

People's Dialogue: Briefing Notes

Extractivism is beyond mining

“Cry of poor and the cry of earth is one cry”

Why the discussion document?

This briefing note was developed after an exciting workshop/ seminar that brought together activists, movements, scholars and NGOs that the People's Dialogue work with in Southern Africa and Latin America. This document is a discussion document and there its intention to stimulate debate, discussion and dialogue. It's intention is not to be seen as a conclusive document, rather it is a contribution.

Contents:

The document will attempt to cover the following aspects:

- Extractivism as a mode of accumulation – capitalism, patriarchy and imperialism;
- Extractivism, the deepening ecological crisis and its impact on territory, body and nature;
- Extractivism: society and nature
- Extractivism in the context of the deepening global crisis;
- From resistance to alternatives: challenges facing our movements in our respective contexts.

EXTRACTIVISM AS A MODE OF ACCUMULATION – CAPITALISM, PATRIARCHY AND IMPERIALISM: Extractivism is a mode of capital accumulation that has integrated gas, oil and minerals mining, fishing, agriculture and forestry; it is across the globe, both in the North and the South, relying on unsustainable modes of consumption with ever increasing demand for goods – an *“imperial mode of living”* (IML- Edgardo Landers). IML has centres of global imperial power but liberal globalisation has expanded and opened up different parts of the world as a result of free trade.

Extractivism has destroyed previous modes of production with millions of people being deprived of land and water and of their modes of subsistence. Usually these communities become criminalised as the survival for the dispossessed often means engaging in system defined “illegal and criminal” activities (gangsterism, drug dealing, prostitution, military conflicts, and “illegal” logging and mining the products of which are often then bought by MNCs).

Countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia have undergone de-industrialisation as they cannot compete with cheap imports from South East Asia and as a result of relationships with China. The only fields in which global South have competitive advantage are natural resources and thus extractivism has been seen by governments of the South (whether left or right-wing) as the only path to finance development policies and projects, regardless of the socio and environmental consequences. They also make people believe that there is no other alternative towards “development”.

We are facing a crisis of a civilisation that is destroying life itself, on the logic of permanent accumulation: there is a contradiction between the reproduction of capital and the reproduction of life.

There are also other contradictions. Currently China, continues to drive extractivism and producing whilst at the same time there is growing unemployment and de-industrialisation in countries of Africa etc.

What is clear however is that we will also still need mining (e.g. metals to make solar panels) for alternatives in the short to medium term.

In the current “development” path, our governments destroy the livelihoods of those whose “development” they want to promote. Why is this happening, even when governments can see that extractivism is not leading to feasible economic solutions? Both the ANC in South Africa and the PT in Brazil, for instance who were brought to power through years of mobilisation and pressure from peoples’ movements – act the same way. Both these governments, like many others in Southern Africa and Latin America have bought into the logic of extractivism and not managed to develop alternative models of development and “industrialisation”, rather we have seen greater deindustrialisation.

Corporate co-optation and capture of leaders and elites seems to provide some of the answers. Corporates also destabilise labour and social counter-formations. A stark example is seen in Kenya, where despite an electricity cost decrease of 75% in the last three years due to the contribution of independent alternative energy suppliers, the government is still commissioning new power stations. In South Africa, while some coal mines are closing down and the country has surplus energy at the moment new power stations are being commissioned. At a local level, in mining communities chiefs and local police are bribed and co-opted, while activists are persecuted and even killed.

One of the challenges for social movements and the left is to (re)define ‘development’ and ask “development for whom”.

EXTRACTIVISM AND MINING: This is a very complex process of how capital organises itself, which involves many different sectors and actors and is subject to price booms and falls (banks and international finance institutions are involved in financing and shaping technology, industry, railways, shipping, pipelines, markets, financial markets, etc.).

Mining also involves different legal instruments in conceding mining licences, the appropriation of land, water and the environment and the transfer of property rights as local populations are dispossessed.

Mining also has a conflictual link to the environment, and a supremacy of underground over aboveground. There is also a capture by the logic of transferring raw materials into manufactured goods as a path to growth and development.

The global crisis is leading to restructuring of the mining sector, with mine closures and increasing unemployment.

We need to take all this into consideration when we think of alternatives and approaches and when discussing concepts such as sustainability, the environment, humans, social justice and the earth as having life in itself.

