "there is no other option", "there is no other work", "you either work for the companies or you stay unemployed". They say that before the arrival of the companies, the only work available was as domestic workers in the city of Três Lagoas or the housework in their families' homes – some of them lived on ranches where their husbands worked for pay.

When asked if they are satisfied with their current employment situation, they generally say no, because of a perception of exploitation. They say that it is "very demanding work". They carry out work like hoeing, ploughing, manual planting, weeding, applying fertilizer, debudding with sickles, and ant control. For the latter, they carry 20-litre sprayers on their backs. One of the women reported that she worked with a sickle for two companies and her hands became so badly blistered that they bled, even if she wore the gloves provided by the company.

Another aspect that emerges from the testimony of these women is the fact that they have a set time to go to work, but not to return home. They leave at around 4:30 am and return at 6:00 pm – unless the bus breaks down, which is quite common. Combined with these extremely long work hours are the bad food and possibility of snake bites. To prevent the latter, the company recommends that they avoid sitting on the ground, and so when they reach the end of a row they must rest standing up – but this is a privilege reserved for the fastest workers who manage to get there first.

There are dramatic stories which involve entire families. This is the case of a woman who worked on the eucalyptus plantations and now suffers from depression. She was given a few days of sick leave, but she is currently unemployed because

when she went back to work, the company laid her off. Her husband is also unemployed; he was laid off when the company Urenha went bankrupt. Aside from not receiving severance pay, he was also not given the medical check-up he should have received at the end of his employment. When he applied to work at another company, he discovered, through the check-up required for hiring, that he had back and heart problems, and was therefore deemed unfit for the job. Because he was not given a medical check-up at the time he was laid off, he was unable to prove that his back problems were a consequence of the work he had done for close to 20 years.

Work in this sector also imposes changes in women's relationships with their children and even with their children's schools. A woman who has lived for more than 20 years in the community of Arapuá described how the arrival of the plantation companies changed school routines as a result of the pace of work. In her words:

The women are working. In fact, our political struggle here is about our need for a daycare centre. Because there are mothers who have two or three small children and they end up leaving them with their grandmothers to go to work. One of them has two children, one is in kindergarten and the other doesn't go to school yet, and she has to leave them with the grandmother so she can go to work. Because the father works, the mother works, and they have no one to leave them with. That's what happens. When there is a school meeting nobody goes, because the mothers are working and they can't take days off work. It's still like that. (Resident of the district of Arapuá, interviewed on February 11, 2014 by Mieceslau Kudlavicz)

We want to emphasize that these observations on the situation of women resulting from eucalyptus plantations are not intended to portray them as victims. Rather, they are aimed at trying to understand and document the contradictory process of capital generated by control of the means of production, the exploitation of female labour, and the imposition of the market society. This is a situation that leads to social inequalities and to phenomena that range from submission to the uprising of the working class as a political subject with the right to choose. It is our hope that rebellion will arrive soon in the countryside of Mato Grosso do Sul!

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P.S.: We want to thank Professor Rosemeire A. de Almeida; even when she is far away, her presence is felt in this and other works

[index](#)

- Women & Plantations: Pain or Gain? The Nigerian Experience



In Nigeria, forest concessions - including reserves and communal farmlands - are being taken over by multinationals and plantation merchants with the aid of some Government officials for monoculture tree plantation to feed international markets enriching private pockets. Rubber, oil palm, cocoa and more recently, gmelina, banana and cassava plantations are the predominant plantations in Nigeria. All of these are geared towards feeding international markets for humans and machines in Europe, America and a legion of countries in the global South. Generally those tree plantations are established without due process including free, prior and informed consent or consideration of community women, men and children who depend on forests for their survival.

The destruction of the forest results in eviction of communities from their ancestral land, cultural alteration, as well as spiritual contamination. And for women, who have such roles as farmers, fisher-folks, traditional healers and housekeepers, traders, fetchers of water, fuel wood collectors and local midwives, it has a major impact.

Some women have died, many are dying and some have been rendered widows as a result of the impact of monoculture tree plantation expansion in their localities. Others have to migrate to long distances when they lose their source of livelihood, in search of menial jobs to fend for themselves and those who fall under their care.

