
[The direct link between energy and deforestation in capitalism](#)

The race to produce energy has left large scars in forests, particularly across the Global South. The companies that produce energy on a large scale, with the aim to meet the insatiable demands of corporate capitalism, raze everything in their path. Whether the energy produced comes from fossil fuels or supposedly 'clean energy' sources for the so-called 'energy transition' makes no difference to the People whose territories are sacrificed in the name of 'energy security'. All of these forms of industrial energy production are synonymous with the destruction of forest Peoples' ways of life. Industrial energy production leaves behind a trail of devastation and conflict. As the past 200 years have shown very clearly, energy production will always be destructive under a capitalist paradigm.

Cheap and continuously available energy is fundamental in order to power capitalism. This energy powers the factories, industrial machines, warplanes, and bulldozers that tear down forests to make way for more factories and infrastructure – which in turn need more energy. Wars continue to be fought over the control of energy sources, especially oil.

One characteristic that distinguishes capitalist societies from others with which they share the world is an insatiable greed for accumulation and 'growth'. Fossil fuels are the energy source that matches this capitalist greed almost perfectly. The abundance of fossil fuels and their combustion power has allowed capitalist societies to grow and continue to use ever more energy. As the ecological and societal consequences of this insatiable greed reach crisis levels, the fossil fuel industry has sold the idea that a transition is underway, and that this transition will lead the world to stop using fossil fuels and replace them with 'clean energy' sources. This is a dangerous illusion, and the fossil fuel industry is fully aware that the promise of said 'transition' is largely an empty marketing ploy; the so-called 'energy transition' – that is, the idea of gradually ceasing to burn fossil fuels – does not exist in capitalism. (1)

The data speaks for itself. Fossil fuels still account for 87 percent of the energy used worldwide, and their use continues to increase (2). The world's largest banks continue to provide massive financing to the fossil fuel industry. Since the Paris Agreement - the UN treaty in which signatory governments pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions - came into force in 2016, big banks have provided a staggering USD 8.7 trillion in financing to the fossil fuel sector. In 2025 alone, banks allocated USD 906 billion to companies in this sector, an increase as compared to the previous year. (3)

The so-called 'clean energy' produced under the logic of capitalism will also always be tainted by destruction. Hydroelectric dams submerge forests, alter the course and ecosystems of rivers and make it impossible for people to continue living their traditional ways of life. Countless trees are felled and forests devastated to produce the blades that move ever larger wind turbines. Mining activities to extract raw materials for solar power panels, electric car batteries, and other products associated with 'green energy' and the 'energy transition' creep further into forests.

The green facade used to justify the search for these raw materials also serves as a shield for governments and corporations to move forward with their destructive activities. The global race for strategic minerals, while presented as a race toward the 'energy transition', holds its dirty secrets. It

provides cover for an arms race that has been accelerating and expanding. A large portion of the minerals used for the 'energy transition' are also essential for the military industry. According to World Bank estimates, between 2020 and 2050, 3 billion tons of minerals and metals would need to be extracted for the so-called 'energy transition'. This represents a 500 percent increase in demand for certain minerals (such as graphite, lithium, and cobalt) and a projected investment of USD 1.7 trillion. But what the World Bank has failed to mention is that 47 percent of these minerals would be used in activities unrelated to the 'energy transition' – and instead, for example, to develop military technologies. (4) The wake of destruction that mining of this magnitude would leave in territories is difficult to even fathom.

WRM's Bulletin 275 debated the very idea of what 'energy' is, and it shared stories from communities with worldviews that differ from the capitalist worldview. These communities spoke of other concepts and kinds of energy that are not destructive. (5) This current Bulletin presents articles about capitalist energy projects that inflict wounds on forests and forest-dependent Peoples. The stories provide further evidence that the so-called 'energy transition' and the concept of 'clean energy' are built on lies; that 'clean energy' production involves large amounts of fossil fuels no matter what; and that the territories of communities in the Global South are sacrificed for this alleged 'transition'. As long as capitalism exists, energy production will inevitably be linked to social and environmental collapse.

[The first article](#) of this bulletin provides an overview of the impacts of oil and gas production on forest areas and several communities in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. This environmentally and culturally rich region is also home to one of Africa's largest oil reserves. In recent decades, numerous accidents related to fossil fuel extraction led to strong community mobilization against industry giants such as Shell.

[The second article](#) provides an overview of the impacts of mining of (not so) rare earth elements in the Mekong region. The Mekong region is one of the areas most affected by mining exploitation – largely driven by the search for raw materials for 'clean energy' production. The destruction and contamination this mining inflicts on communities along the Mekong and its tributaries raises the poignant question: "Green transition for whom?"

[A third article](#) discusses the impacts of an energy project that is presented as 'clean,' but which represents a severe threat to the Shuar People and their territory in Ecuador. The Santiago hydroelectric dam, designed to be the largest dam in the country, is being built in the southern Ecuadorian Amazon. The project would flood 3,000 hectares of mostly native vegetation, and it would affect more than 91,000 people. The Yuquianza and La Unión communities of the Shuar People may be entirely submerged, and their ancestral territory destroyed.

[The fourth article](#) provides an overview of current energy projects in Southeast Asia. Many of these projects are promoted in the name of the 'energy transition'; yet they are extremely destructive to the forest and the People living in and with these forests. The article also points to the perversity of forest conservation programs, which systematically ignore the large-scale forest destruction caused by energy-related projects; meanwhile, such conservation programs place the blame for forest destruction on the communities that depend on forests and use them in traditional ways.

Finally, this bulletin includes a warning about the risks of large government investments in gas production and related infrastructure. Such investments, slated to occur over the coming years, would benefit private interests in the name of the so-called 'energy transition'. [The article](#) explains how the Brazilian government, in particular, is promoting this kind of fossil fuel extraction; it plans to build a gas pipeline that would impact hundreds of kilometers of Amazon rainforest and numerous

communities along its path.

Enjoy your reading!

References:

- (1) OPEC, 2025. [World Oil Outlook](#)
- (2) [Energy Institute Statistical Review of World Energy 2025](#)
- (3) BOCC, 2026. [Banking on Climate Chaos: Fossil Fuel Finance Report 2026](#)
- (4) Oakland Institute, 2025. [Climatewash - the World Bank's fresh offensive on land rights](#)
- (5) WRM, 2025. [Energy in debate](#)