
Every day should be Earth Day

This month, on April 22, Earth Day was celebrated around the world. Earth Day was founded in the 1970s by environmental activists concerned about the effects of pollution and environmental degradation on biodiversity and ultimately the survival of the planet. It is a day aimed at raising public awareness of these issues.

There is no doubt that since the 1970s, the subject of the environment has decisively entered public debate, even at the level of national governments and their structures: What country today does not have a Ministry of Environment? Various international summits and conferences addressing the environment, such as those in Stockholm (1972), Rio de Janeiro (1992) and Johannesburg (2002) have been and continue to be organized, including the Rio+20 conference scheduled for next year.

Nevertheless, it has also become clear that despite all the talk about “sustainability”, awareness of the need to take care of the planet has still not been translated into concrete, structural solutions. This is especially true when it comes to the countries that contribute most to pollution and the exploitation of natural resources. In its analysis of the most recent international negotiations on measures to combat climate change, the GenderCC-Women for Climate Justice network writes from Bangkok, Thailand that “the commitments of developed countries continue to evade their historical responsibility” and condemns the “heavy reliance on false and risky solutions.”

In this month’s bulletin we highlight, once again, a number of these false solutions that are being increasingly implemented around the planet and the ways in which they cause problems for local communities. In this case, we focus specifically on a REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) project in southern Mexico and CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) projects and dams in India. We also look at the attempts to include a perverse new mechanism involving so-called “forests in exhaustion” in international climate change negotiations. The goal behind this mechanism is to promote even further expansion of large-scale monoculture tree plantations, which will lead to even more environmental conflicts in the future.

As pointed out above by GenderCC, the governments that contribute most to environmental degradation, and therefore have the greatest responsibility to put awareness of environmental problems into practice, are still failing to do so. They could and should learn a great deal from the initiatives undertaken by the people through various organizations and movements. In this regard, in this bulletin we want to particularly stress the ever more important role being played by women.

We present as an example the women of the Landless Rural Workers Movement in Brazil who have occupied an area of eucalyptus plantations that exclusively served the uncontrolled consumption of paper by a small minority of the population of Planet Earth, something that these women consider to be unjust and unacceptable. On this land formerly used to grow eucalyptus trees, they have planted food crops needed by the people excluded from mass consumption societies. We should mention that this month is also the month of the International Day of Peasant Struggle, April 17. In the year 2011, there are still countless peasant farmers around the world who do not have access to land of their own, and the false climate solutions mentioned above often aggravate the unfair distribution of

land ownership, for instance, by promoting large-scale monoculture plantations for the production of agrofuels.

We also give the floor to the Asian Rural Women's Coalition, which condemns falsely labelled "clean" energies like nuclear energy, the subject of considerable debate since the recent disaster in Japan. The Coalition highlights the fact that nuclear power plants, which continue to spread throughout Asia, are built in rural areas or on the outskirts of capital cities, "putting the risks and expenses on the lives of people in those areas." In addition, they stress, the power generated by nuclear plants "is used to promote industrial and economic growth, the materialistic lifestyle of some people and the hegemonic power in the world, which has been maintained at the expense of people in rural areas."

Every day of the year should be Earth Day. Every day, women and men around the world should be increasingly aware of and alarmed by the situation of crisis and danger we are facing. This awareness is crucial in order to confront the false solutions promoted by corporations and governments in the most highly polluting countries, and to prevent their deadly consequences.