Okomu Oil Palm

Okomu Oil Palm PLC, a major plantation merchant in Nigeria has been involved with expansion of its plantation since 2000, where 8000 hectares of forest reserve (without a Certificate of Occupancy) for rubber and palm oil plantation was added to the already existing 15,578 hectares.

This activity had led to the eviction and extinction of the communities of Oweike, Agbede and Ijawcamp. The fourth community called Makilolo, is still resisting through the intervention of ERA/FoEN's Community Forest Watch initiative.

Due to the militarization of the community territories by Okomu Oil Palm, people have become tenants in their own land as they are subjected to rigorous security checks before they enter and exit their own communities (see WRM Bulletin 199). Forest community women and people of Makilolo, Agbede, Oweike and Ijawcamp have suffered serious cases of dislocation and livelihood truncation while young women are exposed to different forms of harassment from security operatives.

The company has electricity in all its facilities but communities lack electricity as well as proper sanitary facilities. Pollution of their streams (their only source of water) by the chemicals used in tree plantations has given rise to some health concerns in the area like miscarriages, still births, skin infections, birth defects, bronchitis and a host of others. As caregivers to their families and all those who fall under their care, women are subjected to increased hardship and suffering with more cases of diseases and sicknesses prevalence.

In spite of these impacts on communities, Okomu Oil palm plans to expand its oil palm cultivation by another 20,000 hectares this year under its structured investment of \$75 billion dollars.

Michelin rubber plantations

Local women from communities neighbouring the fast depleting Iguobazuwa forest reserve in Ovia South West Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria, depended heavily on their forest for their medicinal, nutritional and family income needs. But their forests and communal farmlands were suddenly converted by the French Rubber Company, Michelin PLC into rubber plantations to export latex to make car

tyres.

Michelin PLC, a French multinational rubber company headquartered in France, had in the past operated in Nigeria as Utagbauno Rubber Estate Limited (Delta State); Waterside Rubber Estate Limited (Ogun State); Araromi Rubber Estate Limited (Ondo State); and Osse River Rubber Estate Limited (Edo State). It now operates as International Rubber Plantation Society (SIPH) and Rubber Estates Nigeria Limited (RENL). This strategy is to distract and deceive people from their parent brand.

The overall impact of RENL's operations in the area has affected community women and people of Aifesoba, Igueihase, Ora, Iguoriakhi, Iguobazuwa Amienghomwan, Obozogbe villages, where over 3,500 hectares of forested landmass and communal farmlands were given to the company without due process, without free prior informed consent of host communities, and let alone conducting a proper Environmental Impact Assessment.

Other major plantation drivers in Nigeria include: Wilmar International (Biase Plantations Limited) in Cross River State and Southgate Cocoa Company Limited in Cross River State where over 7000 hectares of Etara and Ekuri-Eyeyeng community forest is earmarked for cocoa plantation.

Only forest management practices controlled by communities and based on their knowledge and experience will give Gains to Mother earth, not Pains to Mothers on earth.

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[index](#)

- Women and oil: The struggle for Sumak Kaw say



In October 2013, women from throughout the Amazon region marched to Quito, the capital of Ecuador, to protest outside the 11th oil licensing round, in which oil exploration concessions were to be granted over millions of hectares of indigenous territories in the eastern central-south area of the country. While this was happening, various male indigenous leaders were participating in the opening event of the auction, while others, outside the event, were somewhat hesitant to show open and determined support for the indigenous women.

On another occasion that same month, Alicia Caiuya, a Waorani indigenous woman, after taking the podium before the National Assembly of Ecuador, tossed aside the

script that had been prepared for her and courageously delivered a speech of her own. In it, she spoke of how the seven oil companies operating in Waorani territory had brought no benefits for her people, but rather had increased poverty and pollution, and she added that the matter of Yasuní should be subjected to consultation. After she finished speaking, Alicia was reprimanded by the male Waorani leaders. Alicia's speech to the National Assembly came at a crucial time, when the Ecuadorian government was backing out of the Yasuní-ITT Initiative. Under this initiative, Ecuador had pledged to leave 900 million barrels of crude oil untapped in Yasuní National Park, the traditional territory of the Waorani and one of the areas of greatest biodiversity on the planet.

The struggle of the women in Ecuador has parallels on other continents. For instance, in July 2002, some 600 Itsekiri women occupied the ChevronTexaco oil terminal in Escravos, Nigeria. Among their demands was that they be taken into account in decision making about oil industry activities in the Niger Delta region. This action was followed by many others in Nigeria, a number of them headed up by youth and women.

