
[Water and Land: Inseparable Threads of Life](#)

Along its chain of extraction, production and distribution, each 'commodity' hides many stories of dispossession and destruction. From minerals to oil, from rubber to palm oil, from pulpwood to carton, and nowadays, even carbon, water and biodiversity offset credits are tied to violence and dispossession. They all are connected with land grabbed from communities, and often also pollution of land, water and air. Land, particularly for forest-dependent and peasant communities, encompasses much more than what the common eye can see. Grabbing their land and the water that sustains that land means also grabbing their memories, stories, roots and connections. Land and water are interlinked and inseparable, and water, in this sense, is an essential aspect of land and life. It flows, transforms, nourishes and is being nourished by other living cycles. Water is thus an essential part of communities' struggles.

The consequences of poisoning and/or looting of water are felt by the abundant life systems that depend on the many water sources and the territories that they sustain. Extractive operations, production sites and transportation corridors therefore affect much larger areas than the territories occupied by these polluting activities themselves. Their impact on life and communities thus reaches far beyond the sites of operation, production and transport.

These devastating impacts are very deep in their own right, as Tom Goldtooth from the Indigenous Environmental Network points out, referring to the impacts of forest-based carbon offset projects called REDD+:

"It is not just the takings of land and our trees and our water, our mountains and our grasslands, but it is the takings of our identity. It is the replacement of our Indigenous traditional ceremonies with Christianity, it is taking of our language, it comes with literally the rape of our children, the historical trauma that is documented in Canada in the Church-founded residential schools. This is a serious point."

[15 years of REDD: A mechanism rotten at the core](#)

Leonardo Tello Imaina from Radio Ucamará in Nauta, Loreto, Peru, speaks of the threat of the 'Amazon Waterway' to the Kukuma indigenous peoples. This Waterway is a mega-project aiming to connect the Amazon rivers to capital markets:

"The river, or the 'great serpent,' cannot be seen as a fixed path; it is constantly changing and exchanging with the forest and its many systems of life. [...] The bottom of the river is very important for the spirits that live in the water, such as the 'purawa' (serpent), or the 'karuara'—the people who live in the depths of the river, after having been carried away by the water spirits. Those who have gone to live in the world of water communicate through dreams with their families who live in the earthly world. The pools formed on the river banks, which enable the water to keep circling, is our ancestors' place of life. In this way, the Kukuma have a personal and deep relationship with the rivers."

[Article of the WRM Bulletin 244, 2019](#)

Maria Helena, a member of the Tupinikim indigenous village of Pau-Brasil, in Espírito Santo, Brazil, highlights the impacts of eucalyptus industrial plantations on water and, in particular, on its

importance for community relations, especially for women:

“And when there was a river here, the women would grab their bundles of clothes... and it was like a party on the riverbank, all of them washing clothes. It was mostly on Saturdays, and for those who had time, during the week. It was one less chore, because there was all of that water in the river, and everything was easier. [...]The problems got worse when this whole process started, when the eucalyptus came and started sucking all the water from the river until it reached the point that it’s reached today.”

[Article of WRM Bulletin 128, 2008](#)

Pollution of water also has a devastating impact on communities fighting industrial oil palm and timber plantations in Indonesia. "Mama Na", who is part of the struggle against industrial oil palm plantations in Kampung Subur, Boven Digul regency, Papua, Indonesia, explains:

“The water is polluted. Dead fish are all over the Bian and Digul river. When they came to the area, they built a hospital, the Korindo Hospital. It is literally a “sick house” [in Bahasa Indonesian, Rumah Sakit, means “Sick House”] as the company came to make us sick. The damage sinks underground, to the water. So the fish die. When we use the water for cooking, the pot is oily. Since the company entered, we feel that we have lost our culture. No longer do we have our traditions.”

[Article of WRM Bulletin 253, 2021](#)

A woman from the Fulwaripara community in Chattisgarh state in central India, where many communities live with the forests and face threats of eviction due to conservation areas such as tiger reserves, reflects on how community access to water, and with it community life, changed as a result of both climate change and restrictions imposed by a conservation protected area:

“The monsoon season used to be good at that time, lots of rainfall. But now, the dams have come up; they do not allow the water to go to the ocean. As a result, the waves have become less and less, creating less tidal pressure and rains have become less. Through the ocean, the water climbs up and then the rain falls. Along with the rains, lots of fish/crabs and snakes used to appear. We remember playing with snakes which would spread all over the land with the incessant rains [...] Nowadays, we do not even see that much water in the ponds”.

[Article of the WRM Bulletin 242, 2019](#)

A woman guardian of the lagoons in Cajamarca, Peru, reflects on the resistance, mainly led by women, against a mining company wanting to take over the community's water and territories:

“At the height of the resistance, we would get up at three o’clock in the morning, we would go around the houses to call people out to the march; later we would fetch donated food from market stalls and shops that supported us. Once the marches were under way we set up communal soup kitchens, no one went without food. Some of us would walk in the front line, singing our marching songs and facing down the repression. We did not mind the weariness, the blows, the frequent railing of our husbands or the incomprehension of our family. We were fighting for water, which is life; for our children, and our children’s children,”

[Article of the WRM Bulletin 211, 2015](#)

This bulletin brings to the fore experiences of communities struggling against the looting of their water. It includes stories from Gabon, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil and Indonesia; stories that highlight how vital and intrinsic water and its community control are to their struggles for land and life.

