



WORLD MARCH OF WOMEN THIRD INTERNATIONAL ACTION

The common good and public services

The **common good** describes specific "goods" that are shared by and beneficial for all (or for most) members of a given community, such as the basic requirements for living with dignity: food, water, land, housing, knowledge and **public services** (education, health, energy, etc).

Public services as private profit-making enterprises

Public services – the services that meet the basic needs and rights of a population, such as housing, gas and electricity, sanitation and waste management, education and health services, public transport, telecommunications, drinkable water – should, by definition, be of quality, and available and affordable to all, here and now, regardless of class, caste, gender or financial means. Instead, they have increasingly been relocated from the public (State) to the private sphere, with the result that those who can't afford them are not able to benefit from them. Moreover, public services are structured around an urban model, resulting in better access for those living in cities and access that is very limited for those in rural areas.

The privatisation of these public services reached a peak in the 1980s – the era of Ronald Reagan in the United States, Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, military dictatorships in much of Latin America, etc – a decade in which free market, neoliberal politics took centre stage and market competition was entrusted to regulate demand, supply and 'fair' prices. What was once public was sold to the highest bidder and State responsibility for meeting the basic needs and rights of its citizens was radically reduced.

The consequences have been drastic. Access to health and education services, for example, has become dependent on family income in many countries around the world – both in the North and the South – through the imposition of neoliberal or Structural Adjustment Policies. Access to energy also continues to be very unequal, with around 75% of the population in Africa and 60% of the population in South Asia without access to electric energy, while soaring household gas and electricity bills in 2008 in Europe – as a result of market price fixing and management based on profit rather than rights – has significantly increased the danger that household energy becomes unaffordable for large segments of society. In many parts of the world, populations continue to be dependent on wood for cooking and heat: in Brazil, for example, nearly 23 million people use wood fires to cook on, the majority of whom live in rural areas.

Water services are no longer organised according to criteria based on 'the right to drinkable water' or the health of a population, and instead are commercialised by transnational companies whose priority is profit. The recent imposition of bottled water as a consumer habit, or as the only way of having access to clean, drinkable water is an emblematic example of the invasion of the capitalist logic on our basic needs and rights.

The privatisation of the environment

The environment is a common good; it is not an inexhaustible resource to be used for profit by companies and States. But the capitalist system is based on the extreme exploitation of nature and natural resources, reducing them – through privatisations and control by force – to mere commodities to be bought or sold.



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The earth is privatised when land becomes private property and is transformed into merchandise. Rural and indigenous people are driven out and no longer have land on which to plant. Moreover, fences impede access to communal land which has traditionally been used as pasture for livestock, or for harvesting fruit, seeds, firewood, and medicinal plants.

Water is privatised when farmers fence in reservoirs and block women's access to them; when sources of water dry up or are contaminated due to intensive or monoculture agricultural production; when rivers are held back by dams to produce energy that brings little benefit to the local population. Seas and marshlands are privatised when they are taken over by industrial fishing and intensive breeding of prawns and mussels – leaving the artisan fishers and shellfish pickers without their source of income – or when land is reclaimed from the water in order to expand industrial areas.

Biodiversity is privatised by patenting laws that are imposed by free trade agreements and when the reproductive capacity of seeds is reduced and privatised by GM (Genetically Modified) technology.

The agriculture that sustains this model of environmental privatisation and commercialisation is founded on the monoculture production of crops on vast stretches of land, extensive use of fertilisers and poisons and the use of heavy machinery. This production model has a significant impact on nature, such as the desertification of areas used in monoculture production (for example eucalyptus); as well as using large quantities of petroleum at all stages, including in the production of fertilisers, poisons, etc.

The recent food, energy, financial, environmental crises demonstrate the failure of these capitalist agricultural production and distribution models, and reveal that it is the most vulnerable – poor women, children, the elderly – who feel their impacts most strongly. The majority of governments and multilateral institutions (United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Bank) advocate palliative solutions. These solutions depend strongly on the market: alliances with companies, an increase in commerce, and an end to import tax barriers. In other words, the implementation of the same measures that have caused the problem in the first place. We urgently need to redefine patterns of production and consumption of goods, food and energy.