These recent examples in Ecuador and those from Nigeria are just a sampling of how women, especially indigenous and peasant farmer women, are fighting back against patriarchal power, both in the public arena and in their communities. When it comes to the oil industry, quite often in Latin America it is women who are the first to defend their territory from the threat of drilling projects.

This is easy to explain when we see that, based on the Oilwatch network's experience in monitoring the impacts of oil and gas activities, it is women who are the most affected. That is why indigenous and peasant farmer women are fighting back against the continued extraction of oil and gas in their territories. Instead of being reprimanded or ridiculed, women like Alicia Cauiya should be recognized worldwide, because their resistance contributes not only to the defence of the rights of nature, but of all of humanity as well.

Indigenous and peasant farmer women do not need PhDs to know how oil extraction violates their rights and irreparably affects life. Women suffer more from oil industry pollution, because they are constantly in contact with water when they wash clothes, bathe their children in the rivers, or prepare food. They are also the ones who most often care for household members when they are sick. In Ecuador, for example, studies by Acción Ecológica reveal that the incidence of cancer in oil drilling areas is three times greater than the national average, and it is women who are most affected.

Women in oil drilling areas are not only impoverished, but are also burdened with more work, since in many cases the men of the family leave their homes to work in the drilling operations. In the provinces of Ecuador where there is oil industry activity, for example, 65% of mothers are single mothers or heads of the household. In oil drilling regions there has also been an upsurge in alcoholism, violence and prostitution.

For these and other reasons, it is women who put up resistance against the arrival of oil companies. This reflects human history in general, because for thousands of years, it is women who have taken care of the welfare and well-being of their families and communities. It is women who save resources like energy or water, who have taken responsibility for keeping the environment healthy; they are the educators of children and the caretakers of their families and of nature.

Women are the carriers of a wealth of wisdom and knowledge that should be recognized, listened to and learned in order to build local sovereignty, and even to stop climate change.

This thinking is supported by various feminist academics, including German

economist and activist Friederike Habermann, who says that in any debate on extractive activities, it is crucial to analyze the relationship that women have with their territories and the role they play in their defence.

We know that the reproduction of capitalism and its very functioning are dependent on continued extraction, land grabbing and the undermining of rights. Social forms of caring for the land and territories are primarily in the hands of women, and they will fight to defend them, which makes them an obstacle to the accumulation of capital. It therefore becomes imperative for the agents of capitalism to ensure that women lose their power as leaders and active rights defenders, and the best way to do this is to stress that a woman's place is in the home and community, while political and public affairs should be left to the men.

This is why indigenous women in Ecuador have become inconvenient for the expansion of the oil frontier, because they are precisely the ones who are trying to halt extractive activities, beyond the borders of their territories or within them. And this not only implies the protection of lands and territories, but in essence the construction of *sumak kawsay*.

The Sumak kawsay

Sumak kawsay or "living well" is the way of life of the Andean peoples and at the same time it is a proposal for the world that arises from the vision of people who have been marginalized for the last 500 years. It is put forward as an opportunity to construct another "world system" based on the recognition of the different cultural values that exist in the world and on respect for Nature. This conception lays bare the errors and limitations of different theories of so-called progress and development. From various different angles, not only from the Andean world, there are responses emerging for the demands not satisfied by traditional visions of modernity. (...) Living well, essentially, is the search for a life in which human beings live in harmony with themselves, with their fellow human beings, and with Nature, and ultimately understanding that we are all Nature and that we are interdependent, that our existence depends on the others. Seeking this harmony does not mean ignoring social conflicts or social and economic disparities, nor does it mean denying that we live in a system that is above all predatory, as the capitalist system is. Therefore, unlike the world of consumerism and extreme competition, the aim is to construct societies in which the individual and the collective coexist and complement one another, and in harmony with Nature, where economic rationality is reconciled with ethics and common sense. The economy must reengage with Nature, to maintain it and not to destroy it, to emphasize its use-value and not its exchange-value." (Alberto Acosta, January 30, 2014. <http://www.rebellion.org/noticias/2014/1/180034.pdf>).

