
World March of Women: Change the world to change the lives of women – the fight continues against green deserts and the commodification of nature

We are once again approaching March 8, the international day of women's struggle, on which we, as feminist women, also struggle against the commodification of nature. This commodification is deepened by the expansion of green deserts, which are portrayed as a step in the transition to a so-called Green Economy. This is a process based on false environmental solutions for a system in crisis, but which is, in fact, aimed at creating economic opportunities for the integration of nature into the market.

The expansion of green deserts is not a new phenomenon, but has been particularly promoted in recent years as a result of the policies of so-called developed countries that prohibit polluting factories and processes within their own territories. They prohibit the processes, but they do not prohibit the use of the products that are produced. As a result, companies seek out other territories suitable for the installation and/or expansion of their polluting industrial processes, and South America has become a destination of choice.

Pulp and paper companies are expanding their green deserts of eucalyptus trees in various regions of Brazil. In the states of Bahia, Espírito Santo, Maranhão, Mato Grosso do Sul, Piauí and Rio Grande do Sul (RS) in particular, these companies have taken over ever larger areas of land, expelling indigenous peoples, the descendants of African slaves and peasant farmers from their territories.

In RS there are currently more than 500,000 hectares of monoculture plantations of exotic tree species, and, according to projections, there will be close to one million hectares of pine, eucalyptus and acacia plantations in the state by 2015. The projects planned, in addition to transforming the Pampas biome into vast stretches of eucalyptus, also foresee the construction of pulp mills.

However, due to the deepening of the world economic crisis, combined with ongoing local resistance and opposition, pulp and paper sector investments in RS began to decline. The companies that had always claimed to be driven by their desire to contribute to the development of the state showed their true colours.

But new investments have begun to flow into RS. The current pulp and paper offensive is spearheaded by the Chilean company CMPC (Compañía Manufacturera de Papeles y Cartones, known in RS as Celulose Riograndense), which announced the purchase of 100,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations and the expansion of the pulp mill in Guaíba, using public money from the Brazilian National Development Bank (BNDES). The announcement was applauded by parliamentarians, the media (obligated to their advertisers) and the state government.

Numbers and figures are tossed around and celebrated, but little is being said about environmental licensing process, or about how the conditions of Environmental Zoning for Silviculture (ZAS) will

be/are being fulfilled.

We, the women, say no to green capitalism!

This brief summary is essential in order to have a minimum understanding of what and whom we are dealing with. The fluidity of capital is great, and so is the fluidity of the transmutation of the market. The arrival of Celulose Riograndense is nothing new, but rather another stage in the process of the commodification of the territory of the state of RS.

We, the women, are systematically denied the possibility of defining and planning local development. We are denied, because the capitalist system, which is patriarchal, imposes a role on women in which they are unable to make decisions over their own lives, over their food, energy and land sovereignty. Women are limited to acting within the private space, while men control the public space.

Nevertheless, working alongside other movements, peasant and feminist women in RS are playing a leading role in the ongoing struggle and local resistance against the expansion of green deserts. This resistance has shaken the agribusiness sector, which believed that RS offered favourable conditions for its further growth. And now, as we confront this new offensive, we must say NO to green capitalism, falsely referred to as the Green Economy.

The Green Economy is the strategy discovered by the neoliberal capitalist system to commodify life. Despite the failed attempt at Rio+20 to impose the so-called Green Economy as “the agenda” for coming years, governments and corporations continue to endorse this fallacy (see, for example, the recent study by the International Labour Organization).

In the case of green deserts, the false pretext of forest preservation is used to promote the expansion of “planted forests”. This deceptive use of the word forest serves to disguise the fact that these are monoculture plantations of exotic tree species primarily established for use as raw material for pulp production.

Instead of imposing rules to limit the environmental damages and/or making changes to the current model of production and consumption, the green economy is a continuation of the logic of compensation and commodification. Compensation or “offsetting” implies that polluting processes can continue as long as the state is financially compensated for them. Commodification reinforces this principle and also creates the need place a financial value on nature, which in turn reinforces the idea that only that which can be bought, sold and negotiated on the market has value. Following this logic, investments are needed to ensure a “stable flow” of natural goods (viewed as mere resources at our service).

This fallacious and destructive model directly affects women, especially women rural workers, because of their close ties to natural goods and the sexual division of domestic work. The work of reproduction and care-giving, of sustaining life, is still primarily considered to be “women’s work”. Thus, as this model leads to greater concentration of land ownership, greater use of toxic agrochemicals, greater violations of environmental legislation, greater contamination of the water and greater priority for the productive work carried out by men, the negative impacts on the lives of women are greater as well. This equation is essentially ignored, and deliberately so.

Under this model of agribusiness, promoting the green economy through monoculture plantations of exotic tree species is simply a way of promoting the accumulation of capital, with absolutely no

environmental – or social – benefit. It is based on a view of the world in which natural resources and women's work are inexhaustible. And the state is held solely responsible for ensuring and subsidising the welfare of the population.

Women in the fight against commodification

For those of us in the World March of Women, March 8 is also a day of struggle against the violence of capital against the people's territories, and consequently, against our bodies and against nature itself.

We are fighting for another model. From the perspective of Feminist Economics, we defend the need for a new paradigm to ensure the sustainability of life. Every day, women are creating concrete alternatives to the dominant economic model, articulating changes in the models of production, reproduction and consumption. In other words, we, the women, are developing real solutions that include food sovereignty, energy sovereignty, agro-ecology and the solidarity economy. We are also fighting for the recognition and valuation of the traditional ecological knowledge of the peoples, and for the defence of forests and biodiversity, among other battles. The paradigm shift is already underway, but there is a need for public policies that promote structural changes aimed at the development of the peoples, not the development of capital.

The green economy is a false solution! The feminist economy is our solution! Let's change the world to change the lives of women!

By Cíntia Barenho, project coordinator at the Centre for Environmental Studies (CEA) and member of the World March of Women (WMW), email: cintia.barenho@gmail.com