WORLD RAINFOREST MOVEMENT
Monthly Bulletin - Issue 196 - November 2013

OUR VIEWPOINT

THE GLOBAL THREAT OF OIL AND THE PATH TOWARDS POST¨PETROLEUM SOCIETIES

Petroleum is the result of the effects of millions of years on the remains of dead plant and animal organisms buried beneath clay, soil and minerals. Converted into a “fossil fuel” in the modern age, it is one of the pillars of the globalized economy, a strategic product for the expansion of capitalism, accompanying it with its tragic consequences of inequality, war and destruction for the creation of the “petroleum civilization”.

While oil exploration and exploitation are both direct and indirect causes of deforestation, substantial oil concessions threaten anyway many rainforest regions. Ecuador is an outstanding case where opposition and resistance have led to pro-active proposals for life and against the death brought about by oil production.

The unequal exchange, of “products” – palm oil, coal, oil, palm oil again, and most recently the invented commodity called “carbon credits” has played a role in an historical process of profit-driven plundering by British, Dutch and other corporate interests of energy and other natural “resources” in Nigeria, aiming to increase corporate profits while creating more and more demands for an industrialized production and consumption model based on unsustainable use of fossil fuels.

All stages of oil industry activities cause impacts, local and global, social and environmental. Therefore, efforts to stop the exploitation of oil reserves became an imperative for local organizations and social movements who were witnessing the devastation of their territories by fossil fuel extraction. An alternative needs to be built on the basis of energy sovereignty, understood as an opportunity for countries and peoples to exercise control over their space, their culture and their future, including control over the entire energy process, based on clean, decentralized, renewable, low-impact and diversified energy sources.

PEOPLES IN ACTION

- Silence is Treason (Remembering Saro-Wiwa and other martyrs)
- "Bleeding Oil"
- " To cook a continent"
- " The COP19 Guide to Corporate Lobbying. Climate crooks and the Polish government's partners in crime"
- " ¿Por qué luchar contra el fracking?" (Why fight against fracking?)
- " Eucalyptus Plantations for Energy: A Case Study of Suzano's plantations for wood pellet exports in the Baixo Parnaíba region, Maranhão, Brazil"

OUR OPINION

- Forests, oil and energy: time to re-capture our governments!

On 10 November 1995, it should be remembered by all who struggle for social and environmental justice that the Nigerian military junta executed Ken Saro-Wiwa and other eight Ogoni People leaders. They challenged, resisted and struggled against the severe negative impacts of oil extraction on their communities, while defending their territories and livelihoods. This should never be forgotten.

This also motivated the Oilwatch network and the World Rainforest Movement (WRM) to dedicate the present electronic issue of the WRM bulletin of November to the struggle of Saro-Wiwa and his comrades, as well as to give visibility to the many other struggles around the globe of communities against the very destructive oil industry, with a special attention on those struggles affecting forest and forest-dependent communities. This bulletin is also a renewed appeal for the Oilwatch call "to keep the oil in the soil, the coal in the hole and the gas under the grass", as well as to alert that we all should engage in a broad discussion in our communities and societies about the dominant concept of "energy" that is imposed on us and that is destroying our planet.

The transition towards a post-fossil era is more than urgently needed. At the same time, we should reflect on this model as a whole, so that it does not put at risk our livelihoods or increase injustices with false "renewable energy" solutions that are being proposed at the international level by governments – like agrofuels. We should also reflect on what is the "energy" that we want and need.

Extracting oil in tropical forest areas is maybe one of the most contradictory and violent activities one can imagine for a tropical forest and for the communities that depend on it. The contaminating capacity of oil for such a bio diverse but also fragile ecosystem is too huge to describe in words. This is also true for the level of repression, often involving the military, that these communities suffer when they stand up against the tremendous profit-making activities of giant oil corporations. The repressions are the same, and produce victims every day, irrespective of whether the companies are private, public or a mix of both. Oil and energy corporations in general are some of the biggest corporations in the world. They have the strong support of governments, especially interested in the official and less official "royalties" they can earn from their activities, while repeating the same vague and false discourse that by supporting oil extraction, they promote "development" and the "alleviation of poverty". Even if communities and country populations get benefits in some situations, the damage of oil extraction

remains unacceptably high in terms of all the impacts it provokes, now and in future.

It is no surprise that the Yasuni initiative is located exactly in a tropical forest region, unique and with an enormous importance and diversity. By August this year, the Ecuadorian government affirmed that it was forced to start oil exploitation in this area, arguing that it would apply so-called "best practices" that would cause "minimal impacts". President Rafael Correa alleged that he was forced to extract oil because of

the lack of interest of governments to finance the proposal of non-extraction that would pay for a part of the "lost" revenues. But what Correa forgot was the opinion of the many people who fully supported the initiative, in Ecuador and around the world.

This Yasuni initiative created an overwhelming interest and recognition from people, organizations and movements that support and struggle for a socially and environmentally just world. Therefore, the Ecuadorian government´s decision illustrates the perverse way our world is functioning today: corporations have captured our governments and the real concerns of the people and the environment are considered to be of less importance than the profits of corporations and revenue of governments.

There is an urgent need to liberate our governments. The people need to capture their governments!

Oil is a global menace and by being the main driver of global warming it is causing disasters around the world – far beyond the communities living in the oil fields. The recent disaster in the Philippines, Somalia and even Canada, can be adjudged to be consequences of reckless burning of fossil fuels, even if scientists say they cannot definitively draw that conclusion. What is happening is not only the result of typhoons, cyclones or hurricanes but rather of climate change, of an increasing vulnerability of communities because their governments continue promoting forest-destroying activities like oil extraction, mining and logging.

But are we not living in times of social and environmental corporate responsibility? Are we not in the REDD+ era that has again put forests in the center of the environmental debate? Why can the word not listen to the wisdom of the owners of the forests? Increasing evidence continue to show that REDD+ is a false solution because it has the in-built logic of "compensating" destruction and pollution by preservation elsewhere and this results, at the end of the day, in more emissions, in more forest destruction and land grabbing.

Oil extraction is one of the direct and indirect causes of deforestation that remains unchallenged under the REDD+ scheme, while some of the oil companies are already benefiting from REDD-type projects that have become part of their business. Acre in Brazil is one the place in the world where REDD is most advanced. Oil extraction activities are now coming into Acre just as it also is entering into other conserved forest areas in Brazil and the Amazon. We can safely say that REDD+ and oil do not contradict: they go hand-in-hand, while presenting themselves under a ´smokescreen´ of corporate and social responsibility, and as part of a "green economy." While the language gets green the violations of people's rights continue unabated.

This bulletin also reflects on what energy is actually about, as well as what is the energy that we want to have in the future? What can we learn from forest-dependent communities where many still maintain their autonomy and do not depend on our centralized corporate–driven energy generation and supply systems? The death of Ken and his comrades, 18 year ago in Nigeria, will not be in vain if we can push for and put "our energy" into building broader movements in all countries and become connected as strong local and global networks and movements to build livelihoods, including energy forms, that are environmentally and socially just. If we do we will definitely be on our way to re-capturing our governments!

Oilwatch and WRM

index

- Petroleum: A pillar of capitalist expansion

Petroleum is a homogenous mixture of organic compounds that, together with coal and natural gas, was formed some 300 million years ago during the Carboniferous Period of the Palaeozoic Era. Converted into a “fossil fuel” in the modern age, it is the result of the effects of millions of years on the remains of dead plant and animal organisms buried beneath clay, soil and minerals, subjected to great pressure, high temperatures and the action of anaerobic bacteria, that is, bacteria that do not live or grow in the presence of oxygen.

