



Defending the commons against transnational corporations

In our fight on poverty and violence against women, the World March of Women continues to work on a systemic analysis of the social, cultural and economic structures that perpetuate these problems. As we continually evaluate and review the focus of our struggle, we have observed that clashes with transnational corporations or interests are common as we seek to defend our territories. With this in mind, at our 4th International Action, we identified defending the commons against transnational corporations as one of our action areas.

We understand the commons to be everything that is needed to sustain life with dignity. This includes seeds, water, air and soil, as well as cultural diversity and the knowledge and expertise that allow us to feed ourselves, communicate, educate ourselves, maintain productive processes and enjoy rest, recreation and pleasure. The commons also encompass public services, such as education, healthcare, energy, digital services, transport and other services that are vital for us to live full lives.

The concept of the commons is rooted in cultural practices whereby territories are shared, and the gifts of nature are managed to protect and preserve what is common to the community over the long term. For us, territory is more than just a geographical space; it is the material, emotional, cultural, communal network that enables and sustains life.

Cities must also be considered part of the commons as territories where people must be able to live with dignity. They must offer decent housing, common areas for recreation, care services, community gardens and public services that are accessible to all and managed by the people themselves. In other words, cities must be understood as communal territories, not as markets or warehouses for housing consumers.

The practices developed by communities to enjoy the commons without jeopardising the future of diverse forms of life are a form of resistance in the present and a strategy for the future. As grassroots feminists, we recognise and call attention to the amount of time, energy and knowledge that women dedicate to these practices¹. In managing their territories, traditional communities continually recreate the biological diversity needed for strong, healthy ecosystems. Women play a crucial role in this process: they are the ones who domesticate species, store and exchange seeds, rear small animals, pass down knowledge of medicinal herbs, prepare food, fetch water, etc.

In cities, communal meals, urban gardens, domestic composting and direct purchasing from farmers create relational spaces that strengthen territories and women. Many of these practices play a key role in building economic and emotional autonomy, allowing women to leave abusive relationships,

¹ As Miriam Nobre reminds us in an interview published by SOF in: [https://www.sof.org.br/los-comunes-como-practica-tradicional-resistencia-en-el-presente-y-estrategia-hacia-al-futuro-desde-el-feminismo-nos-permite-otras-miradas-hacia-la-enorme-cantidad-de-tiempo-energia-y-conocimiento/#:~:text=Miriam%20Nobre%20\(MN\)%3A%20Entendemos,para%20disfrutarlos%20de%20manera%20compartida.](https://www.sof.org.br/los-comunes-como-practica-tradicional-resistencia-en-el-presente-y-estrategia-hacia-al-futuro-desde-el-feminismo-nos-permite-otras-miradas-hacia-la-enorme-cantidad-de-tiempo-energia-y-conocimiento/#:~:text=Miriam%20Nobre%20(MN)%3A%20Entendemos,para%20disfrutarlos%20de%20manera%20compartida.)



recover areas taken over by property speculation or (il)legal armed groups and revive flavours destroyed by the food industry.

Since the commons are synonymous with community, they also include conflicts and contradictions and the political ability to resolve them through respect and consensus. The joint political decision to organise life differently, which is reaffirmed in every new challenge, and alliances at different levels improve conditions for resisting attempts by the state or markets to exploit the commons and our lives.

The fragmentation and ‘enclosure’ of the commons and the privatisation of their management, removing control from communities, underpin the accumulation that lies at the heart of capitalism, which, as a system of multiple oppression, is also patriarchal, racist and colonialist.

In our systemic analysis, we have observed that the logic of accumulation, which is rooted in the fragmentation and privatisation of the commons and the exploitation of the natural world, is incompatible with sustaining not only human life, but life on the planet as a whole.

The neoliberal policies privatising public services that are imposed by international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, violate fundamental rights to access water, energy, healthy food, housing, healthcare, etc. and contribute to impoverishing communities, especially women, who are the first to take on care work not provided by the state and the first to be excluded from public services like education and healthcare.

Free trade agreements promoted by the Global North preserve colonialist structures, establish unequal relationships between countries, focus on obtaining tariff concessions and impose unfair prices for local products and a model of development based on exploiting the land and communities. These practices bring poverty and economic dependence.

Transnational corporations are the face of capitalism. It is they that advance through our territories using militarisation and violence as tools to plunder, privatise and commodify the commons. It is they that exploit international organisations and impose free trade agreements that disadvantage women and their communities.

In recent years, global production and distribution chains have become more concentrated. Mergers like Bayer-Monsanto are more and more frequent, leading to a concentration of power in many sectors of international and national economies simultaneously and increasing corporations’ ability to co-opt and blackmail states and governments, many of which are complicit.

