
What do the criticism of the Pope's encyclical by carbon market and REDD proponents reveal?

The new Pope Francis' "*Laudato Si*" encyclical addressing the ecological crisis, particularly the climate crisis, has been much discussed in the last month. It is uncommon to see so many organizations and individuals discussing a papal encyclical. Although it did not take into account important issues such as the place and role of women in these matters, the document was quite incisive and effective in its analysis and questioning of the current globalized capitalist over-consumption and production model. With this, the encyclical reinforced what social movements and other groups have been pointing out and denouncing for a long time.

In this document, the Pope also questioned some of the false solutions to the climate crisis that have been presented to the people of the world. The document states that carbon trading "*can lead to a new form of speculation, which would not help reduce the emission of polluting gases worldwide*". It also affirms "*in no way does it [this mechanism] allow for the radical change which present circumstances require. Rather, it may simply become a ploy which permits maintaining the excessive consumption of some countries and sectors*". Some defenders of the carbon offset mechanism, which allows the selling and buying of carbon credits, also known as carbon trading, were upset. The question then is: What does the criticism published by some of them reveal?

Such defenders start their answers affirming that the sale and purchase of carbon credits is an excellent and effective tool since it already has shown results, with projects that even were "certified" and awarded "quality labels". This defensive posture reveals an intransigent desire to protect carbon trading, without a willingness to acknowledge the widespread conclusive criticism of carbon market mechanisms as a whole (1), as well as the experiences on the ground with tools that aim at commodifying carbon in tropical forests, such as REDD (2). Likewise, carbon market defenders cannot provide even basic developed responses to the content of each enquiry raised in the Pope's statements.

Despite some praises to the analysis of the causes of the climate crisis in the papal encyclical, defenders end up evaluating the proposed solutions as weak and unrealistic, partly because it would cost an amount of money that would not exist. For them, defending a "radical change" is synonymous with not being "down to earth". This reveals how they try to convince us that we must accept the world as it is, especially the fact that it is dominated by a capitalist market economy. Apparently they do not care that this economy is controlled by just a few hundred corporations, which despite being largely responsible for the climate crisis, receive all sorts of concessions from our governments – and for that there is money - and do not accept limits to the continuous expansion of their markets and profits at the expense of the majority of the people and the destruction of the environment. Some examples can be seen in the articles in this bulletin on the growth of large-scale monoculture projects in Papua, as well as mining expansion in Madagascar and the criminalization of social movements in India for fighting against the construction of a dam. The fact that carbon market advocates do not speak about, much less defend, the urgent need to dramatically curb these concessions, reveals how they live and collaborate with the world of financial institutions and companies representing big

capital. Those are also the institutions and companies that so far have taken full advantage of the existence of carbon trading and these are the key players taking advantage of this new market and its speculative potential. In their anxiety to show the success of carbon trading, proponents also reveal another position: the "technician" or "specialist" who "knows" and understands that his/her role is to inform men and women who (still) "do not know" about these so called "complex" issues like "CO2" and "carbon credits", since only the "technician" or "specialist" (generally from the North) really understands those issues.

Communities affected by REDD projects have suffered first-handed. The "technicians" who come to the communities to propose projects decide which information the "beneficiaries" of the project will have access to. They rarely inform for example, that REDD does not reduce the impacts of the climate crisis because it allows pollution and destruction to continue, so in practice it is in fact a diversion from the main problem. Moreover, the time and energy invested in REDD discussions within climate conferences have confirmed why there are still no decisions to approve and implement real solutions, such as a drastic reduction of carbon emissions by the main responsible parties. "Specialists" do not inform either that if continuing with this situation for much longer, climate change will be intensified, and will particularly affect the livelihoods of rural communities and/or those living in the forest – because the climate crisis even compromises the future of the forests which many communities depend on. They also fail to mention that due to REDD projects, other communities neighboring main polluters in countries like the US or Canada, which buy carbon credits to supposedly "offset" their emissions, will keep suffering more and for longer because of polluting activities, such as extraction and/or refining of oil; activities that would have now been "compensated" with REDD. These communities are often indigenous and/or black communities which have been suffering from environmental racism for years due to the fact that they are neighbors of the oil companies (3)

Finally, there are advocates who argue that the Pope' criticism is not applicable since the carbon market mechanism was already accepted by governments, i.e., it is already part of the negotiations for a new global climate agreement to be decided in Paris later this year. This reveals how carbon market advocates have made progress in their strategy to capture governments to serve their interests. But above all, it reveals that these advocates do not seem to be bothered by the disturbing fact that communities generally are not invited, and much less can influence the extremely important decisions that will define the direction the world will take in relation to the climate change struggle - or lack thereof, and which impacts will be felt by everyone. The disinterest in allowing more popular involvement and voice has a reason: If communities were actually present, they could see up close how many of their representatives -governments and the UN - are "prisoners" of the interests of a small group of corporations and NGOs, which in order to avoid structural changes, have been "selling" false solutions to the climate crisis for years, mainly the idea of ??carbon trading, including REDD. If people really were represented and present in these discussions, they could rebel and change the course of events.

We reaffirm the need for our governments to make decisions that "the present circumstances require" by the end of the year in Paris. The "radical change" advocated for years by many organizations and social movements merely lies in exercising to take conclusions based on the analysis of the facts that led and aggravate environmental destruction and climate change; namely, being "down to earth"! Our governments should also act accordingly, if they were serious about their role and if they cared about the future of the people they supposedly represent. It also means that false solutions like carbon trading and REDD, which do not represent any actual or structural change, must be rejected.

We call on everyone to join the [Call to Action to reject REDD and the extractive industries](#), already signed by over 150 organizations and social movements worldwide - see also the article in this bulletin - which was released in the run up to the climate conference in Lima, Peru, in 2014

1. See for example: <http://www.fern.org/tradingcarbon>
2. See for example: <http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/redd-a-collection-of-conflicts-contradictions-and-lies/>
3. See for example: <http://www.ienearth.org/category/climate-justice/carbon-trading-and-offsets/>