Ways forward?

Speculative capital and the stakeholders involved, such as banks, consultants, big companies and investment funds, along with allies like NGOs and often our own governments, are attempting to use *trade in environmental services* to take control of peoples' lands in order to "sell" these services and make profits. This makes the struggle for the rights of peoples who depend on forests more complex and difficult.

How can this struggle be continued? Here are some possible steps to be taken:

- Many communities that live in forests, including peasant, traditional and indigenous communities, share the concern over how to preserve these areas, especially when they become more scarce and the need for land increases. Often they call on the state for support in guaranteeing the conservation of forests, which is a completely just demand.

The information gathered in this article indicates that instead of entering into schemes like *PES* and *trade in environmental services*, communities should gather as much information as possible about what the idea of *environmental services* and their "trade" represents, and discuss them with the whole community. This article is specifically intended to contribute to this kind of discussion.

And if governments spend public resources to help big companies and banks, the same money could also be used as part of public policies to help communities who want to preserve and recover their forested areas, with no need for transforming these efforts into perverse mechanisms like *trade in environmental services* which simply deepen the processes of the commodification and financialization of nature.

- A characteristic shared by *trade in environmental services* and the "carbon market" is the lack of transparency around these types of mechanisms. It is extremely important to demand, in your respective countries, information from the authorities and members of parliament about legislation already approved and being discussed in connection with these kinds of activities. In countries where legislation on *trade in environmental services* is being hastily developed, such as Brazil, there are clear contradictions with national constitutions – for example, when draft legislation proposes the privatization of something that is fundamental and open to free access by the entire population. In the state of Acre, Brazil, for instance, civil society organizations are calling on the Federal Public Ministry to declare the*unconstitutionality of State Law* 2.308/2010, which establishes the System of Incentives for Environmental Services.

- In almost all countries of the South, peasant agriculture suffers from a lack of support and public policies to maintain and strengthen it. This type of farming, which is also practiced in forest areas without posing a threat to their survival, has proven the possibility of coexistence and interaction between agriculture and forests. More support in the form of public policies for peasant agriculture would strengthen the food security and sovereignty of these populations and the regions where they live. Moreover, peasant agriculture already contributes, as demonstrated by La Via Campesina, to

“cooling” the planet. But very often, instead of providing support to peasant farming communities, national governments finance and facilitate the introduction of *trade in environmental services*. This involves spending public money and sometimes taking on new debts with international financial institutions like the World Bank, which offer “incentives” for this new type of “trade”. And once again, the burden is borne by the people.

- The growing commodification and financialization of nature highlights the importance of building broader alliances among those who oppose the international financial system, others who fight against the privatization of nature, and still others who fight daily to protect their territories and ecosystems.

- A broad and powerful alliance against the “green economy” is being built through the call for mobilization towards Rio+20 and beyond (40). The goal is to develop a collective agenda among non-governmental organizations and networks and social movements, including actions in solidarity with communities impacted by companies that take over and destroy their territories, as in the case of CSA in Rio de Janeiro, owned by the multinationals Vale and Thyssenkrup, or that pollute the seas and impact on fishing communities, such as the oil company Petrobrás. The call for mobilization also foresees the holding a People’s Assembly on the eve of Rio+20, where the voices of peoples affected by privatization and projects that cause environmental degradation can be heard.

- It is essential to continue and step up the struggle so that communities who preserve and depend on forests have rights and control over these areas. This means fighting for recognition of the rights of these peoples to their territories, something that is still non-existent or insufficiently enforced in many countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia. In countries where significant advances have been made, such as Brazil, there has been a tendency towards backsliding in terms of respect for the rights of indigenous and other traditional peoples, as the efforts to create a “global market in *environmental services*” gain ever greater momentum.

- We must continue to oppose and denounce capitalist financial speculation activities. Although the economic-financial crisis has primarily affected the world’s biggest economies, almost all countries, and particularly their governments, continue to defend and form part of this system. However, throughout the world, there is growing protest and mobilization demanding profound changes, especially with regard to the ever increasing financialization of the economy, and also of nature, through the rising wave of privatization of everything that still remains public. This is why we must continue to fight against the expansion of the logic of speculative capital, to stop it from completely taking over areas crucial for the future of humankind, including rainforests.

We must all join together in denouncing the perversities and contradictions of this logic and its concrete impacts on our territories. We must support and strengthen the resistance of peoples around the world, to ensure first and foremost that their rights over their territories are guaranteed, and also to reverse the process of the privatization of nature, in the future as well, to guarantee free access to nature for the communities who have always made use of and preserved it.

As the Congolese woman quoted in this article declared, “We are very happy with our forest, because it allows us to get everything we need.” And that is priceless.

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40 - http://wrm.org.uy/bulletin/173/Rio+20_and_beyond.html