

Position Paper: Climate change and agrofuels

Friday 5 December 2014, by [La Via Campesina](#) (Date first published: 3 December 2014).

Climate change and agrofuels

Position Paper of La Vía Campesina

Environmental and Climate Justice Now!

We continue organizing, mobilizing, and building alternatives to redress the climate crisis and defend Mother Earth.

We, La Vía Campesina, indigenous people, small farmers, youth, migrants, rural workers, agricultural day laborers, fisherfolk, artisans, alongside our allies in the struggle for profound social transformations, are coming together in Lima for the COP 20 to reiterate once again our commitment to feeding the people of the world, to organizing, mobilizing, struggling and building alternatives that cool down the planet, not just for our own benefit but for all those who share Mother Earth.

Very recently, civil society witnessed again how the people of the world continue defending ourselves and rejecting the false solutions of capital and its institutions who claim to take us into account. With 2014 being International Year of Family Farming, the World Bank and its allies in the United Nations (UN) tried selling the world what they termed “Climate-Smart Agriculture” as some sort of new product that would put the brakes on the climate crisis once and for all. However, on the streets of New York and within the Climate Summit itself, we unmasked this fallacy and informed public opinion what “Climate-Smart Agriculture” is all about: more industrial agriculture, more World Bank financing and support for the capital of the few, more contamination and plundering of natural resources, more exploitation of lands, territories, peoples and workers. Above all else, it is part of the same green economy proposal based on less justice and less ecology.

In the United States of Sandy (2012) and Katrina (2005) – where the poor suffer most the intensification of each hurricane, flood, drought, and forest fire – we added our voice as organized small farmers, blacks, indigenous, migrants, fisherfolk, women and youth to the largest street demonstrations in the history of climate change. There, once again, we demanded: Environmental and Climate Justice Now!

Before New York, we were in Venezuela for the Social PreCOP Meetings of 2014. There, we contributed to the Margarita Declaration which was later submitted to government representatives from 40 nations, including the countries that make up the Bolivarian Alternative for the People of the Americas (ALBA). Those countries that share our perspective will be taking the PreCOP message to the formal Conference of the Parts (COP 20) in Lima, Peru, and will be supported in the streets by our Peruvian organizations and their local, national, regional, and international allies.

We will be mobilized on the streets of Lima to participate in the People’s Summit on Climate Change, raising our voices as we did in Rio (2012), Durban (2011), and Cancun (2010), and will demand that as part of the preparations of a draft for the first binding agreement since Kyoto – to be signed in December 2015 during the COP 21 in Paris, France – that all signatory states fulfill their

commitments and promises to reduce carbon emissions and global warming to 2 degrees, as has been recommended by the scientific community in order to avoid a climate debacle of catastrophic proportions.

Summits come and summits go, each with its own historical weight and significance, while we in La Vía Campesina continue to build the social base necessary to achieve our principal demand – food sovereignty, the recognition and protection of our people, our lands, our territories, and an end to all attempts at privatizing humanity's commons. In addition, we make special mention here of the increase in forced migrations caused by the climate crisis. If there is one thing that truly symbolizes the human tragedy of climate change, it is the roughly 50 million human beings that today live between the countries that expelled them, and the nations that reject them.

Present in Peru, we reiterate:

- The green economy does not seek to put an end to climate change or environmental degradation. Instead, it looks to generalize the principle that those who have money can continue to pollute. To date, they have used the farce of carbon credits to continue releasing greenhouse gases. Now there is talk of biodiversity credits. That is, companies will be able to destroy forests and ecosystems so long as they pay someone who promises to conserve biodiversity somewhere else. Tomorrow they will likely invent credits to trade and destroy water, landscapes, and clean air.
- The payment for environmental services is being used to displace indigenous people and small farmers from their lands and territories. The mechanisms most being promoted by governments and companies are REDD and REDD Plus, which they affirm will reduce greenhouse gas emissions caused by deforestation and forest degradation. These mechanisms are in fact being used to impose, with derisive payments, management plans that deny rural families and communities their right to access their very own lands, forests, and watersheds. In addition, these projects guarantee companies unrestricted access to collective forests, increasing the likelihood of biopiracy. They also impose contracts on communities for periods of over 20 years, limiting community control over lands that are leased by indigenous and small farmers in a process that will most likely result in these communities losing the resources they depend on for survival. The basic idea behind the so-called environmental services is to take control of people's natural resources and then reach into new areas.
- Another green economy initiative is to convert plants, algae, and all organic residues into a source of energy to substitute fossil fuels: what they call "the use of biomass". These "agrofuels", as we call them, have already caused millions of hectares of lands once covered in forests or food crops to be converted into lots for feeding machinery. If the use of biomass for energy becomes widespread, we will see life in the oceans reduced even further because many marine species will be left without anything to feed on. We will also see our soils unable to recover their organic material, essential for conserving fertility and protecting against both erosion and draught, and witness our animals starve as crops and feed become more rare and expensive. Water will also become rarer, be it because of agrofuel production or because our soils won't have the capacity to absorb and retain water because soil organic matter will be missing.
- Then comes "climate-smart agriculture", which aims only to impose a new Green Revolution on people – this time including transgenic crops – and suggests we give up our demands for effective mechanisms to defend ourselves against climate change, accepting instead insignificant payments that work just like REDD. This proposal also seeks to impose production systems on us that are highly dependent on agrochemicals, such as direct seeding accompanied by aerial spraying of RoundUp – defined by its promoters as "low-carbon agriculture". In short, they will force us to do their type of agriculture, and we will lose control of our territories, our ecosystems, and our

watersheds.

