
Unifying struggles under the climate change umbrella

For peoples struggling for their rights in forest areas, climate change appears to be far removed from their immediate concerns. However, whether they know it or not, they are one of the most important and committed actors in protecting the Earth's climate.

For instance, those opposing industrial logging operations in their territories may feel that their struggle is only about rights and livelihoods. And that's what it's about for them, of course. However, by stopping logging operations, they are also preventing the release of large amounts of carbon dioxide emissions –the main greenhouse gas leading to global warming- which is safely stored in the forest biomass.

Communities fighting against large hydroelectric dams are also preventing the release of huge amounts of greenhouse gases such as methane, CO₂ and nitrous oxide from the dams' water reservoirs, as well as the release of CO₂ from the forests that would be destroyed and from many other dam building-related sources.

Indigenous and other forest-dependent communities confronting government or corporate plans for the “conversion” (destruction) of forests to large scale agriculture and cattle raising, to oil palm and timber plantations, to industrial shrimp farming, to mining, are also in fact protecting the world's climate by preventing the release of enormous amounts of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases to the atmosphere.

Forest communities confronting oil exploration and exploitation in their territories are even more directly linked to combating climate change, because they are doing exactly what needs to be done: preventing the extraction –and thus the burning- of fossil fuels, which are the main and climatically the worse source of CO₂ emissions related to global warming.

From the above, it is quite evident to anyone having a minimal knowledge about the causes of climate change that those peoples' struggles are in fact preventing further climate change. However, most of those struggles are being repressed and criminalized by governments that have signed and ratified the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. At the same time, the corporations that are directly or indirectly involved in those investments are based in countries –mostly Northern- that have also signed and ratified that Convention.

The conclusion is obvious: by repressing those struggles –or supporting corporations involved in the issue- governments are not only violating local peoples' rights but also a United Nations Convention created to address the most serious threat faced by humanity: climate change.

Additionally, many of the “solutions” put forward by governments for addressing climate change result in further social and environmental impacts which lead to local resistance. For instance, as a means of avoiding the necessary cuts in their own emissions, Northern countries were instrumental in the creation of mechanisms for “offsetting” their emissions. One of such mechanisms promotes the establishment of large-scale tree plantations to act as “carbon sinks.” This means promoting the

same type of plantations that are already being opposed by countless local communities throughout the world. Another “solution” for avoiding the necessary changes in production and consumption leading to climate change has been the promotion of agrofuels –ranging from corn and soya to oil palm and eucalyptus- which have also proved to be socially and environmentally destructive thus resulting in organized local opposition.

Though it is not easy to establish if those –and many other equally absurd- “solutions” originate from government delegates at the Convention on Climate Change or from corporate lobbyists at home and present at the Convention, it is clear that a large number of corporations and entrepreneurs are benefiting or plan to benefit from them.

As regards to climate, the current situation thus shows that those who have the power to make things change –governments- are unwilling to do what’s necessary. On the other hand, there are a large number of actors carrying out different forms of resistance at the local level, that originate in different issues apparently far removed from climate, such as land reform, small scale agriculture, food sovereignty, indigenous and traditional peoples’ rights, gender equity, human rights, pollution, consumption and many more. In most –if not all- those struggles there is at least some link with climate and therefore all those different resistance processes could be part of the much broader struggle to prevent climate change. This can be the common link for uniting local, regional and international movements under the climate change umbrella, in order to bring about the major social and economic changes needed for achieving that aim. While governments play the fiddle -for the delight of corporations- the future of humanity now lies in the hands of its peoples.