Worldwide, there are a large number of situations that have provoked conflicts related to environmental issues, such as: the rubbish war in Naples, conflicts over diamond mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the criminal manner in which the United States government has dealt with hurricane Katrina victims, and the appropriation of areas devastated by the tsunami by hotel businesses. These situations reveal and explain the market logic imposed on populations. At the same time, they make visible the fact that in many situations poor populations have been able to affirm themselves as political subjects, as was the case with the struggle against the privatisation of water in Cochabamba, Bolivia in 2001.

Fossil fuel consumption and false solutions

The consumption of fossil fuel in the world is very unequal. The United States consumes 25% of the crude petroleum extracted in the world. The American army alone, for example,



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consumes as much as Sweden. Half of all the energy consumed in the world is devoured by 15% of the population. The production and use of cars – stimulated by the automobile and petroleum industries (controlled by four large transnational corporations: ExxonMobil, Chevron, Shell and BP) – is responsible for the greater part of this half. In rich countries, there are 580 vehicles for every 1000 inhabitants; in the poor countries, there are ten.

Even the food production, distribution and commercialisation chains are organised around high levels of energy consumption: the expulsion of people from rural areas by agribusiness increases the distance between food and its final consumer. A great amount of energy is wasted, especially by the big supermarket chains, first to centralise and stock huge quantities of food, and then to distribute it to different regions.

Governments that do not want to challenge the production and consumption model seek palliative solutions that are able to generate more business, such as necrofuel¹ – agrodiesel or ethanol – that is extracted from plants. Its growing use has resulted in the occupation of vast swathes of land by monoculture production of crops that are used to feed cars. Several studies have demonstrated that, if current methods of cultivation and processing are maintained, more fossil energy (petroleum) will be used to produce the energetic equivalent in necrofuel. The serious problems that this production model provokes become more acute with climate change and an increase in the price of foodstuffs.

The emission and concentration of greenhouse gases has increased significantly due to the burning of petroleum, mineral charcoal, and natural gas, as well as the burning of forests and decomposition of vegetation in huge hydroelectric plants lakes. This causes a greater retention of heat on earth and, in consequence, higher temperatures. This heating causes desertification in some areas and an increase in rainfall and floods in others, besides the increase in ocean levels that is leading to the flooding of coastal cities and islands. All these situations result in the loss of agriculture land for farmers, an increase in migration, the destruction of infrastructure such as bridges and houses, and an increase in death and sickness (such as tropical diseases and those transmitted by water). There are those who argue that climate change affects everyone equally due to its global nature, but – in reality – those who suffer the most are poor, excluded populations, i.e. those who contribute the least to climate change due to their much lower levels of consumption.

Food sovereignty

The negative effects of climate change on agriculture, as well as the concentration of food production control in the hands of a small number of companies (and the resulting destruction of local, small-scale, agriculture) and financial speculation have resulted in a dramatic increase in food prices, intensified by the increase in the price of petrol and the competition between producing food and producing necrofuel.

In 1996 it was estimated that there were 830 million people suffering from hunger or starvation in the world. In this same year, during the United Nations World Food Summit, governments committed themselves to diminish this number by half by the year 2015.

¹ The term used by governments and business is 'biofuel', thus linking fuel produced from plants to life (bio = life in Latin), whereas those who consider this fuel to be a false solution to climate change use the term 'necrofuel', thus linking fuel produced from plants to death (necro = death in Latin)



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Present estimates reveal that today there are 1.2 billion people suffering from hunger. One of the causal factors of this situation is the change in the model of food production: until 1960 the majority of countries were self-sufficient in this kind of production, whereas today 70% of the countries in the southern hemisphere import food. The average price in dollars of the principal grains – wheat, corn, rice, and soya – doubled in the international market between the 2006 and 2008 harvests.

At an international level, the World March of Women organised its reflections and actions around food sovereignty at the Nyéléni International Forum, organised together with Via Campesina, Friends of the Earth International, among others. We participated in Nyéléni as a feminist movement and contributed to the expression of women as political subjects, establishing alliances among women from different movements, organisations and walks of life (farmers, fisherwomen, migrants, etc). For the women who participated in Nyéléni, the most important theme debated was women's access to land, water and seeds, i.e. to their territory, and the affirmation of their contribution and knowledge in food production, preparation and distribution. As the Nyéléni Declaration reminds us, food security (the right of peoples to sufficient, healthy food, however it is produced) is a very different concept to that of food sovereignty, as defined by female and male producers and consumers of food: "Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations" (Nyéléni Declaration, February 2007).

