
[International Women's Day 2007: Struggling for food sovereignty](#)

By the World Rainforest Movement - March 2007.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, women's struggles for emancipation took on greater visibility. They were times of social and political transformations and women started to mobilize for their rights, and among these, for their right to vote. In 1911, the first International Women's Day was celebrated and in 1975, the United Nations Assembly formally recognized 8 March as International Women's Day.

Since then women have become increasingly aware, taking part in numerous social struggles and providing a different viewpoint, a different kind of energy. Women want to cease being victims and become actors in their history and in the history of humanity, that is facing the increasingly ferocious advance of large enterprises marketing from oxygen to genes.

Last year we highlighted the action of two thousand Brazilian women farmers belonging to *Via Campesina* who, in commemoration of International Women's Day, destroyed millions of eucalyptus saplings at Aracruz Celulose's tree nursery near the city of Porto Alegre. The struggle against the "green desert," -referring to the advance of monoculture eucalyptus plantations for pulp production- is a struggle against environmental destruction, unemployment and poverty in rural areas. Women are well aware, as they have personally suffered from it, that the occupation of land by large enterprises implies the destruction of peasant agriculture and as they mainly work in food production and animal breeding, they are the first to be excluded.

This year and again striking the trail, nearly 1,300 women from *Via Campesina* occupied four properties belonging to the Aracruz, Votorantim, Stora Enso y Boise pulp companies in the State of Rio Grande do Sul on the morning of 6 March in the framework of the Women of *Via Campesina*'s National Day of Struggle. The women marched under the slogan of "Peasant women struggling for food sovereignty and against agro-business." The eucalyptus plantations belonging to the four companies cover over 200,000 hectares in the State of Rio Grande do Sul. These lands could provide a home for 8,000 families and give them work, income and a decent life in the rural area.

On an international level, the forum for food sovereignty held recently in Mali was also a step forward in this respect. A declaration by the women present at the Forum points states that "We have met at Selingué (Mali) in the framework of Nyéléni 2007 to participate in the construction of a new right: the right to food sovereignty."

" Women, who throughout history have been the creators of knowledge about food and agriculture, who still produce up to 80% of the food in the world's poorest countries and are today the principal guardians of biodiversity and agricultural seeds, are particularly affected by neo-liberal and sexist policies. We suffer the dramatic consequences of these policies: poverty, inadequate access to resources, patents on living organisms, rural exodus and forced migration, war and all forms of physical and sexual violence. Monocultures, including those dedicated to agrofuels, and the widespread use of chemicals and genetically-modified organisms have a harmful effect on the

environment and on human health, particularly reproductive health." And they add "We are mobilized. We are fighting for access to land, to territory, to water and to seeds."

On this symbolic International Women's Day and from the standpoint of our defense of forests and resistance to the advance of monoculture tree plantations that take over land and sovereignty and place future life at stake, we join women's struggles to find new productive formulas, new socio-economic values that will enable us, as human beings, to recover our sense of belonging to nature and to treat nature with due care. In the patriarchal world that has marched to the sound of war, perhaps it is time to let women's imagination flow in the hope that it can change the course of events. That it can provide an input to the search for the principles of respect, equality, justice, solidarity, peace and freedom.