
We Denounce and Resist the Green Economy's Impacts on Women and Forests

Declaration by the World Rainforest Movement (WRM), March 2016

To Berta Cáceres and the Lenca People, the struggle continues!

In March, the world commemorates two important dates: International Women's Day (March 8) and International Day of Forests (March 21). Women play a key role in the conservation of and struggles to defend forests, water and land. The misnamed "Green Economy," rooted in the patriarchal capitalist system, generates and deepens gender injustice—especially and disproportionately impacting women.

In recent years, "official" discussions on the importance of forests have gained such notoriety, that the United Nations General Assembly decided to launch the International Day of Forests in 2013, with the aim of raising awareness about the importance of forests. However, these discussions do not address the direct and underlying causes of deforestation, quite the opposite. Forests and the biological diversity they contain have been reduced to providers of "ecosystem services," which can be assigned an economic value; allowing for the expansion of corporate opportunities for profit. This process is part of the "Green Economy," (1) and it is intensified by the United Nations' and FAO's erroneous definition of forests, which does not distinguish them from monoculture tree plantations. (2)

The "Green Economy" does not mean transforming the current economy into a non-harmful one that respects forests and recognizes the importance of the people who depend on them. On the contrary, its proponents seek something very different. The forests of the "Green Economy" reinforce the colonial notion of "preserving" a collection of species that must remain untouched by humans. Denying the role that people have played in forest conservation over thousands of years especially impacts women. It is precisely women who have played a key role in the conservation and traditional use of forests, the transmission of traditional knowledge, and the provision of food, water and medicine for their communities. They also have a leading role in resistance struggles to defend their territories.

The "Green Economy" has facilitated the spread of offset projects, such as REDD+ and biodiversity compensation mechanisms, where polluting companies responsible for deforestation can continue their activities by claiming they are "offsetting" the destruction they cause. Thus, forests are in service to the same oppressive and patriarchal economy that continues unabated, with its attendant destruction.

And what has happened to women in this "Green Economy" push?

"Conservation" projects like REDD+ tend to impose a host of restrictions on communities' traditional use of forests, arguing that these traditional uses are the main cause of deforestation. Meanwhile,

they allow the expansion of oil, gas and mining exploitation, industrial monoculture plantations, the construction of mega highways and dams, among other projects.

Experience with REDD+ and similar projects and programs has shown how these projects drastically change the lives of forest-dependent communities. They are imposed without proper consultation, let alone consent, and they have deprived communities' access to their territories and forests vital to their survival (3). Communities that have lived in forests for countless generations now face laws, regulations and contracts that seek to prevent them from continuing their traditions, livelihoods and ways of life. And those communities facing growing capitalist exploitation must continue fighting eviction, pollution and the violence that this entails. In this context, women are greatly affected.

The dominant patriarchal system has assigned to women the tasks of food provision, housework and family care. Prohibiting and restricting their use of forests implies a greater and more difficult workload for women, in order to carry out the tasks of subsistence farming, collecting water and medicines, etc. In addition, the increased workload further limits women's possibilities to actively participate in decision-making processes, to which they are invaluable and which are important to women, too. The *Global Alliance of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities on Climate Change* against REDD+ states that "REDD+ clearly constitutes a new form of violence against women, because it limits or prevents their access to land where they grow and harvest food and obtain water for their families." (4) In rural communities throughout the world, such activities are mostly in women's hands; even as they own less, inherit less and generally have less access to community assets.

Another negative impact of the "Green Economy" specifically affecting women is the increase in violence by police forces that companies or states hire to monitor these projects. There are numerous accounts of women telling of violence police exert upon breaking into houses and carrying weapons without authorization (5).

An attack on food sovereignty, territory and communities' autonomy is a direct attack on the vital role of women.

The logic of the "Green Economy" increases economic and political interests in land. On the one hand, offset mechanisms facilitate extractive activities, plantations, dams, infrastructure, etc.—intensifying the destruction. And on the other hand, land grabbing of forest areas for "conservation" projects that house "ecosystem services," craved by capital interests, further increases pressure on territories. This double land grabbing has consequently led to an increase in conflict and sparked resistance struggles. This in turn has led to militarization and the use of satellite and drone technologies to conduct surveillance on communities living in forest areas that have been designated as "ecosystem services" providers. This significantly increases the violence.

Women are central in processes of resistance to the "Green Economy," just as they are in processes of building other paths toward radical, supportive and restorative social transformation. As Berta Cáceres, defender of the Lenca people asserted: ***In our worldview, we are beings that come from the earth, the water and the corn. The Lenca people are ancestral custodians of the rivers, and we are protected by spirits of the girls who teach us that giving life in many ways to defend rivers is giving life for the good of humanity and this planet....Merely contemplating the self-destruction caused by capitalist, racist and patriarchal pillaging will shake our consciences.***

There are countless examples of organizations and struggles led by the strength of women—walking together, learning, building solidarity and inventing new ways of creative and courageous resistance.

We stand in solidarity with the struggles of women defending forests and land.

(1) See WRM Newsletter 222. *"The Green Economy: giving*

(2) Watch WRM's video about the FAO's promotion of the International Day of Forests

, <http://wrn.org.uy/other-relevant-information/in-relation-to-water-plantations-are-not-forests-either/>

(3) See WRM's book, *"REDD: A Collection of Conflicts, Contradictions and*

Lies" <http://wrn.org.uy/es/libros-e-informes/redd-una-coleccion-de-conflictos-contradicciones-y-mentiras/>

(4) <http://www.ienearth.org/global-alliance-of-indigenous-peoples-and-local-communities-on-climate-change-against-redd-and-for-life/>

(5) <http://wrn.org.uy/es/articulos-del-boletin-wrn/seccion1/economia-verde-en-brasil-mujeres-relatan-los-impactos-del-proyecto-redd-de-spvs-y-de-un-area-protegida-de-la-fundacion-boticario/>