It is also apparent that the environmental crises triggered by transnational corporations are an integral part of their plans for profit. Not only do they seek to commodify the natural world, our bodies and our territories, but they also aim to profit from crisis via offsetting systems, such as those established for carbon and plastic. Yet, there can be no offsetting of the harm that these transnational corporations are doing to the natural world. Islands vanishing in Asia, taking the whole web of life with them, cannot be compensated by social responsibility campaigns led by the very corporations responsible



for polluting the atmosphere. The hundreds of communities that lose their homes to fire or flood cannot be compensated by lukewarm policies on environmental responsibility. The communities whose lands are suffering from desertification, and drought cannot be compensated by carbon credits. The loss of animal and plant species that jeopardises our ability to feed ourselves and the ability of ecosystems to exist and reproduce cannot be offset by plastic credits. Offsetting systems are false solutions that do not go to the heart of the crisis of capitalism, which is patriarchal, racist and colonialist.

Transnational corporations exacerbate social injustices via practices that violate the right to decent work. They promote labour deregulation, which leads to exploitation and reinforces inequalities based on sex, sexuality, ethnicity, class and other socially differentiated categories. As key stakeholders in the capitalist, colonialist economy, they promote infinite growth and efficiency measured solely in market values. The practices of transnational corporations disrupt local economies, introduce monocultures, impose extractive industry, displace traditional livelihoods and damage or destroy ecosystems.

There has been a corporate capture of the international institutions, with repercussions at the regional and national level. Since the pandemic, we have seen how institutions such as the United Nations and its agencies have changed their operational approach, allowing transnational corporations to play a more visible, active role in developing policy and decision-making. They are no longer limited to spaces for lobbying or sponsorship.

The logic of capital accumulation is fundamentally incompatible with the logic of sustaining life.

The crisis that we are experiencing is not only a climate crisis, it is a multidimensional crisis that affects the climate, biodiversity and care, displacing communities and depriving them of their land and their ability to support themselves.

Crisis is no longer a prediction; extreme weather events are more and more frequent, intense and destructive, especially for women. Berta Cáceres's call "Wake up, humanity! We have no more time" continues to summon us to action.

In our experience supporting communities that have survived natural disasters or been displaced for environmental reasons, we observe that women, the LGBTQI community, indigenous people and Afro-descendants of diverse sexualities are suffering worsening violence and exclusion. Sexual violence has become more frequent. Dispossession makes women and girls more vulnerable to people smuggling and trafficking, sexual slavery and prostitution for food. Patriarchal, racist oppression is becoming more acute, with old practices re-emerging. Moreover, women and girls are increasingly burdened by care work.

The crisis afflicting the natural world and our communities is also striking capitalism itself and, in order to overcome this crisis, the system is expanding its exploitation of natural resources. Against



this backdrop, green capitalism is emerging and creating new ways of doing business and commodifying nature.

The capitalist energy transition sacrifices vast swathes of land, burying them under wind farms and solar panels or creating false hope of tackling the climate crisis with technological solutions that open up new mining operations, such as lithium mining. None of these false solutions get to the heart of the problem: the current model of production and consumption, based on capitalist transnational corporations with their mega-projects that are concerned only with profit, is unsustainable and must be replaced.

Digital capitalism is one of the tools used in this new drive to exploit life. Data have become a new source of capital accumulation in a process termed ‘datafication’. Our information, preferences and habits have become yet another frontier in the capture of the commons. Data are not there to be collected. We produce them through our relationships, our interactions, our bodies in motion, our peasant agriculture, our diet, our preferences and our communication. Everything that we do with our mobile phones and computers or in front of cameras and sensors in cities and rural areas generates data that are hoarded and used by corporations with the infrastructure (software, hardware and servers) needed to capture our lives. Digital capitalism not only violates our privacy, it also leads to unsustainable consumption of energy largely derived from mining.

They try to convince us that there is no alternative, but we know that there is. Every day, women and communities start urban gardens, community kitchens, cooperatives to reuse plastic waste, food swaps, non-genetically modified seed banks, etc. We strive to recover and build our sovereignty over our territories, energy resources, communication and food.

Our criticisms

We maintain that the crisis facing us is multidimensional, affecting the climate, biodiversity, care, migration and the loss of land. It is the product of a political and economic model that neglects life and exploits nature, women and the commons for the sole benefit of the elites. In short, the ‘crisis’ is caused by the capitalist model of production, distribution and consumption.

We do not believe in false solutions that seek to uphold the same model of production and consumption. It will be impossible to solve this multidimensional crisis with alternative energy sources that depend on uncontrolled exploitation of the land, extractivism and displacement of farming communities, indigenous and native groups and Afro-descendants from their land.