Reaching the petroleum stored beneath the earth’s surface or the ocean floor in order to extract it requires drilling. But prior to drilling comes the work of exploration (prospecting) which also entails the use of high-precision instruments, the involvement of geologists, geophysicists, engineers, the construction of roads and communication systems, the mobilization of motor vehicles and helicopters, and the installation of camps and laboratories. The various methods of prospecting include seismic exploration, in which explosive charges are set off using dynamite in shallow wells, and the resulting shock waves reflected off the different layers of the earth are recorded with seismographs combined with photographic equipment. Another method is exploratory drilling, which involves drilling deeper wells to analyze samples from rock layers at different depths and study their composition and characteristics.

The extraction of petroleum basically continues to use the same drilling method developed by Edwin L. Drake of Pennsylvania, USA, in 1859, which established the foundation of the oil industry and accelerated the advance of the industrial age. Crude oil reservoirs tend to be thousands of metres underground (usually between 3,000 to 4,000 metres down, although there are wells that are 5,000 or 6,000 metres deep). Once the drilling reaches the reservoir, the change in pressure sends the viscous crude oil shooting to the surface, where it is collected through the use of oil derricks. This is the primary production phase, which can last for years, but when the pressure subsides, pumps must be used to continue pulling the crude oil up to the derrick. The oil is then transported by pipelines or ships for subsequent refining. (1)

The environmental disasters resulting from oil drilling, gas flaring over oil wells, and pipeline leaks are

notorious. This is reflected in the testimony of local communities in Nigeria who suffer from the gross wastage of natural gas being flared by oil companies for purely economic reasons. In the Niger Delta region, more than two billion cubic feet of gas are flared daily. The enormous flames pump massive quantities of greenhouse gases and toxic substances into the air. As Nnimmo Bassey of Oilwatch describes, “There is no breath of fresh air near these flares. They cause asthma, bronchitis, cancers and blood disorders. They also pour acid rain on the land, vegetation, buildings and the people” (see WRM Bulletin 133). Pipelines have opened up the forests to predators while oil spills, the continuous flaring of gas and forest fires have become part of daily life for local communities, for whom oil has brought nothing but hardship.

Technology has also made it possible to extract petroleum from the seabed: offshore oil wells now account for around 25% of worldwide oil production. Through the use of sophisticated equipment

account for around 25% of worldwide oil production. Through the use of sophisticated equipment, underwater and deep sea facilities and floating or anchored drilling platforms, oil reserves at depths of more than 1,000 metres can be reached. Offshore oil drilling, however, has been accompanied by major environmental disasters, resulting from the spilling of oil and toxic chemicals in the water as well as the release of noxious gases into the atmosphere, endangering marine life in the surrounding area and in some cases threatening the food sovereignty of fishing communities.

After refining, oil and petroleum derivatives are transported across a vast distribution and marketing network involving intermediaries, wholesale and retail distributors, storage facilities and sales outlets, stretching around the planet and posing risks of its own (2).

The petroleum map

While most of the world's petroleum reservoirs are small, there are a small number of large reserves than contain most of planet's oil, concentrated in a few regions (petroleum provinces) where massive oil and natural gas fields have formed in sedimentary basins.

Approximately 86% of the world's oil is located in 23 petroleum provinces. Other figures state that around 15 countries account for 75% of global oil production and contain 93% of the planet's petroleum reserves. Over half of the world's proven oil reserves are in the Middle East. Al-Ghawār in Saudi Arabia is the world's largest oil field, and other giant oil fields are found in Iraq, Kuwait and Iran.

As for North America, the United States has produced the most petroleum of any country in the world, and some of its oil fields are shrinking, but it is believed to possess major reserves that have yet to be discovered. Mexico is one of the world's ten largest petroleum producers, although production is declining at its biggest oil field. Canada has begun to exploit the large deposits of bitumen (heavy crude oil) in the Athabasca oil sands, also known as tar sands, in the province of Alberta, which lay beneath 141,000 km2 of forests and peat bogs.

A new petroleum frontier: Tar sands

In northern Alberta, beneath an area the size of Florida, are the tar sands: a mixture of sand, clay and a heavy crude oil or tarry substance called bitumen.

To extract this substance, all trees and plants are stripped away, in a style similar to open-pit mining. Thus the production of crude oil from the tar sands has destroyed the Athabasca delta, altering its pristine forests and clean rivers and lakes into a devastated landscape of deforestation, open pit mines and contaminated waters.

After the bitumen is extracted from the tar sands, it is upgraded in enormous facilities with smokestacks bellowing pollution into the air. The wastewater from the process is stored in huge toxic tailings ponds that can be seen from space.

Enormous amounts of water are used in this process: between two and six barrels of water are needed to produce one barrel of oil. Tar sands operations are licensed to divert 652 million cubic meters of fresh water each year, 80% from the Athabasca River. About 1.8 million cubic metres of this water becomes highly toxic tailings waste each day, polluting the Athabasca River as well as the groundwater that flows into Indigenous territories. Indigenous communities have reported the appearance of rare virulent cancers affecting many of their members, as well as physical abnormalities and tumours in fish and game.

Source: Indigenous Environmental Network, http://www.ienearth.org/what-we-do/tar-sands/

In South America, Venezuela is the largest petroleum exporter and has the world's second biggest oil

In South America, Venezuela is the largest petroleum exporter and has the world's second biggest oil field, after Saudi Arabia. Brazil is South America's second largest oil producer, with most of its reserves in the Atlantic Ocean.

The United Kingdom's oil reservoirs in the North Sea are the largest in the European Union and position it as an important producer, although its production levels have declined and it is now a net importer of petroleum. Russia has large oil fields as well as the best potential for new reserves.

The recent discovery of a massive deposit of shale oil in southern Australia could turn the country into a "second Saudi Arabia" in terms of petroleum production.

In Africa, the lure of cheap oil – mainly because its extraction is carried out in ways that pay scant attention to the environmental and social costs – and heavy capital investment that entails the grabbing of vast areas of land have resulted in oil operations spreading over the eastern and southern regions of the continent, destabilizing governments and dividing communities. While oil and gas fever grips the tycoons in Tanzania, Mozambique, Madagascar, Chad, Mauritania, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, etc., the local communities are never brought into the picture of what is about to hit them. One example is the West African Gas Pipeline project, for which even the environmental rules of the World Bank were not respected, as denounced by local communities. Thus the poor continue to subsidize the costs of crude oil by the losses they suffer in quality of life and extreme environmental degradation (see WRM Bulletin 133).

In the meantime, faced with the progressive decline in production of some oil fields, oil companies have developed new technologies that allow them to expand the oil frontier into increasingly remote and previously inaccessible areas of the seas (as in the case of the Tupi deepwater oil field off the coast of Brazil), Arctic regions and tropical forests, altering and destroying fragile ecosystems and dramatically exacerbating carbon emissions and therefore climate change.

The unconventional technique of hydraulic fracturing or "fracking" – through which fluid is injected at high pressure to widen fractures in shale rock and release the oil and natural gas trapped inside – opens up more frontiers for petroleum extraction and the consequent environmental hazards. In the case of fracking, in addition to the huge amounts of water consumed in the process, the various chemicals used to help dissolve the shale rock end up contaminating both the soil and groundwater. Moreover, this "brute force" technology is a chaotic, non-linear process that can open fractures to freshwater formations as well as other oil and gas wells.

The role of petroleum

Petroleum is currently one of the pillars of the globalized economy, a strategic product for the expansion of capitalism. With its countless derivatives resulting from chemical transformation by the petrochemical industry, giving rise to plastics, synthetic fibres, detergents, medications, food preservatives, rubber and agrochemicals, among others, petroleum shapes the petroleum civilization, with its tragic consequences of war and destruction.