Sumak kawsay is a complex concept, as it refers to a traditional Andean indigenous philosophy. It has emerged as a new paradigm that involves a different form of relationship between human beings and nature. Sumak kawsay can only be viable at a national or global level when the rights of nature are officially recognized and fully respected, and well along the way down a post-oil road away from capitalism. The women of the Amazon are giving us an example of how to move towards this

reality.

But other and diverse spaces for women to join forces against extractive industries across Latin America are also emerging. They address the urgent need to increase understanding of the impacts of mining and energy mega-projects on the lives of girls and women, and to raise the visibility of women's resistance and defence of their territories, as well as the need to research, document, monitor and disseminate in greater detail the differentiated impacts of extractive activities on women, as concluded in the declaration of the Latin American Meeting on Women and Mining held in Bogotá, Colombia in October 2011.

Walking down this same road, although they don't know each other, are thousands of women around the world fighting back against the expansion of mining and oil drilling.

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[index](#)

- Brazil: Sexual exploitation of women and mega-dam construction in the Amazon



Although they have succeeded in occupying greater space in society, women continue to suffer oppression, exploitation and violence. In countries like Brazil, the mass media – through newspapers, magazines and television – play a perverse role. In a world where neoliberal capitalism reigns and in which women's bodies are transformed into mere merchandise, the mass media oblige women to conform to a certain conception of the "ideal" woman. Moreover, women's bodies are used to sell everything from cleaning products to cars to particular brands of beer, and they are depicted as being forever at the disposal of men, for sex work. In this way, the media encourage this practice and transmit the idea that women have complete freedom, that is, that prostitution is a choice that they can take or leave at any time.

Behind this illusion, however, lies a very different reality. In the first place, while the large majority of sex workers are in fact women, it is usually men who control them, within a patriarchal society. In the second place, most of the women – of all ages – who enter into prostitution are poor, and they turn to it as a means of survival in a world that denies them other opportunities. Violence, rape and physical assault, as well as theft and health problems, are very common.

The sexual exploitation of women is a reality that occurs not only in big cities, but also in the vicinity of large-scale projects in the Brazilian Amazon, such as the Belo Monte mega-dam (see <http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/>)

[section2/brazil-belo-monte-an-illegal-and-immoral-hydroelectric-dam-project-that-violates-numerous-rights/](#)).

Women from the Brazilian Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) – a member organization of La Via Campesina – comment on the situation in the new video, “Nosso corpo nos pertence” (Our Bodies Belong to Us), produced by SOF, a Brazilian feminist NGO. According to Elisa Estronioli, “As MAB studied the violation of the rights of people affected by dams in greater depth, it discovered that when dams are being constructed, there is an increase in the violation of the human rights of women. And one of the forms of rights violation is in fact prostitution. (...) A dam like Belo Monte – where there are currently, at the high point of its construction, 28,000 workers, most of them men – is like a time bomb. The structure is highly militarized, marked by a great deal of oppression, a great deal of tension among the workers, and so women’s bodies, through prostitution, are used as a mechanism to pacify the mood of the workers.”

Danila Lorenz commented, “When the workers go there to work, they are given a type of vouchers, credits, that they can spend in the local market, and that local market includes prostitution.” Elisa added that “in Belo Monte, for example, there are brothels that Norte Energia claims to be unaware of, but they are at the entry to the construction site, inside the territory that was expropriated for the construction of the dam, and anyone who walks by there, on the way to the work site, can see that they are places of prostitution.”

However, on many occasions, when women who are subjected to this sexual exploitation are offered a means to denounce the situation, they are coerced or threatened into denying what is going on. According to Marinete Lima of MAB, “In our work with the women we face a major challenge in making them aware that they are not merchandise, and that we, as women, have the right to say no to this capitalist system, to this system of dams and projects that supposedly bring progress. But we don’t want this kind of progress. And so we, as women from MAB, face this challenge, of organizing ourselves as women and claiming our right to say no to these dams.”

This article is based on the new video produced by SOF (Sempreviva Organização Feminista) of Brazil. The video can be seen (in Portuguese) here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvS4hwSa8So>

[index](#)

- Environmental conflicts and women in Africa



A report by Edwin C. Perry, Cheryl Potgieter and Urmilla Bob,(1) highlights the links between environmental conflicts and women. The authors join to the growing attention put by women's movements, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and researchers, among others, on violence against women as well as on the need to examine its links to situations of conflicts

The report states that violence against women "takes place more frequently during periods of conflict, especially when physical violence characterises the type of conflict experienced and when the conflict occurs in societies that tend to be patriarchal. Women's vulnerability increases significantly during periods of violence, and environmental conflicts are no exception. This aspect is particularly important given that environmental conflicts often result in displacement, migration and/or refugees.

