
[Why are women fighting against extractivism and climate change?](#)

It is obvious that capitalism feeds on and is sustained by the exploitation of workers, women, indigenous peoples and nature. And, while it was believed that women's bodies were the last frontier of capitalism, we now see that the borders have expanded towards other areas: the functions, cycles, elements and structures of the natural world. Photosynthesis, the carbon cycle, the production of water, the creation of biodiversity and other processes that recreate life on the planet are now commodities that can be abstracted, appropriated, marketed and even turned into financial investment products.

In practice, just as women have been subjugated by capital, today nature has also been pressed into servitude to permit seemingly endless accumulation. Just as women supposedly know and should 'love' and must therefore *obligatorily* take responsibility for the care of the home, the elderly, the sick and children (without pay, because it is not a job, it is something inherent to them), Mother Nature provides us with environmental 'services' because she 'has always done it' and it is inherent to her.

Neither of these suppositions is true. On one hand, the love a person may feel cannot be used as a justification to turn her into a domestic slave or a breeder of human beings. Similarly, the gifts of nature cannot be used as a source of 'services', formerly referred to more commonly as 'natural capital'. This change in terminology is not insignificant, because it represents the premise that nature has goods and offers services, and reflects a high degree of abstraction, since it is no longer An Environmental Capital, but rather infinite commodities that can contribute to the growth of monetary and financial capital.

Capitalism depends not only on the –unpaid– domestic labour of women, but also on the millions of poorly paid women who join the labour market; it is almost An endless Human Capital. Governments tend to promote programmes for women entrepreneurs who work *at home* so that, in practice, they neither neglect their 'obligations' in the home nor do they need to access social security. In the Amazon, for example, the oil companies need women to take care of the home while the men go out and work in oil industry activities; or they need women to cook and do laundry in the work camps; or they need women sex workers in the areas near the oil industry operations. In Ecuador, the authorities proudly point to their promotion of projects sustained by women, such as those created to feed the hordes of oil industry workers who invade their territories to clear the forests and conduct seismic surveys. However, these jobs have turned the women of the region into the servants of oil capital. The same thing is happening with nature. The 'environmental services' market appropriates the functions of nature and turns them into a form of *work*.

This is the case with the REDD+ and REDD++ mechanisms (1), and projects of this type, which represent a double opportunity for profits: on one hand, governments, companies and banks buy or sell environmental services (such as the carbon cycle), appropriating the work of nature, and on the other hand, they have the communities who *work* like any other stock of *cheap* labour, taking care of their commodities and becoming part of the global market. In the latter case, it is also women who

play an important role when they find themselves deprived of their autonomy and creativity.

For example, in Ecuador, women and nature both suffer and are subjected to this double subjugation. The over-exploitation of women's work is combined with the criminalization of women who have an abortion; nature, contaminated and deteriorated, is fenced in, its rivers are dammed, and it is turned into a supplier of ecosystem goods and services. Both are placed at the service of the new model of production and knowledge. This capitalist modernization plan is creating new types of women, who are less emancipated, and new kinds of nature, which are less free.

Through discipline, just as they have done with women who want to be in control of their own future, they attempt to "control nature, tame it, live in harmony with it but know how to control its extremes or otherwise continue to be its victims" (2). Nothing has changed in the conception of modernization in over 300 years.

In spite of this, both women and nature are fighting back. In fact, it is women who have shown the most forceful resistance against the entry into their territories of oil, mining and environmental services companies. They fight in their homes when their husbands want jobs with the oil company, they fight in the communities because they are opposed to REDD projects, they fight in the cities for democracy. Women play a key role in the resistance against the extractive model, and in the anti-capitalist process of change. At the same time, nature is manifesting its fierce resistance through climate chaos, floods, droughts, etc. We need to enter into a dialogue with it and listen to its message.

An example of organization and resistance is that of the women in Ecuador, where a meeting of women fighting against mining and oil operations was held in October 2014. This meeting resulted in the Declaration of the Meeting of Women against Extractivism and Climate Change, which states:

"We do not want the development alternatives that have signified the extinction of cultures and peoples; this is a development of death, of destruction, based on exploitation, primarily of oil and minerals. This development has no future. We know this because we have already lived with it for more than 500 years. We have the alternative to this kind of development.

This is why we call for:

- the recovery of food sovereignty
- the recovery of water sovereignty
- the recovery of energy sovereignty, in other words,
- the recovery of Mother Earth as the source of nourishment for our bodies, for our people
- production aimed at generating healthy food for Living Well.

This is why we are fighting for the minerals to be left underground, and for the oil of the Amazon to be left untapped. These are the real solutions for climate change and a way to conserve our biodiversity, which is our true wealth" (3).

There are many examples like these. Women joining together, building solidarity, and developing creative and courageous forms of struggle and resistance. It is time for the next UN climate negotiations to be feminized!

Ivonne Yanez, Acción Ecológica, Ecuador

Email: ivonne@accionecologica.org

(1) For more information on the problems with REDD, see: <http://www.accionecologica.org/servicios-ambientes/documentos-de-posicion-de-a-e/1782-posicionsociobosque>

(2) Rafael Correa, *Enlace Ciudadano* 350, 30/11/2013

(3) <http://territoriodefeminismos.org/2014/10/15/encuentro-de-mujeres-frente-al-extractivismo-y-al-cambio-climatico/>