While oil has been used since ancient times by the Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians and more currently the indigenous peoples of the Americas, for a wide range of purposes – for construction, as medicine, as lamp fuel, for the protection of canoes – it was in the late 19th century and early 20th century, in the context of the Industrial Revolution, that its use for the production of engine fuel (gasoline and petrochemical substances) gained ground, displacing coal. It was at this time that Rockefeller's Standard Oil emerged as the world's largest oil refining, transporting and marketing company, based in the United States, the country that was the largest petroleum producer and consumer until the Second World War.

Oil played a decisive role in the development and outcome of the First World War, by fuelling the new

Oil played a decisive role in the development and outcome of the First World War, by fuelling the new vehicles known as tanks on land, the ships and submarines at sea, and the first fighter planes and aircraft used for reconnaissance, aerial attacks and bombing missions. During this time, oil production in the United States, far from the battle fields, rose from 33,000 tons in 1913 to 44,000 in 1917 and 62,000 in 1920. The oil industry continued to grow in the post-war years, alongside the natural gas industry, definitively displacing coal (3).

In 1938, worldwide oil production had reached 276,000 tons, a figure that rose to 370,000 tons in 1946, as a consequence of the Second World War. Between 1950 and 2000, global crude oil production increased fivefold. In 2012, global petroleum consumption had reached an average of 89 million barrels per day, 30% more than in 1992, producing 14.11 billion tons of carbon emissions.

Petroleum and its various derivatives and applications enabled big capital, through the use of motorized tractors, small aircraft, chainsaws and agrochemicals, to drive the expansion of agribusiness, with its large-scale industrial production of food and timber. The massive use of these production tools benefited the big oil monopolies, which began with the so-called Seven Sisters – the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (now BP); Gulf Oil, Standard Oil of California (SoCal) and Texaco (now Chevron); Royal Dutch Shell; and Standard Oil of New Jersey (Esso) and Standard Oil Company of New York (Socony) (now Exxon Mobil) – who dominated the global oil business until the early 1960s. After the creation of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the influence of these companies diminished. Subsequently, as a result of a series of mergers, only four major corporations remained – Exxon Mobil, Chevron, Royal Dutch Shell and BP – although their combined total capital is much greater than that of the Seven Sisters (4).

The oil business has provoked massive rates of deforestation, altered and destroyed ecosystems, and dismantled the traditional way of life and food sovereignty of countless local communities. As aptly noted by Andrés Barreda, “The neoliberal period is the era in which the most fuel has been burned in the entire history of humanity. The consumption and waste of energy and materials by capitalist industries, cities and agribusiness are growing at a colossal rate, particularly the energy consumption of global intermodal transportation networks and almost one billion vehicles and the multimodal electronic information network of computers, mobile phones, etc. that currently comprise the global machine, creating a capitalist economy voraciously addicted to increasingly greater global production and consumption of the three fossil fuels: oil, natural gas and coal.”

The curse of petroleum

In the countries of the South, long abused by colonization and fenced in to make them dependent, oil tends to be a curse, something perhaps best illustrated by the countries of Africa. Local communities in Nigeria, Angola, the Republic of Congo, Gabon and other oil-producing countries have suffered and continue to suffer from the “curse” of petroleum, which has not brought them any wealth.

In the Niger Delta, the rates of cancer, infertility, leukaemia, bronchitis, asthma, stillbirths, babies born with deformities and other pollution-related ailments are unusually high. Local communities constantly grapple with the consequences of oil spills, gas flares and other menaces arising from oil exploration activities. Of the oil companies operating in the Niger Delta, Shell has gained the greatest notoriety for human rights abuses, as military operatives paid by the company moved into the communities with armoured tanks and weapons, shooting and killing hundreds of people including women and children, mowing down entire villages and maiming thousands, in times when Ken Saro-Wiwa roused the consciousness of the nation and the international community over the environmental injustice in Ogoniland (see WRM Bulletin 152).

It is around the oil industry – together with mining – that capitalism has organized the industrial production of most of the harmful substances and energies that now saturate not only waste fills but also water systems, the atmosphere and finally the planet’s climate.

Oil companies, despite their pledges of social responsibility, due controls, security measures and use of best practices, act with total impunity, violating human rights and contaminating the environment on scales that represent crimes against the environment, nature and humanity as a whole. In the face of the power of the oil giants, states may fail to protect their people or nature by forcing the companies to accept responsibility for their acts. And even in cases where legal action is taken, most outcomes are unsatisfactory in terms of tackling the justice claims of impacted communities, whose values, cultures and traditional jurisdiction are not addressed by justice systems. This is the case of sacred lands, the concept of community land ownership, and the Rights of Nature, a concept incorporated in the constitution of Ecuador (5). For the U'wa people who live in the rainforests of eastern Colombia, oil is the blood of Mother Earth, which is why oil drilling is considered a desecration. In their words, "We know that the riowa (white man) has put a price on all that is alive, even the stone itself; he trades with his own blood and he wants us to do the same on our sacred territory with ruiria, the blood of the earth which they call petroleum... all this is foreign to our customs..." (6). This has led to the U'wa people's longstanding conflict with the Colombian state and the U.S. oil company Occidental Petroleum (OXY), which has been authorized by the government to drill for oil in the heart of U'wa territory, sowing repression and death.

Local communities are challenging the oil drilling that poisons their land, water and air. They no longer want to live in the midst of oils spills, gas flares and the economic and social disruption caused by the oil industry. They do not want the industry to continue destroying their forests. And they are calling for the oil to be left underground, where it belongs, a demand that is spreading around the world and includes natural gas and coal.

All signs point to the imminent danger facing humanity as a direct consequence of the dominant model imposed by the current "petroleum civilization", whose forms of production, trade and consumption are crushing the large majorities for the benefit of a small few. The modern Western urban lifestyle is sustained by excessive energy consumption that entails enormous social and environmental injustice. According to a recent report on energy published by Friends of the Earth International (7), 1.3 billion people, or one fifth of the world's population, do not have access to electricity. Per capita energy consumption in the United States and Canada is roughly twice that in Europe or Japan, more than 10 times that in China, nearly 20 times that in India, and about 50 times as high as in the poorest countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

Pluspetrol in Camisea, Peru, threatens Indigenous Peoples in isolation and wants to be rewarded with a REDD+ project!

Since 2004, a consortium led by the Argentine oil and gas company Pluspetrol has been exploiting the Camisea gas fields in Peru, inside the Kugapakori-Nahua-Nanti Reserve (KNNR). The company is now planning to drill new wells, build a 10.5km pipeline extension and carry out seismic tests across 100s of square kilometres as part of a massive expansion of its operations. Though the project is currently pending approval by the Peruvian Ministry of Energy and Mines, Forest Peoples Programme (FPP) has denounced that photos in an internal report by a Peruvian government agency reveal illegal clearings in the reserve that purportedly protects indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation and initial contact.

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the project reveals that Pluspetrol acknowledges that contact with the indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation is "probable" during its operations, that such people in general are highly vulnerable to contact and "massive deaths" can occur as a result, and that the impacts of its expansion on them will be, or could be, considerable for a wide variety of reasons (for more information on Peoples in Voluntary Isolation see WRM Bulletin 194).

Believe it or not, Pluspetrol wants not only to expand its operations in the Amazon but also be "rewarded" with the benefits of a REDD+ project that would grant the company the carbon credits that could be generated from the forested areas on the reserve that remain standing (see Masking the Destruction: REDD+ in the Peruvian Amazon http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/masking-the-destruction-redd-in-the-peruvian-amazon/).

Nevertheless, it is the most vulnerable communities – precisely those with the least access to the uses and applications of petroleum – that are the most affected by the climate change caused by global greenhouse gas emissions, 57% of which result from carbon dioxide released by fossil fuel use.

In the meantime, oil has been ideologically imposed as an essential source of energy for globalized "plastic societies", centralized by multinationals for whom it is a financially lucrative business simply because they do not account for the environmental and social disasters it causes.