Free trade agreements and financial institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IBD), the World Bank, the European Union, USAid, etc. impose the capitalist model of development by enforcing economic policies and legal conditions that favour the penetration of transnational corporations and mining or energy mega-projects that entail the privatisation of the water, forests and land and strip whole communities of their rights.



We condemn the policy of exterminating land defenders and criminalising their struggles to defend their land promoted by transnational corporations as they co-opt states and governments. They even go as far as to start wars to control mineral resources.

We condemn the burning of millions of hectares of forest in the Amazon by agribusiness, which seeks to expand the available land for growing soy or corn for biofuels.

We condemn the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which are anti-democratic financial institutions that have spent 80 years imposing policies that have failed communities and the planet with impunity. Austerity and planned poverty, coups d'état and dictatorial regimes, privatisation of fundamental rights and loss of sovereignty, socioecological and climate debt, neocolonial land grabbing, promotion of fossil fuels and uncontrolled extractivism, war, repression and mass forced migration are but a few of their effects. We reject the IMF and the World Bank's claim to be the standard-bearers and guardians of a supposed 'green transition' to tackle the crisis that they themselves continue to fuel.

We denounce that transnational corporate powers are present in the UN and other international organizations. These institutions today, far from guaranteeing the exercise of human rights, have been transformed into a legitimizing arm of false solutions to the multidimensional crisis we suffer. Likewise, we denounce the extractivism practiced by these international agencies in social movements. We are constantly resisting and fighting against the practices of appropriation and emptying of meaning that they make of our proposals and knowledge, they seek to limit the transformative scope of our proposals that call for the reorganization of the whole society around the sustainability of life and at no time outlines the conciliation or pact with the capitalist, patriarchal, racist and colonialist system that has been imposed in the last 500 years.

Privatisation of the commons and public services makes water, energy, housing, education and fundamental rights for a decent life into privileges. It widens the gap between communities caused by exclusion and affects women and girls disproportionately. In many parts of the world, it remains normal for families to send a male child to school if they can only choose one child to receive an education. Equally, it is mostly women who must walk long distances and carry water back to their homes or are forced to leave paid employment when a sick family member needs care.

We condemn the manipulation of the narrative on defending women's rights and the natural world to justify wars and imperialist occupations.

We condemn data extractivism and its use as a weapon against democratic processes and alternatives that challenge the status quo.

Our proposals

We must build **popular sovereignties** by drawing on the knowledge and practices of food, energy, communication and technology sovereignty and self-governance that we have developed in our territories. For us, building popular sovereignties means fighting the patriarchal violence that fuels the



monster of colonialist, racist capitalism. A sovereign people or community has democratic control over the processes and social systems that guarantee their survival.

The World March of Women calls for **sovereignty over bodies and territories** under the slogan “free women, sovereign peoples”. In our struggle for popular sovereignties, a body is more than just a physical organism and a territory is more than just a geographic space. Both body and territory are a web of social relationships that intersect with one another, so we strive to weave our struggles together.

We advocate the **feminist economy** as a strategy to tackle racist, patriarchal capitalism and build societies that are based on sustaining life. This means that no debt is more important than guaranteeing the provision of public services. No life is more important than another. We must acknowledge that we are interdependent beings that need to care for others and be cared for by them. Like any other form of life on Earth, we are part of ecosystems and our survival depends on the health of those ecosystems.

We demand **environmental justice**, bringing together diverse political subjects (women, communities and social movements) around political agendas aimed at democratising power and achieving popular sovereignty, building agroecology, decommodifying nature, dismantling corporate power and bringing about demilitarisation. The multidimensional crisis has a disproportionate impact on women, indigenous communities and Afro-descendants in the Global North and South, and this impact is shaped by colonialism, patriarchy and racism, which are key components of the oppression required to maintain the capitalist system.

With regard to a **just energy transition**, we call for a frank discussion on an energy model that truly safeguards life on Earth. It is vital that we reach a consensus on the principles and practices that should underpin a just, feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonialist, anti-capitalist energy transition. Such a transition must acknowledge the interdependence of all living things on the planet, as well as our dependence on the natural world.

The World March of Women is participating in the feminist construction of **food sovereignty and agroecology**. The concept of food sovereignty, which we share with La Vía Campesina and allied movements, maintains that the mere availability of food is insufficient and that the people must be able to decide on the quality of what they eat and how to produce and distribute food without affecting other life forms. Women are fighting for a relationship with the natural world that sustains life and diverse ways of living.

We must **revive our history of struggle**, build popular power and salvage and generate our own knowledge through political training processes that contribute to the collective construction of real solutions to the multidimensional crisis afflicting the planet.