
World Social Forum: A pause on the way

The World Social Forum met in Nairobi, Kenya from 20 to 25 January. Beyond the opinion that each one of us may have about its achievements, what we would like to highlight is not so much what was said or what was done there but its message that “another world is possible.” .

This message implicitly means that the present world is no longer possible. In this world, increasingly dominated by large corporations, social and environmental problems are aggravated year after year. In spite of the incessant intervention of so-called solutions by those seeking desperately to keep it alive, the truth is that in most cases, the remedy is worse than the illness itself. Let us look at some examples of these so-called “solutions” in WRM’s scope of action:

- To face the loss of biodiversity, the main “solution” is the establishment of protected areas, implying among other things eviction of the communities who live in them
- To face deforestation, “solutions” are added, such as protected areas, monoculture tree plantations and certification of plantations and forests
- To face climate change, some of the “solutions” are carbon sinks (tree plantations) and biofuels (oil palm, transgenic soybean and maize, sugarcane).

Each one of these “solutions” implies a series of serious negative social and environmental impacts that we have explained in numerous articles in the WRM Bulletin. Their true value is zero and they only serve to give the deceitful impression that everything can be solved without resorting to the sweeping changes urgently required. Among other things, they enable the following:

- To continue with deforestation so that large companies (timber, mining, oil, hydroelectric, shrimp) can carry on making profits with the excuse that there are protected areas to maintain biodiversity, that plantations lessen the pressure on forests (and that they are certified), that hydroelectric dams do not cause greenhouse effect gas emissions, etcetera.
- To continue promoting agricultural and tree monoculture plantations and their accompanying package of agrochemicals and transgenic plants so that the large seed, chemical, biotechnological and pulp companies can carry on making profits under the false pretence that they are attempting to mitigate hunger in the world or substitute oil by biofuels or produce the paper the world needs.
- To continue destroying the climate with the continuous burning of fossil fuels allowing oil companies to carry on making their profit, but also to enable other large companies (palm oil, sugar, biotechnology, etc.) to enter the business.
- To continue destroying the base for subsistence of millions of peasants and indigenous people through appropriation of land, water and forests by the large companies (in the water, biotechnology, pharmaceutical, pulp business, etc.).

In spite of its apparent strength, that world has already shown itself to be impossible and that it destroys the very foundations of the world we all live in.

To face this, the message of the Forum is “another world is possible.” What kind of world? A world that is socially supportive and environmentally respectful. But how would it be? We don’t have an answer but we do have the conviction that it is possible. How do we reach this? Perhaps the words of the writer Eduardo Galeano will serve to make us think:

“Utopia is on the horizon. I move two steps closer, it moves two steps further away. I walk another ten steps and the horizon runs ten steps further away. As much as I may walk, I'll never reach it. So what's the point of utopia? The point is this: to keep walking”

Along this walk, the World Social Forum is just a pause on the way, where an enormous diversity of walkers stops to exchange ideas among themselves. What matters is not what the Forum does or what the Forum can do, but that the walkers start finding ways to reach that “other possible world.”