The shift towards more environmentally and socially just and healthy societies, in terms of energy as well, is an ever more urgent necessity. It is no longer simply a matter of a change in energy sources. If the powerful economic, political and financial interests that currently uphold the oil apparatus are maintained, if inequality persists, if production and consumption continue on the same massive scales, if capacities are exceeded, any renewable energy source could ultimately prove just as harmful as oil.

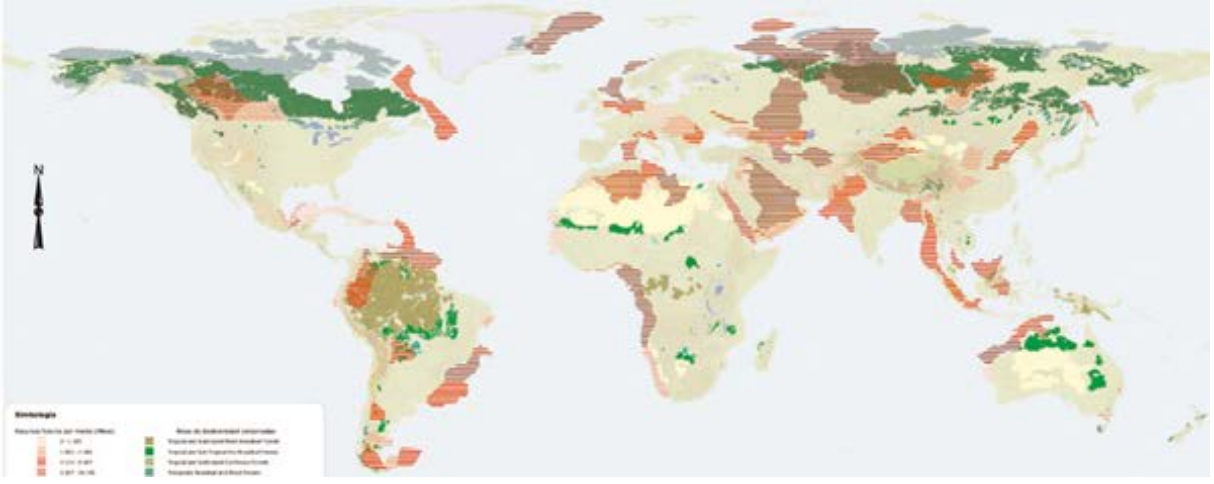
The real answer lies in solidarity-based societies built by social movements and the resulting power to save humankind from its current disastrous course, which will benefit no one in the long run.

(1) El petróleo, http://www.elpetroleo.50webs.com/perforacion.htm
(2) "Sueños de oleoductos y tuberías", Isaac Osuoka, Oilwatch Africa, in "Fluye el petróleo, sangra la selva", Oilwatch, http://www.oilwatch.org/documentos/libros

(3) "Petróleo, el combustible del capitalismo", María Ibáñez, http://www.enlucha.org/site/?q=node/831
(4) "Manipulaciones y zarandeos de la actual civilización petrolera mundial", Andrés Barreda, Oilwatch, http://www.oilwatch.org/component/content/article/118-varios/documentos/131-manipulaciones-y-zarandeos-de-la-actual-civilizacin-petrolera-mundial#sdfootnote14sym
(5) "Digging for dirty oil. Reviewing corporate oil liabilities and EJO legal strategies for environmental justice", EJOLT, October 2013, http://www.ejolt.org/2013/10/digging-for-dirty-oil-reviewing-corporate-oil-liabilities-and-ejo-legal-strategies-for-environmental-justice/
(6) Carta de los U'wa al mundo, http://www.asociacion.ciap.org/IMG/pdf/Carta_U_Wa.pdf
(7) "Good energy, bad energy", http://www.foei.org/en/good-energy-bad-energy

index

- Oiled forests – the case of Ecuador



Oil has been historically extracted disregarding the costs that the process entails to the local people and the environment. Thus oil extraction has become a direct cause of the deforestation of large areas of tropical forests where some of the world's most promising oil and gas deposits lie, degrading the forest as a whole through its impacts on water, air, wildlife and plants.

Furthermore oil drilling constitutes an underlying cause of deforestation and forest degradation because it opens up the forest enabling logging and forest conversion to agriculture and cattle rising.

Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Nigeria have substantial oil operations in rainforest areas ravaged by the deforestation caused not only directly by the process of oil drilling but also by the construction of roads through the forest that allow remote lands to be open to developers in search of oil. Toxic by-products are usually dumped into local rivers and persistent oil spillages result from broken pipelines and leakage.

Oil in the Ecuadorian Amazon

In Ecuador, current exploration campaigns are concentrated in the north of the Amazon region, especially at the foothills of the 'Cordillera Oriental'. This area is the ancestral territory of the Cofan, Siona, Secoya and Waorani indigenous people. It is also the territory of the Napo-Kichwas and several Shuar families that settled there during the rubber boom. There are attempts to bring oil exploitation also to the South of the Amazon in the next round of oil concessions in 2013.
Before oil activities arrived to this part of the Amazon the main characteristics of the area were:

1. Hunting, fishing and gathering.
2. Itinerant agriculture that allowed the indigenous peoples to conserve and create productive soils in zones where the previous conditions of clay soils did not allow agricultural practices; and generate and preserve-biodiversity in these tropical forests.
3. Cultural, religious and recreational activities through land use regulation and respect of the territory.

The first economic activities directed to external markets were rubber and timber. Then along with oil expansion, new protected areas were created such as the Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve, the Yasuní National Park, the Cayambe Coca Ecological Reserve, the Limoncocha Biological Reserve.

The impacts of oil extraction in the Ecuadorean Amazon have been well documented, especially due to the case against Chevron-Texaco that operated for 26 years in the North-Eastern part of the country. In this period, Texaco drilled 339 wells across 430 thousand hectares. It extracted more than 1500 million barrels, discharged billions of barrels of toxic formation waters and other toxic wastes, and flared billions of cubic feet of gas. Although it is impossible to put a price on nature, because life cannot be measured in money terms, the damages of the company´s actions have been calculated in the tens of billions, due to oil spills, marshland contamination, gas burning, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, wild and domestic animals killed, appropriation of natural materials, river salinisation, diseases (31/1000 cases of cancer when the national average is 12.3/1000), underpaid jobs, and the list goes on …

On February 14th, 2011 the court decision in the 'trial of the century' established that Chevron-Texaco was liable for a USD 9.5 billion fine. The judge ruled that if Chevron Texaco didn't apologise in public in 15 days, the amount would be doubled as punitive damages. The deadline expired and the company now owes USD 19 billion. This must be one of the largest settlements awarded in any trial.

The company has refused to pay, despite a failed appeal whereby on January 3rd, 2012 a three members tribunal ratified the original decision.

Ecuador: an oil country

The proposals for moratoria and oil-free territories have emerged from very diverse front lines, uniting movements against war, urban expansion, consumerism, the destruction of oceans, the spread of cancer and its causes, and indigenous peoples' movements.

It has become clear over the last century that fossil fuels, the energy sources of capitalism, destroy life − from the territories where they are extracted to the oceans and the atmosphere that absorb the waste − through transformation and consumption. The oceans are acidifying and the atmosphere contains more and more greenhouse gases. Fossil fuels, under the guise of 'energy security' promote violence across the world, in the process building and sustaining inequalities regarding who pays the costs for the extraction and also in access to energy.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Ecuador began extracting oil, first on the coast and then in the Amazon region. It started to export oil in the 1970s. In the 1980s, Ecuador's timid efforts to establish a sovereign economy, including the development of secondary industries, were sidelined as the debt crisis across Latin America led to the imposition of neo-liberal adjustments that forced the country to depend on a primary-export economy.

