
[The multiple challenges for popular resistance and mobilization in defence of forests](#)

When a new year begins, it is quite common for people to express their wishes and hopes for a better world. Here at WRM, we are wishing for a year in which forests begin to be preserved and the communities who depend on them can live freely within their territories, as one step towards a more just world. However, when we take a look around at the world we are living in today, it is clear that enormous challenges lie ahead. For example, what can we do to strengthen popular resistance and mobilization in order to stop the destruction of forests?

This is an especially pertinent point if we consider the results of the last United Nations Climate Conference in Peru this past December. Summing up those results, we could say that the pace at which the oil, mining, oil palm plantations and logging industries are advancing into the Peruvian Amazon rainforest is much faster and stronger than the pace at which the governments who gathered in Lima are advancing towards reaching an agreement on climate change in Paris this year. This new agreement should include measures that are capable of confronting the extreme gravity of the global climate crisis. That means drastic and mandatory reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, in accordance with the historical responsibility of each country. Only this would be sufficient to ensure at least some possibility that the peoples of the world, and especially the most vulnerable, will not need to face uncontrollable climate change impacts in the near future.

The lack of will shown by the conference participants to reach an agreement was one of the main reasons for which thousands of people gathered on the streets of Lima to take part in the Global March in Defence of Mother Earth during the conference. Although we know that we make up the majority of the world, in terms of peoples affected by the current production model responsible for the climate crisis, working together in the organization, mobilization and resistance to this model continues to be a major challenge. Practically all of the governments around us, for different reasons, defend the continued expropriation and destruction of forests in order to feed this large-scale, globalized, extractivist and “developmentalist” model of production, dominated by financial capital and transnational corporations. Together, these actors do everything possible to prevent us from mobilizing. On the contrary, they want us to become obedient consumers of the multinationals’ products.

If the people of the world really had the possibility of going to Lima and other places where our governments discuss the major issues that affect humankind, the number of people participating in a March like the one mentioned above would be much greater. But for now, most of the mobilizations and protests in defence of forests and against the plunder of people’s territories take place within the territories of the communities affected. They happen in places where one or several communities suffer serious threats of losing their territory and, as a consequence, their source of sustenance and livelihood. Very often, these thousands of local mobilizations and actions take place with no visibility or support. But they are growing in number day by day, as large-scale projects expand into the forests and territories of local communities, including dams, industrial monoculture plantations (see the articles from Laos, Indonesia and Brazil in this bulletin), mining and oil drilling (see WRM Bulletin [167](#) and [196](#)), and also REDD+ projects (see “[Ten things communities should know about REDD](#)”), a

new means of appropriating the territories of communities who depend on forests. Despite the repression and criminalization of protests, there are communities with incredible stories of victories, where unity and determination succeed in overcoming the political and repressive power of a transnational corporations and their web of influence (see the article on Suzano in Brazil in this bulletin). Nevertheless, the acts of repression, intimidation and cooptation by companies and governments speak much louder, and are often able to topple the resistance of communities.

In addition to the challenge of continuing to support local struggles in all of the countries with tropical forests in Asia, Africa and Latin America, particularly those with little or no support, there are perhaps two other major challenges that it is worth keeping in mind as this new year begins.

The first is to achieve greater interconnection among the thousands of local struggles, with the goal of strengthening them, forming networks, interlinkages, joint political awareness-raising activities in order to understand what is behind the destruction and expulsion of which we are all victims. These interconnections, at all levels, are important because they create larger movements, capable of not only supporting local resistance but also of disturbing governments and corporations who merely want to maintain or continue imposing their destructive policies and projects on the peoples' territories. Experiences with these kinds of interconnections demonstrate how they enrich and stimulate those who participate in them and promote mutual solidarity by placing value on the struggle and participation of each community. Also important are the initiatives emerging in various places to build networks and larger resistance movements together with communities who have still not been affected by destructive projects and still have their forests, their territories, but run the risk of being expelled and criminalized.

The second challenge involves creating another kind of resistance that is almost non-existent today: that of beginning to say "no" to so many products, and to the corporations who are behind these products that lead to the expulsion of communities from their territories and the destruction of the forests, which in turn further intensifies the climate crisis. For example, products like tropical wood and minerals, paper and cosmetics, palm oil and soy oil, shrimp and fuels. There are so many products that result from destructive activities in some faraway country, like the extraction of minerals, oil and tropical timber, large-scale industrial monoculture plantations, and shrimp farming. "Green labels" like those granted to tree plantations by the FSC and RSPO (see the article on Guatemala in this bulletin and WRM Bulletin [201](#)) have already been proven incapable of ending the destruction of forests or defending the territories of local communities. Instead, these labels serve as "passports" for companies to further consolidate their operations where they are already located and to expand their plantations into new regions or countries, as well as to tap into new consumer markets.

Therefore, the challenge is to create something different, a resistance that is in tune with the struggles in different territories, knowing that there will always be opposition from governments and corporations, as well as certain NGOs. For example, a call to organize a boycott on the markets with the largest consumption of forest products, including the corporations behind these products, is considered "unjust" because it would negatively affect the exporting country and its own population, or "unrealistic" unless consumers are offered an alternative. But we know that the profits from the export of raw materials from countries with tropical forests scarcely benefit the population of these countries, while the means of production and territories of these populations, which are fundamental for their way of life, are destroyed. We also know that the consumption of many globalized products, such as tropical wood, which is primarily used in luxury goods, is totally unnecessary and does not impact on the "well-being" of the population as a whole.

It is clear that the defence of forests or of “Mother Earth”, as in the case of the Global March in Lima, is an urgent task that entails multiple challenges. There is a need for popular resistance and mobilization that is not limited to forest regions or to just a few protests, because otherwise, the forests are unlikely to survive. There is a need for creative ideas and bold proposals.