
Climate change: Stop playing the fiddle!

Climate change is already happening. The recent hurricanes in the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico and southern US –and their terrible death toll- are not normal natural events: they are human-made disasters resulting from well-known causes. Unless those causes are seriously addressed, millions of people will continue to suffer from climate change impacts, ranging from extreme droughts to extreme flooding and storms.

In spite of their stated commitments, governments –North and South- have until now done little to solve the problem. The story goes that while Rome burned, Nero played the fiddle. A similar situation is now happening: while fossil fuels and forests burn, our governments choose to play the fiddle, pretending that the market will eventually solve the problem. Unfortunately, it won't. On the contrary, it is the market itself which makes the absurd seem reasonable and the reasonable to appear impossible.

It is clearly absurd to pretend that planting millions of hectares of trees will in some way “compensate” carbon emissions from fossil fuel burning. It is obvious that the net biospheric carbon pool will continue to increase as more carbon is extracted from the underground and pumped into the biosphere. But the market –and the oil industry- loves this approach. A new commodity –carbon- has been created and much money can be made out of it. The absurd has become reasonable.

We, they, everyone, knows that drastic political measures need to be put in place, regardless of whether they make economic sense or not. If a loved one is seriously ill, no-one thinks in terms of “how much will it cost to save him or her”? One does whatever is necessary for saving that life. The planet's climate is very sick and a similar approach is needed. Phasing out fossil fuels as fast as possible should be number one on the agenda. This would be the reasonable thing to do. But deeply entrenched economic interests oppose it and declare it “unviable”. Halting deforestation should be number two on the agenda, but “market forces” continue to promote forest destruction for economic gain, thus making forest conservation impossible.

It would be simple to put the blame on the current US president, but the truth is that few –if any- governments are actively doing something to seriously address climate change. Northern and Southern-based oil companies continue exploiting and exploring for yet more oil. Oil is made cheap while alternative energies are made expensive. Energy efficiency and conservation are but marginal cosmetic measures to reassure the public that something is being done. Some forest areas are declared as “protected” to allow for the continued destruction of the remaining forests. Carbon sink tree plantations continue being implemented in the South in spite of their absurdity.

Within such context, the only possible solution lies in the hands of normal people, who are still capable of distinguishing between what's reasonable and what's not. It is them who will put pressure on governments to implement the necessary measures to halt climate change before it's too late. Nero may have had the excuse of being mad; our governments don't. The peoples' message must be loud and clear: stop playing the fiddle and act now!