Oil thus moved to the centre of the economic activities of the country; and Ecuador started to suffer from the so-called 'Dutch disease', the symptoms of which include the decline of other productive sectors.

The first phase of oil extraction was marked by a total lack of control over concessions. This was followed by a stage marked by nationalism. In this period, oil was nationalised and the state oil company CEPE was created. In its first years CEPE formed a consortium with Texaco. Subsequent governments established neo-liberal policies in contracts with private companies, weakening the state oil company.

Ecuador's first oil exploitation area was the Santa Elena Peninsula. It is unknown how much oil was extracted there. However, Ecuador was internationally recognised as an oil country when petroleum was discovered and extracted in the Amazon region. From a political economy point of view, Ecuadorian leaders would be wise to take into account the interaction between different factors such as the characteristics of the oil industry, and the territories and the power relationships built around the oil metabolic cycle.

According to Acosta (2009), oil activities involve diverse social and environmental effects:

• Significant income generation. • Expensive investments. • Difficulty in accessing reserves which means building infrastructure (roads, electric plants, airports, pipelines, etc). This leads to the creation of debt as national investments need huge amounts of money obtained mainly through the financial system; when a country pre-sells its oil barrels a percentage of the oil export incomes goes to pay for the previous debts. • Technological dependence: Ecuador lacks its own technology and thus depends on foreign expertise (for example, oil exploration was executed for the most part by Halliburton in the past and nowadays by the Chinese Sinopec). • Increased dependency and growing national consumption of petroleum and related products such as plastic, liquid petroleum gas (LPG) and gasoline • Oil economies are marked by a lack of control over international price variations on the global market. • There are severe social and environmental impacts that provoke diverse local resistance processes. • National sovereignty is systematically lost, especially in terms of oil policies, waiving rights in contracts, price-fixing and the institutional framework around oil activities.

Extractivism of the 21st century, from neo-liberalism to state capitalism

According to Ross (2001), Ecuador shares many characteristics with other countries that depend on non-

renewable resources:

1. Weak State institutions that are not capable of properly enforcing the laws nor controlling the actions of government. 2. Absence of rules and transparency that encourage high levels of discretion in the management of public resources and the commons. 3. Conflicts in the distribution of revenues between powerful groups that strengthen rent-seeking and patrimonialism. This leads to a blending of the public and private sectors and in the long term decreases investments and economic growth rates. 4. Short term policies 5. Low values of social indicators, such as literacy, high infant mortality, etc…

In the neo-liberal phase (from 1985-2007), the state offered extremely favourable terms on oil revenues so as to attract foreign investments. From 1985 onwards, Ecuador called for new oil bidding rounds that expanded the geographic limits of the oil frontier to the East, towards the Yasuní National Park. These oil bidding rounds were part of a strategy of trade opening that stemmed from indebtedness and therefore the need to pay debts back, and the retreat from nationalistic policies.

The government of Rafael Correa, which came to power in 2007, stopped external debt payments and is more nationalistic than past governments. However, it has not distanced itself from the extractivist logic but on the contrary has maintained it, due to the opportunity offered by high oil prices to increase

government revenues and invest in public works and also in welfare payments.

Ecuador has insufficient refining capacity. Therefore the country exports oil but then imports oil products in increasing amounts because of economic growth. It aims in the long run to increase refining capacity but for the time being, the aim is to export more and more oil every year. As existing oil fields become exhausted, this implies expanding the oil frontier in the Amazon region.

These new oil frontiers include protected areas (such the Yasuní National Park) and indigenous territories in the central-south region of the Amazon. These regions contain extra heavy crude as in the remaining important reserves inside indigenous territories, for example in Pungarayacu and in other areas of the Kichwa peoples in the Napo region. There is also a desperate search for oil along the Ecuadorian coast.

Oil concessions in the Amazon in 2007 covered 5 million hectares; 4.3 million of them conceded to foreign companies. In 2011 these numbers doubled with the incorporation of 20 more oil blocks. In light of the re-election of Rafael Correa in 2013, the oil frontier can expect to be expanded to the south-east at the cost of many local complaints. Since 2007, Correa's has been the most extractivist government in the history of the country, in terms of oil and now also mining.

Today the belief still prevails, also inside the government, that oil and mineral resources are essential for the development of the country and for the satisfaction and provision of basic rights such as health and education. There has been no widespread and democratic reflection on the limits of the extractivist economy.

Threats to Yasuní

Some of the expected impacts should oil exploitation take place in Yasuní ITT are:

Waste Products

The oil industry admits that for every vertical well that is drilled 500 m3 of solid waste and between 2,500 to 3,000 m3 of liquid waste produced.

Production Water

Produced water is briny fluid trapped in the rock of oil reservoirs. It is by far the largest toxic byproduct

Produced water is briny fluid trapped in the rock of oil reservoirs. It is by far the largest toxic byproduct of the oil industry. If the ITT oil reserves contain 846 million barrels, then their exploitation would mean about 400 million m3 of oil production waters. The re-injection of all this water is impossible. These salty and toxic waters would end up inevitably in the Yasuní park itself.

Deforestation

Deforestation is one of the habitual effects of oil activities in the Amazon and some other regions in the world. It occurs while building roads, campsites, heliports, along the pipeline routes and other infrastructure needed for these activities. It has been estimated that every new road built impacts 100 metres of forest on either side, creating a border effect. Roads break the migration routes of the natural fauna, affect the distribution of flora and constitute a permanent threat to the peoples living in the area. However, the most significant cause of deforestation is the indirect deforestation associated with the building of roads for infrastructure maintenance and that brought on by the colonisation by settlers generated by the project itself.

In block 31, the Apaika and Nenke platforms are inside the Yasuní National Park. The project plans to build diverse oil facilities such as a Central Processing Facility (CPF), 30 km of pipelines, campsites, heliports, both permanent and temporal, transmission lines, roads, 14 wells and 2 platforms.

Climate effects

Oil activities produce ex situ and in situ emissions. The oil industry requires large quantities of fossil fuels. It is estimated that for every 10 barrels extracted, one is burned in the same place. The situation is worse when the oil is heavier (as in Yasuní) and when the well is at the end of its useful life. The heavy oil must be pumped and this requires energy. Finally, ex situ, burning ITT crude would generate 407 million tonnes of CO2.

These figures do not take into account the emissions from local direct and indirect deforestation, and the gas flaring. ITT oil exploitation would increase road building, colonisation, illegal activities such as logging and biopiracy, and it could promote the expansion of illicit crops.

Psychosocial impacts

In addition to pollution and environmental devastation, oil activities disrupt community life. There is evidence in other areas such as the Waorani's indigenous territory where these activities have generated alcoholism, prostitution and introduced different diseases (ranging from lethal diseases to mild ones such as obesity or malnutrition due to changes in eating habits).

ITT and block 31 are located inside Waorani territory, as well as the hunting grounds of other indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation. These are traditional hunter-gatherer societies that move throughout a large area inside the park's borders, sometimes reaching the oil blocks. Oil activities bring disease, impoverishment, conflicts and other social ills. The territorial occupation by oil companies is accompanied by the installation of military camps, bars, brothels, roads, small businesses from outsiders, etc. All of them provoke social and cultural conflicts for the native peoples.

The ITT Yasuní Initiative: an initiative for life

The Yasuní proposal for leaving oil underground evolved with the key strategic aim of confronting the oil development model head-on, simultaneously attacking its capacity to impose itself at the local level, and expanding critique to the national and international level.

From its beginnings it included the arguments and the struggles of the communities against oil policies and projects, allowing for the recognition of the peoples that have resisted, not only protecting their own territories but defending the planet as a whole.

At the national level, the initiative included a profound questioning of the extractivist model. At the international level it aimed to question the environmental injustices of the carbon markets and the neo-liberal policies regarding climate change that impose false 'green solutions'. The most direct way to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide is to leave fossil fuels in the ground.