- One of the most perverse false solutions promoted during international negotiations is that which calls for restricted access to and use of irrigation waters. Based on the pretext that this water is scarce, they propose that it be concentrated on “high-value crops”. That is, that irrigation be saved for export crops, agrofuels, and other industrialized crops instead of to water the crops that feed our people.
- The promotion of technological fixes that are in no way real solutions is part of the agenda and discussions that took place in Rio. Among the most dangerous are geoengineering and the acceptance of transgenic crops. To date, no geoengineering solution has proven itself capable of addressing the climate problem in any significant way. On the contrary, some forms of geoengineering (such as ocean fertilization) are considered so dangerous that they have been prohibited internationally. For us to accept transgenics, they promise to create crops that are resistant to drought and heat. The only crops they offer, however, are those resistant to their herbicides which, in fact, has now brought about a return to the market of highly toxic herbicides such as 2,4,-d.
- The most ambitious plan, described by some governments as “the greatest challenge”, is to place a price on all of nature (including water, biodiversity, landscapes, wildlife, seeds, rain, etc.) so as to privatize (using the excuse that conserving nature requires money) and later charge us for its use. This is what they call the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB), and is in fact the final assault on life and nature, as well as on the means with which our people survive as workers, farmers, hunters and fisherfolk.
- We call on civil society to pressure governments so that they remove all barriers to decentralized, community-controlled renewable energy solutions including solar, wind, and tides and that these receive funding for the design and implementation of said energy systems. At the same time, we must educate people about the benefits of community-based energy systems, the preservation of small farmer systems based on agroecology, a sustainable environment, as well as economies that are healthy, local, dignified, and just.

Once again we present our proposals, in contrast to the false solutions sold by the culprits of the climate crisis. In Peru, as we have done in other COP Summits, we affirm:

1. We must transform the world’s industrialized, agro-export food system into a system based on food sovereignty, on the return of land’s social function as producer of foods and sustainer of life, based on local production, processing, and distribution. Food sovereignty allows us to end monocultures and agribusiness, foment small farmer systems of production characterized by greater intensity and productivity, increased economic opportunities, better care for the soils, and a healthy diversified harvest. Small farmer and indigenous agriculture is also the way to cool down the earth: it has the capacity to absorb, or avoid, up to 2/3 of the greenhouse gases released annually.
2. 20% of arable lands worldwide are currently in the hands of small farmers and indigenous people. With just 1/5 of all arable lands, our families and communities produce over half the world’s foods. Ours is the most secure and efficient way to overcome hunger in the world.
3. To secure food for all and the restoration of climate balance, agriculture must return to the hands of small farmer communities and indigenous people. For this to occur, integral agrarian reforms are urgently needed that are truly transformative, putting an end to the extreme and increasing land concentrations that are negatively affecting humanity. These agrarian reforms will provide the material conditions for agriculture to fulfill its role as humanity’s caretaker, which is why the

defense of small farmer and indigenous agriculture is a collective responsibility. In the immediate future, it is necessary to halt all transactions, concessions, and transfers that result in further land concentration and grabbing and/or the displacement of rural communities.

4. Small farmer and indigenous systems of agriculture, hunting, fishing, and herding help care for food and the planet and, as such, should be adequately supported by unconditional public funding. Market mechanisms – such as carbon credit and environmental services schemes – should be dismantled right away and replaced by real measures such as those mentioned above. Putting an end to contamination is the responsibility of all, and no one can evade this buying up the “right” to destroy.

5. The only legitimate use of what international entities and companies call “biomass” is as food for living beings and the restoration of soil fertility. The emissions released as a result of energy misuse should be reduced at the source, bringing an end to wasteful consumption. We need renewable energy sources that are decentralized and controlled by the people.

We of La Vía Campesina, small family farmers, landless workers, indigenous and migrant communities – men and women – stand in direct opposition to the commodification of nature, of our territories, of water, seeds, foods, and human life. We reiterate what we said at the People’s Summit of Cochabamba, Bolivia: *“Humanity is facing an historic decision – we can continue along the path that capitalism created, based on predation and death, or set about on the path of harmony with nature and a respect for life”*.

We repudiate and denounce the green economy as one more masked attempt to cover up increased corporate coveting and food imperialism across the globe. It is a brutal way for capitalism to try washing its hands, and offers nothing but false solutions such as “climate-smart agriculture”, carbon trading, REDD, geoengineering, transgenics, agrofuels, biocarbon, among other market solutions to the environmental crisis.

Our challenge is to reestablish another way of relating to nature, and between peoples. This is our right and responsibility, and for this reason we will continue the struggle to do so, calling on all people to keep up the endless fight for food sovereignty, for integral agrarian reforms, for the return of territories to indigenous people, for an end to capital’s violence, and to restore agroecological small farmer and indigenous food systems.

NO TO THE FALSE SOLUTIONS OF GREEN CAPITALISM!

SMALL FARMER AGRICULTURE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL

AND CLIMATE JUSTICE, NOW!

La Vía Campesina, Wednesday, 03 December 2014