Women and feminism in the struggle against the commodification of the environment and the privatisation of public services

Conflicts related to environmental issues or to the struggle for access to good-quality public services mobilise women because of our socially constructed position in society. We are primarily responsible for feeding and educating our families, providing water, caring for the sick, fetching firewood or ensuring there is energy available for the household. Women's time is considered – by the patriarchal and capitalist systems – to be unlimited and inexhaustible. State services are privatised and those who do not have access to the market due to financial limitations have to rely on public services of very poor quality which increase women's time burdens exponentially – time spent in queues for food or water, time spent educating children when they are badly taught in schools, time spent waiting for medical services for the young and old, etc. We want to share this work with men and, at the same time, change the conditions in which it is being carried out.

There are feminists who are radically critical of the hegemonic development model. They propose the substitution of the dominant paradigm of development (marked by integration into the capitalist system and the market society) with a paradigm focused on the sustainability of human life, understood "as the dynamic and harmonic relationship between humanity and nature and among human beings".

In the World March of Women this criticism is expressed in the questioning of the commodification of relations among people, of people with their bodies, and of people with the environment. We not only denounce the most obvious aspects of the sale of women's bodies – sexual trafficking and tourism and the imposition of a beauty standard bought through plastic surgery – but we also question the excess medicalisation of natural



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processes such as menstruation and menopause, as expressions of the commodification of the environment. Our reflection regarding the relationship with nature is expressed in our criticism of seed privatisation – through restrictive laws or GM technology – and the carbon market that converts air contamination in a production factor negotiable in the financial market.

Our challenge is to bring together rural and urban women's struggles for common goods and public services – food sovereignty, access to public services, the protection of nature, against privatisation of life, etc – with a view to strengthening the links between women and raising awareness of common and unique problems in each environment.

In the struggle for common goods and access to public services we demand:

- The promotion of alternative clean energy sources (bio-digesters, solar and wind energy...) and the rejection of nuclear energy, as well as the democratisation, decentralisation and public management of energy in ways that will guarantee the rights of peoples, including those of indigenous peoples;
- Universal access to drinkable water and basic sanitation, as well as to public services of quality (health, education, public transport, etc.), provided by the State as the guarantor of basic needs and rights;
- Agrarian reform and promotion of agro-ecology (organic agriculture, etc) – in opposition to the privatisation of the environment - and the abolishment of all barriers preventing rural communities from saving / preserving and exchanging seeds amongst themselves, their countries and continents;
- Punishment for polluting industrial countries and transnational companies responsible for the contamination and destruction of our environment and for changes in the food chain, as well as immediate measures to stop this situation;
- Reparation of the ecological debt owed by industrialised countries, most of which are in the North, to peoples in the South. This debt is the result of the gradual appropriation and looting of natural resources and abusive appropriation of communal spaces such as the atmosphere or the oceans, which has created numerous socio-environmental problems at local levels;
- Support for countries where the consequences of climate change and intensive, chemical based agriculture have increased the effects of natural disasters.

And we commit ourselves to:

- Affirm the principles of, and strengthen the struggle for, food sovereignty;
- Deepen our analysis of the access and consumption of energy;
- Establish and strengthen links among urban and rural women through direct purchase experiences, fairs and collective food preparation and distribution. Exchange knowledge and ensure that the “urban point of view” is not privileged



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with regards to analysis and practice. Struggle for a change in eating habits, from rubbish, low-quality imported foodstuffs, to locally produced, healthy foodstuffs. Denounce the hegemony of the agro-business industry and of the big supermarket chains in food distribution;

- Identify and denounce transnationals that cause harm to, and loss of, food and energy sovereignty;
- Denounce market solutions to climate change, such as the clean development mechanism, joint implementation and emissions trading schemes (the three main pillars of the Kyoto agreement);
- Hold the peoples in the North accountable for their consumption and lifestyle and to struggle for changes in consumption and production models, be they of goods, food or energy. Raise awareness of the need to reduce the demand in the North for resources from the South.