Excerpted and adapted from: "The Yasuní – ITT initiative from a Political Economy and Political Ecology perspective", by Esperanza Martínez, in" Towards a Post-Oil Civilization", EJOLT Report No.: 06. The full report can be read at http://www.ejolt.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/130520_EJOLT6_Low2.pdf

index

- The unequal and perverse exchange between Nigeria and colonialist corporate powers: from fossil fuels to industrial oil palm plantations and REDD

Fossil fuels began to replace wood as an energy source in England in the 18th Century, a switch that went hand-in-hand with the so-called "industrial revolution". Consumption of fossil fuels was extensive already then and its implications were huge, not only in England but also far away, in Nigeria, Africa. There is a direct link between the increasing use of fossil fuel in that period, mainly coal to produce steam, with the fact that West Africa became a century later the global center of the palm oil industry.

In the 19th century, British merchants in search of business opportunities along the African coast were able to take advantage of the steam engine to become independent of wind and currents. With the steam engine, they got upriver in the Niger delta where the sailboats could not. At the same time, they found out that the palm oil that was very common in West Africa was a useful and even essential grease for the wheels of the steam engine as otherwise they would not be able to withstand the pressure and break. In spite of the resistance they faced from the coastal Nigerian merchants and chiefs, the British got considerable advantage compared with these merchants and chiefs who until then had controlled palm oil prices. By travelling up-river, the British also discovered that there was coal and other materials and goods to obtain. This motivated the colonizers to invest in a railroad system to bring these materials and goods to the coast. Besides palm oil, also coal mines started to feed England´s steam boats, trains and economy. (1)

Until the first half of the 20th century, West Africa was the main global producer of palm oil, with Nigeria the main producer country. At the same time as Indonesia and Malaysia overtook Nigeria as the world's largest producers of palm oil, in the 1960s, British-Dutch multinational Shell began large-scale exploitation of oil in the Niger Delta. The oil industry became both the largest industry of Nigeria and the most destructive to the communities of the Niger Delta that depend primarily on the forests, mangroves, rivers and estuaries for their farming and fishing livelihoods. The resistance struggles of the communities have been numerous and faced violence and oppression (see editorial about the struggle of Ken Saro-

have been numerous and faced violence and oppression (see editorial about the struggle of Ken Saro Wiwa). The devastating impacts have been increasingly recognized at the international level. UNEP (United Nations Environmental Program) for example investigated the environmental and public health impacts of the oil extraction with a focus on Ogoniland in 2011, at the request of the Nigeria government. Ogoni is a main area of oil extraction in the Niger Delta. The UN report found that “oil contamination in Ogoniland is widespread and severely impacting many components of the environment” and “the Ogoni people live with this pollution every day” (2).

Many transnational oil corporations, especially Shell, have made huge profits at the expense of the Nigerian people, and particularly the Ogoni. In January 2013, a Dutch court ruled that Shell should clean

up oil pollution in Ikot Ada Udo, compensate those affected and prevent further leaks from occurring. (3) It was a unique case where for the first time a Dutch multinational company had to stand trial in a Dutch court for the acts of one of its subsidiaries, Shell Nigeria operating outside the Netherlands. But many other communities are waiting for such a decision that acknowledges Shell’s responsibility for the devastation caused by the oil extraction and requires the company to pay at least for the clean-up given that many areas have been so devastated that restoration will be a process to take centuries if not more. For example, the villages of Oruma and Goi that suffer from exactly the same environmental destruction as the people in Ikot Ada Udo, but the court did not hold Shell liable in their cases. The Nigerian farmers and FOE-Netherlands announced they will appeal against this decision. (3) Meanwhile, Shell and other corporations continue to claim that responsibility for many oil spills is with the perpetrators of sabotage and theft. However, a recent Amnesty International report, based on six months of field study, confirmed that there is “no legitimate basis” for the company´s argument that most of the spills are caused by sabotage or theft. Moreover, Amnesty argues that if spills take place, “securing oil infrastructure against such acts is - to a substantial extent - the responsibility of the operator." (4).

While oil production continues, industrial oil palm plantations are expanding again in the country, an expansion spurred again, in an indirect way, by fossil fuels, basically because of the search for alternatives to these fuels by Northern countries while aiming to maintain their centralized and huge energy consumption. One of these alternatives are agrofuels and palm oil, the cheapest vegetable oil available now on the world market, which has been identified as a key ´raw material´ for the increasing demand for vegetable oils in the EU because of mandatory targets for “renewable energy” use by 2020. Companies from Asia, but also Europe and the USA have been grabbing land in Nigeria and in Africa for industrial oil palm plantations, plans and projects covering more than 4 million hectares have been announced by mid-2013.

In Nigeria, the main area of investment is Cross River State, in the Southeast, where the last remaining tropical forest area of Nigeria is located. It is there that the biggest palm oil company in the world, Wilmar - a Singapore-USA owned company – started some years ago to expand oil palm plantations on the lands of the Ibiae indigenous communities. The first area acquired by Wilmar, through its subsidiary Biase Plantations, is 5,5 thousand hectares, of which 3 thousand hectares is forest land while the remaining area are old oil palm plantations that are being replanted. The Calabar-based NGO RRDC has shown how this privatisation of land previously held by the state has resulted in human rights violations, environmental destruction, and the violation of municipal and federal laws and legislations, none of which has prevented the company from claiming its planting is adhering to RSPO principles and criteria. The new trend of increasing large-scale oil palm plantations by RSPO member Wilmar poses a particular threat to the future and survival of the indigenous Ibiae community. And Wilmar tends to expand more and more, with tens of thousands of hectares of oil plam plantations encroaching on forest and community land, as is happening in other African countries where Wilmar and other corporations are also expanding their oil palm plantations (5).

This rapid expansion of industrial plantations in Cross River State and neighbouring regions and countries brought representatives of organizations from Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Benin, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, DRC and Gabon, as well as from Indonesia, Europe and the Americas, together in

Coast, Cameroon, DRC and Gabon, as well as from Indonesia, Europe and the Americas, together in Calabar, Cross River State, to discuss this trend of expanding industrial oil palm plantations on the African continent and discuss common plans and activities. During four days of activities – 2-5 November 2013 - , they shared experiences, analysed the situation on the continent as well as learning from what came of the promises oil palm companies made when they established plantations in Indonesia, the main producer of palm oil worldwide. The participants reaffirmed the commitment to join efforts to halt the ongoing industrial oil palm monoculture expansion and continue the struggle to defend peoples' territories and economies. A declaration from the meeting was produced and can be accessed at http://wrm.org.uy/meetings-and-events/calabar-declaration/

Alongside oil palm expansion REDD+ projects are also threatening to encroach community land in Cross River State. These projects are being set up by the state and federal government as part of a so-called pilot programme on REDD, financed by UN agencies, through the UNREDD programme. Communities living in the forest areas targeted for these projects complain that they are not being informed, while their traditional activities are put at risk, based on what is happening in numerous other REDD+ projects around the world where communities lose control over their territories.

This brief overview shows a story of an unequal exchange, of "products" – palm oil, coal, oil, palm oil again, and most recently the invented commodity called "carbon credits". They all play a role in an historical process of profit-driven plundering by British, Dutch and other corporate interests of energy and other natural "resources" in Nigeria, aiming to increase corporate profits while creating more and more demands for an industrialized production and consumption model based on unsustainable use of fossil fuels. What makes the latest twists of the story even more perverse is the fact that while initially, Nigeria was merely a source of cheap fuel and energy for the European, especially the British industry, the forests and mangroves that survived the devastation from oil and oil palm extraction are appropriated to help "solve" the climate crisis that has resulted from this massive burning throughout the past two centuries of fossil fuels coal, oil and gas. The perversity lies in the fact that these supposedly carbon/saving REDD and tree planting projects are not solving this crisis, because they are false solutions. In addition to creating the illusion that the climate crisis is being tackled when in fact emissions are just moved from one place to another (6). They are creating more problems to the Nigerian people, as one more ingredient in a story of multiple violations in the course of extracting energy.