While studies have demonstrated that gender-based violence is a characteristic of environmental conflicts (2), there are very little data available on the actual and perceived spatial distribution and understanding of gender-based violence and vulnerability related to environmental conflicts.

The sources and meanings of how women themselves perceive the environment and the conflict are critical to understanding gender and violence. The main sources of information about women's vulnerability in environmental conflict situations are based primarily on official (usually police) statistics, victim surveys and a series of estimates by organisations working with survivors of violence. It is important to note that there is consensus that in most cases violence against women is not reported to official sources, including the police. Furthermore, victim surveys and information from the survivors of violence tend to be limited to specific case studies and/or anecdotal experiences.

There are also political consequences in relation to women's increased vulnerability. While fear of victimisation restricts women's lives and causes distress, additionally, particularly when conflicts result in extreme violence, vulnerable community members often retreat from public spaces. Given the patriarchal nature of societies, women's participation in the public sphere is generally limited in any event. This retreat often results in women's experiences and issues not being raised when the impacts of the environmental conflict/s are being discussed and intervention strategies are being developed.

There is acceptance that poverty and environmental degradation (an important aspect of several types of environmental conflicts) have disproportionate impacts on African women (especially those who reside in rural areas). The feminisation of poverty is well documented. However, there is a dearth of studies that examine the feminisation of environmental conflicts in relation to the disproportionate burdens and increased vulnerability women face as a result of environmental conflicts. Their vulnerability is also directly linked to the fact that although women constitute more than half of the population and provide the majority of the food supply in developing countries, they have limited access, ownership and co-ownership to land and natural resources. In Swaziland, women's contribution to labour and management in food production has been put between 60 and 80%." (3)

Connected to the direct impact of environmental conflicts on women's lives, especially in poor communities, the authors explain how, following the violence in Liberia during the recent civil war, "women were less concerned about redress and reparations for sexual violence but more concerned about the loss of their livelihoods as well as their ability to access resources such as safe water and services such as education and health care."(4)

In rural Africa, the report reflects on situations where women have economic dependence on men, even reinforced by cultural traditions and religious practices that dictate women's relationships and roles in societies as well as the

relationships to resources, especially land. They explain that "extensive research shows that in comparison with men, women are generally at a disadvantage in terms of control and access to resources, including land." (5)

Yet, women are key environmental caretakers. Their vast knowledge about the ecosystem that constitutes their livelihood is key to guarantee the future of local communities and the forests and biomes they depend on. To conserve Nature well has direct links to women and their access to all that Nature offers such as water, firewood, medicinal plants, wild foods and agricultural land. As the authors of the report explain: "Environmental conflicts have often resulted in restricted access to or degradation of these vital resources."

For the impoverished sectors – who, agreeing with the authors, are often poor women and children – "the cost of environmental conflicts is greater, given restricted access to resources and opportunities as well as fewer available mechanisms – such as the ability to move, or resources to increase protection – to cushion the effects of being victimised."

Acknowledging the role of women in the conservation of forests and Nature in general as well as their vulnerability to restricted and limited resource availability raises awareness about the link between them and environmental conflicts. Indeed, it adds to the need of building an ecological and integrated vision that leads the way for a change in our societies.

(1) "Environmental conflicts and women's vulnerability in Africa", Edwin C. Perry, Cheryl Potgieter and Urmilla Bob, in African Journal on Conflict Resolution, Special Issue on Environment and Conflict, Volume 10 No. 2, 2010, <http://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajcr/article/viewFile/63315/51198>

(2) See for example Brocklesby and Hinshelwood 2001; Fred-Mensah 2003; Ogra 2008; Veuthey and Gerber 2009.

(3) Mkhabela (2006:67)

(4) Pillay (2009:98)

(5) Agarwal 1996, focusing on India; Cross and Hornby 2002, focusing on South Africa; Fred-Mensah 2003, focusing on the Ghana-Togoborder; Rao 2006, focusing on India.