Sources: (1) based on a presentation of Andreas Malm from Lund University, Sweden, during EJOLT (www.ejolt.org) workshop in Nigeria, March 2013; (2) http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/OEA/UNEP_OEA_ES.pdf; (3) http://wrm.org.uy/articles-from-the-wrm-bulletin/section2/nigeria-dutch-court-condemns-shell-but-more-justice-is-needed/; (4) http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-24839324; (5) http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/oil_palm_in_africa/; (6) http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/10-things-communities-should-know-about-redd/

index

- Post-petroleum societies: For the defence of forests and peoples' rights, for harmony between human beings and nature

The first steps

International discussion around the impacts of oil industry activities gained particular relevance in the early 1990s, largely as a result of two significant events. The first was when local communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon filed a lawsuit in the United States against Texaco for the social and environmental impacts of its operations. The second was the murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa along with other activists in Nigeria. Before these two events, the Exxon Valdez oil spill of 1989 had received major news coverage, but it was viewed as an isolated incident and was only granted importance between it happened in Alaska.

What was happening in Ecuador and Nigeria was a reflection of what was taking place at the local level: communities had been taking action, for many years already, to fight back against the onslaught of oil companies, and were fully aware of the impacts of oil operations on peoples' rights and on the environment.

These two events also inspired the creation of the Oilwatch network in February 1996 in Quito, Ecuador. In different countries – Guatemala, Colombia, Brazil, Cameroon, Nigeria, Indonesia, Burma, Peru, Mexico, Ecuador – there was growing reflection on the need to halt the expansion of the oil frontier in fragile areas and indigenous territories.

All stages of oil industry activities cause impacts, local and global, social and environmental, from the first incursion into local communities by the public relations representatives of oil companies, to exploration, drilling, transportation and refining, to the burning of fossil fuels or the production of toxic agrochemicals and plastics. The loss of forests is one more of the consequences. In the case of Texaco's operations in Ecuador alone, it is estimated that over a million hectares were deforested, including the land cleared for seismic lines, drilling rigs, highways, camps and other facilities. Other countries face the same problem.

Efforts to stop the exploitation of oil reserves became an imperative for local organizations and social movements who were witnessing the devastation of their territories by fossil fuel extraction.

The first proposal was that of resistance. Different strategies began to be used, such as forcing out oil companies or preventing their entry, filing lawsuits, and linking opposition to oil drilling with other issues such as the defence of biodiversity, human rights, the external debt, the battle against the power of transnationals, and climate change. A life and death struggle had begun.

In Kyoto in 1997, Oilwatch and hundreds of other organizations called for a moratorium on oil, gas and coal exploration. In 2002, during the Rio+10 Summit, a moratorium on oil industry activities was Oilwatch's central proposal: "We cannot deny the mounting scientific evidence demonstrating that climate change is caused by the burning of fossil fuels. […] Oilwatch therefore declares a moratorium on oil activities. This moratorium can be promoted from government levels […] and from local community spheres, through the sovereign decision of the peoples and their resistance and struggle to keep their traditional territories from being opened up to new oil exploration." The moratorium could be exercised through the declaration of "untouchable" protected areas or oil-free zones.

An alternative needed to be built on the basis of energy sovereignty, understood as an opportunity for countries and peoples to exercise control over their space, their culture and their future, including control over the entire energy process, beginning with its acquisition and processing, based on clean,

decentralized, renewable, low-impact and diversified energy sources.

In 2004, in Malaysia, Oilwatch and Friends of the Earth, together with WRM, issued a joint declaration in which they stressed the need to halt extractive activities like mining and oil drilling in order to protect forests, biodiversity and the rights of indigenous peoples. But it was in June 2005 in Montecatini (first meeting of the Working Group on Protected Areas) and subsequently in December 2005 in Montreal (COP 11 of the Framework Convention on Climate Change and SBSTA 23 of the Convention on Biological Diversity) that the path to a post-civilization was clearly marked out in the Oilwatch Eco-Call. This call proposed linking all matters related to the conservation of biodiversity, soils and air, climate change and the rights of the peoples, particularly indigenous peoples, in a common strategy that would include leaving oil reserves underground. The first step could be taken in a specific location like Yasuní National Park in Ecuador. The road of resistance looked towards the horizon in the form of the Yasuní initiative.

Since that time, the Yasuní proposal has matured and become probably the most concrete proposal for moving towards a non-petroleum-based civilization. It represents the transition from rhetoric to practice; from the hypocrisy of climate negotiations to concrete solutions; from darkness to a new utopia for leftist movements that had run out of solutions; from disillusionment to hope for young people.

This is why the Yasuní proposal earned such a positive reception and endorsement from the international community as it became better known, as well as considerable support from some of the world's governments. But it was in Ecuador that the initiative achieved the greatest impact, to the point where 75% of Ecuadorians agreed on the need to protect what was left of Yasuní, which means leaving the crude oil in the ITT oilfield (Block 43) underground.

The Yasuní proposal, in Ecuador, was born with four objectives:

- Leaving 840 million barrels of oil untapped, which would prevent the burning of over 400 million tons of CO2.
- Protecting the territory of indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation.
- Protecting the area's forests, rivers and biodiversity.
- Taking the first step towards a post-petroleum Ecuador.

The proposal to not extract more oil, in Ecuador and the world, raises discussion around the problems associated with oil that looks beyond the market, technology, compensation, corruption of the sharing of profits. It means addressing the question, What kind of society do we want to be?

The Yasuní proposal and the defence of forests and peoples' rights

The relationship between hydrocarbon extraction and forests has several points of connection. One of these is, as mentioned earlier, the loss of forests due to direct or indirect deforestation in the areas around oil operations. But another is one of the false solutions for climate change, namely the REDD mechanism, which incorporates forests into the markets for carbon and other environmental services. REDD allows forests that have been protected by indigenous communities to be converted into carbon credits – in other words, licences to pollute. In practice, REDD is permitting the continued extraction and burning of oil.

This is why declaring areas like Yasuní as oil drilling-free zones not only prevents the consumption of more crude oil, but also frees forests from serving as providers of environmental services.

In addition to deforestation, hydrocarbon extraction is also a direct cause of human rights violations. To begin with, in order to pave the way for the advance of the oil frontier, the first thing that happens is that

community relations representatives arrive in local communities with no advance notice, arrogantly

disrespecting community decision-making processes. In most cases, communities simply find themselves faced with the presence of machinery ready to go to work. Once oil companies begin operations, they cause local pollution that seriously affects people's health, destroy the ecosystems that are a source of livelihood for local populations, rupture the social fabric and damage community relations. There are countless negative impacts that have been quite widely documented. Thus the proposal to leave the oil underground aims to bring an end to the rights violations suffered by local communities.

In addition, in the case of Ecuador, the Yasuní/ITT initiative also seeks to respect the will of the Tagaeri and Taromene peoples to live in voluntary isolation.

The Yasuní proposal, climate justice and new international relations

The indigenous peoples resisting the expansion of the oil frontier and defending their forests, lands and territories are in practice building post-petroleum societies, as well as helping humanity, since they are contributing to combating climate change.
Under the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, the industrialized countries of the North have an obligation to reduce pollution at the source. The countries of the South with forests, such as Ecuador, have the responsibility to protect them and to respect the rights of the peoples who live in them and take care of them, which means respecting the decision of communities who are opposed to the extraction of oil in their territories. .

The Yasuní proposal also represents the exercise of climate and environmental justice, since it implies social and environmental reparations for vulnerable peoples, the restitution of their rights, and the recovery of their territories for the reproduction of life. A post-petroleum society must consider reparation of the ecological debt generated by climate disasters and a commitment to non-repetition, as a form of justice.

When Ecuador launched the Yasuní-ITT initiative in 2007, one of its objectives was to bring an end to international relations of domination, plunder and environmental racism. The aim was for a small country to be recognized for its courage in foregoing the extraction of oil, and to be supported in this effort by international solidarity. International cooperation could make a radical shift, away from the creation of indebtedness, profiting from disaster, using the countries of the South as carbon sinks, military intervention, and the impunity of corporations from the North operating in the South.

The Yasuní proposal: Sumak Kawsay vs. capitalism

Because the highest stage of capitalism is rooted in petroleum, its economy and its technology, the institutions and foundations of the petroleum society must also be changed. This process must begin by taking away the primary fuel of capitalism: oil. We cannot wait for this change to take place at the level of consumption: we need to shut off the source.

The proposal of a post-petroleum society also helps to highlight the contradictions of capitalism and to question development. Contradictions like technology vs. nature, or the value of the use/transformation of nature vs. its intrinsic value – including oil, which has an intrinsic value where it is buried – must be resolved as we advance towards a post-petroleum society.

With regard to energy, today we see its manifestation – and our need for it – in terms of movement, heat or electricity. But from the perspective of different cultures and peoples, it is something else. Indigenous

peoples and peasant communities perceive energy from the point of view of good food, good health, and healthy territories. For traditional peoples, energy is a matter of time, space and relations. Energy is not scarce, nor is there an energy crisis, because energy is infinite in their territories. What could be happening is the theft of energy from their territories and the introduction of different energies. For

example, the extraction of the energy of petroleum, which is harmless underground, and its transformation into everything from gasoline for cars and electricity to toxic agrochemicals and plastic garbage; or the dispossession of the energy of the peoples through the introduction of ways of life of immediate gratification and violence, which break the bonds between humans and nature.

Oil industry activities are among the most destructive activities carried out by human beings. They entail drilling deep into the heart of the earth and opening fractures in the underground world, in addition to the destruction of all forms of life on the earth's surface. A petroleum-free society must rebuild sovereignty in terms of health, food, culture and technology as well as energy.

Sumak Kawsay, an Andean philosophy, signifies harmonious relations between human beings and nature. Many indigenous peoples around the world have this same principle, with other names. But the premise is that Sumak Kawsay must be pursued without oil.

Ivonne Yanez, Acción Ecológica/Oilwatch South America-Ecuador, sudamerica@oilwatch.org

index

PEOPLES IN ACTION

- African groups demand Obama stop pushing dirty energy through Power Africa

On November 2013, coinciding with the UN climate conference in Warsaw, 75 African groups from 18 countries sent a letter to President Obama concerning his Power Africa initiative that will give Africa more access to electrical power. However, the program is meant to benefit U.S. corporations and implies further extraction and exploitation of fossil fuels instead of bringing decentralized, truly clean, community-controlled renewable energy. The signatories of the letter reject these dirty fuel projects because of their devastating impacts on local health, communities, and the environment.

The letter was released as the world commemorated the anniversary of the murder of Nigerian activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was sentenced to death on November 10, 1995 by the ruling military junta for speaking out against Shell's devastating dirty energy exploits in Nigeria's Niger Delta.

See the full letter at: http://www.foe.org/news/archives/2013-11-75-african-groups-demand-obama-stop-pushing-dirty-en#sthash.lDdLMMoX.dpuf

index

- Ecuador: Demand for a popular consultation on Yasuní

In response to the government's decision to abandon the initiative to leave the oil in the Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini (ITT) block beneath Yasuní National Park untapped, and to begin drilling operations, a youth organization called YASunidos has launched a campaign to call for this decision be submitted to a popular consultation, as established by the constitution of Ecuador.

The campaign has met with strong support and given rise to a major mobilization aimed at collecting 600,000 signatures from Ecuadorian citizens in order to demand the popular consultation.

Leave the oil in the soil!

https://www.facebook.com/pages/Yasun%C3%AD-a-Consulta-Popular/714907461869771

index

index

- Actions in Africa against dirty energy - Calabar Declaration against the expansion of oil palm monocultures

The No REDD in Africa Network (NRAN) initiated the “Week of Action Against False Solutions”, from October 28 to November 4. The action, joined by the global convergence Reclaim Power! http://reclaimpower.net/, opposes the “dirty energy” and the companies who try to greenwash themselves with false solutions like REDD and other false solutions such as carbon trading, CDM, 'green economy', biodiversity offsets, CCS, geo-engineering and of course the big false solution- 'clean coal'.

Within the Week of Action, the organisation Justiça Ambiental hold a film screening and debate on dirty energy, REDD and other false solutions at Museum of Natural History (Museu) in Maputo, Mozambique.

Also, from November 1st - 5th, an International Strategy meeting organized by World Rainforest Movement (WRM), and hosted by Rainforest Resource and Development Centre (RRDC) was held in Cross River state, Nigeria (which is ground zero for REDD in Nigeria) to discuss the Impacts of Industrial oil palm expansion on the ecological and social integrity of Africa.http://reclaimpower.net/week-of-action-against-false-solutions

index

- Women of the Amazon defend the rainforest from the dangers of oil drilling

A group of indigenous women from the Amazon region succeeded in meeting with the president of Ecuador and members of the Ecuadorian parliament. After a long wait they were finally received, and handed over an official petition denouncing the expansion of the oil frontier in the Amazon rainforest, the lack of free, prior and informed consent, and the particular impacts of oil industry operations on women. However, there has been no concrete response to the petition, nor was there any official record of the meeting, which has led the women to believe that their presentation was not taken into account in the day’s agenda.

To counter the attempted invasion of indigenous territories by oil companies, the women have put forward an alternative proposal called “Kawsak Sacha” – “Living Forest” – aimed at collective preservation, conservation and coexistence with the Amazon rainforest, which they view as sacred territory and as the cultural heritage of its indigenous peoples.

Source: http://www.salvalaselva.org/noticias/5474/mujeres-amazonicas-defienden-la-selva-para-la-vida

index

RECOMMENDED

- Silence is Treason (Remembering Saro-Wiwa and other martyrs), http://nnimmo.blogspot.com/2013/11/silence-is-treason-remembering-saro_9.html#!/2013/11/silence-is-treason-remembering-saro_9.html

index

- "Bleeding Oil", a documentary about the ecological disaster in Nigeria caused by global oil corporations, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTjAGlYAJZA

index

- “ To cook a continent”, the oil industry in Africa, Nnimmo Bassey, http://www.homef.org/content/cook-continent

index

- The COP19 Guide to Corporate Lobbying. Climate crooks and the Polish government’s partners in crime, Corporate Europe Observatory and TNI, http://www.tni.org/sites/www.tni.org/files/download/cop19_guide_to_corporate_lobbying-with_references.pdf

index

- “ ¿Por qué luchar contra el fracking?” (Why fight against fracking?), a video in Spanish with English and French subtitles, http://www.argentinalibredefracking.org/

index

- “ Eucalyptus Plantations for Energy: A Case Study of Suzano’s plantations for wood pellet exports in the Baixo Parnaíba region, Maranhão, Brazil” , http://wrm.org.uy/books-and-briefings/eucalyptus-plantations-for -energy-a-case-study-of-suzanos-plantations-for-wood-pellet-exports-in-the-baixo-parnaiba-region-maranhao-brazil/, by WRM, part of the Biofuelwatch report “Biomass: The Chain of Destruction”, http://wrm.org.uy/other-relevant-information/biomass-the-chain-of-destruction/

index