[index](#)

PEOPLES IN ACTION

- International campaign to define forests for their true meaning

La Via Campesina, Friends of the Earth International, Focus on the Global South, the World Rainforest Movement and more than 120 organizations from around the world sent a letter to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO, in Rome, on the occasion of March 21st, the UN International Day of Forest. The letter demands that the FAO change its present definition of forests.

The letter appeals to FAO to reflect in its definition what makes a forest a forest for the communities who depend on them: "In contrast to the existing process within FAO, a process of elaborating a new and more appropriate definition of forests must effectively engage those women and men who directly depend on forests. An appropriate forest definition must support their modes of living, their networks and organizations. On the International Day of Forests we commit to continue the campaign to move the FAO and all concerned institutions to initiate a process led by forest communities to formulate a new definition of forest."

During the coming three months, groups will also present the demand to national

and regional FAO offices.

See <http://wrm.org.uy/all-campaigns/open-letter-to-fao-on-the-occasion-of-the-international-day-of-forests-2014/>

[index](#)

- International Day in Defense of Peasants' and Farmers' Seeds

The women and men farmers and peasants belonging to the Via Campesina, are calling for this April 17th to be a global day of action and mobilisation in defence of the struggles of farmers and peasants, and, in particular, in defence of peasants' and farmers' seeds which are a heritage of the world's peoples in the affirmation of Food Sovereignty.

Via Campesina denounces that farmer's seeds have been attacked by capitalist interests that have sought to privatize and standardize them to the benefit of industrial agriculture. However, in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas, year by year there is growing strength in the organized peoples' capacity for mobilisation and struggle against an agro-industrial system that gives rise to exploitation and death, grabbing land, poisoning food, and expelling peasants and indigenous peoples from their territories.

On the International Day, La Via Campesina will also denounce the transnationals, agri-business, and the use of agro-toxics and genetic modification as well as will reject all attempts at repression, criminalisation of protest, punishment, or assassination. It announces that it will "continue to struggle to change all that is oppressing us, controlling us, subordinating us.

<http://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/actions-and-events-mainmenu-26/17-april--day-of-peasants-struggle-mainmenu-33/1564-april-17th-international-day-of-farmers-struggles-in-defence-of-peasants-and-farmers-seeds>

[index](#)

- Protestors denounce pact to transform rural region of Brazil into a "eucalyptus desert"

On March 8, 2014, peasant farmers from organizations including the MPA, MST, MMC, Quilombolas, the Union of Rural Workers of Mucuri and Montanha and Fetaes, along with youth activists and other social movements, took to the streets of Montanha, in the state of Espírito Santo, Brazil, to denounce the pact between large landholders, the public administration and multinational corporations like Fibria (formerly Aracruz Celulose) to transform the region into an "enormous desert of eucalyptus". During the political rally held in the town's central square, some 1,000 women handed out eucalyptus outside the town hall and the headquarters of public offices as a form of protest. The participants in the rally also paid tribute to fellow peasant farmers Saturnino Ribeiro and Valdício Barbosa, who lost their lives in the struggle for land in this region. After a march, two truckloads of food were distributed to neighbourhoods on the periphery of Montanha.

The main themes of the protest were: Agribusiness is the strategy used by patriarchal capitalism in the countryside! We must denounce it and unite in struggle! Stop violence against women! Agrarian reform is the only viable way to

produce healthy food for workers!

Source: MST, Espírito Santo, Brazil

[index](#)

RECOMMENDED

- Environmental Justice Atlas, by EJOLT, a large EU project bringing science and society together to catalogue ecological distribution conflicts and resistance struggles. The interactive map describes in detail 900+ cases of environmental crimes.

<http://ejatlas.org/>

[index](#)

- Should we build more large dams? The actual costs of hydropower megaproject development, Bent Flyvbjerg, Alexander Budzier, Daniel Lunn. An important scientific study by University of Oxford researchers on hydropower megadams built between 1934 and 2007 (245 dams in 65 countries).

www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0301421513010926

[index](#)

- First-hand testimony of Andaman tribe reveals sexual exploitation - In an audio recording obtained by Survival International, a young Jarawa man reports that poachers regularly enter his tribe's protected reserve and lure young Jarawa women with alcohol or drugs to sexually exploit them. <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/9957>

[index](#)