EXTRACTIVISM AND AGRICULTURE: Two key issues need to be considered in our discussions when looking at the impact of extractivism in agriculture on society and nature:

a) Who feeds the world? 70% of the world is fed by small-scale farmers and fishers, while 30% is fed by industrial agriculture. Thus not everything has yet been taken away from us. However small-scale producers are under ecological pressure, losing access to land, water and livelihoods, biological diversity and are being linked to high technology production;

b) Ownership of the germplasm of seeds – our germplasm is now owned by corporates or are stored in private collections/research institutions. There is very little left in our government institutions and thus one question is how can we get back what has been taken away from us? Discussions on this are often ahistorical as they ignore the past 10,000 years of seed development by our ancestors and communities.

Industrial agriculture corporates have taken over knowledge production, enforce intellectual property rights and have taken out patents on life, seeds and agricultural inputs and technology. Until recently there were 6 major controlling MNCs and they are now merging into 3. They are competing for control of the market, buying each other out. If they collapse we will go through terrible shocks and thus we need to think about this when we think of the transition. The MNCs are also forming strategic alliances with industrial farmers towards “precision agriculture” (e.g. GPS guided agriculture), leading to deskilling even in large scale farming. In seeds, GMOs are being replaced by a new technology – “gene editing”, or removing unwanted genes through silencing technology.

We are entering a very difficult period with greater concentration of ownership and power over food production and costs. We also need to understand the role of asset management companies in how they are driving and determining our food costs.

Moreover, industrial agriculture, with its large scale live-stock breeding factory farms contribute enormously to GHG emissions.

EXTRACTIVISM AND FISHERIES: Violence, patriarchy, class and race dimensions and a conservation narrative, are key features in the fisheries sector. In addition, in Southern Africa at least we see the emergence of the “*blue economy and blue growth*”.

Post 1994 attempts to redistribute fisheries resources from (white-capital controlled) industrial fisheries to black artisanal fishers, previously formally excluded from fisheries, were frustrated through an alliance between capital and organised labour under the narrative of a threat of “job losses”. Another narrative was and continues to be one of conservation: “*there is overfishing and not enough left in the seas so we need to protect the eco-system*”.

Recently, changes in sea water currents/temperatures possibly related to El Nino and climate change have led to a shift in the occurrence of small pelagic fish for instance (from the West to the South coast of South Africa). This led to the closure of some canning factories on the West coast of South Africa and capital also alleging that the use of wooden boats was no longer feasible and a need for mechanisation. Thus, despite the initial narrative of “protecting jobs”, job losses have now occurred particularly amongst women.

There is a greater push for marine protected areas (MPAs) and for private coastal enclaves and coastal tourism, other forms of dispossession also occurring in other parts of the world: peoples’ traditional fishing activities are criminalised, they are removed from their traditional and spiritual homes, completely ignoring the impact on communities and leading to more migration to urban areas. MPAs are also allocated to “eco-tourism”, for those who want to “observe nature”. Women bear the brunt: as government allocations diminish, men push women out alleging fishing is traditionally a male activity. Women are also excluded from traditional activities such as sea weed collection.

In addition the drive is to impose individual (property) fishing rights rather than community (fishing) rights. Similarly to agriculture, there is the introduction of new technologies, spatial planning and marginalisation of traditional knowledge and practices.

Finally, since 2010 we also saw the emergence of the “*blue economy*” appropriating the language of “rights” of the MDGs. Besides the seas being seen as potential sources of renewable energy, there is a drive for industrial fishing/aquaculture, gas and oil exploration, mining, search and how these and maritime transport can contribute to “*blue growth*”. The language used is violent and militaristic (“*penetrating this virgin territory*”).

Some similar processes (e.g. search for gas deposits; climate change impacts on water bodies; displacement of people and loss of fisheries reliant livelihoods) are also being seen in inland lakes in Malawi, Uganda and Chad, for instance.

EXTRACTIVISM AND FORESTRIES: Instead of focussing on theoretical issues the presenter drew attention to what is happening on the ground. In SA only 1% of the land is covered by forests and these are owned by corporates. Forestry communities grew as a result of becoming workers in the forests. What is happening in forestry is very similar to what is happening in fisheries. But communities are resisting removal from forests and in two cases they engaged in blockades of roads due to the failure of companies to respond to their demands. Within a few hours there was a response and engagement by the companies. It is very important to incorporate community actions in our discussions.

EXTRACTIVISM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DEEPENING GLOBAL CRISIS: The global crisis is deepening and we see a shift to more conservative politics and the emergence of right wing politicians across the world. The recent tirade of D. Trump for instance, wants to repeal legislation created by Obama that imposed restrictions on the import of minerals from “areas of conflict” (e.g. Great Lakes Region) into the USA. Even though this had a minor effect on Africa it was a symbolical initiative. Trump’s aim is to give USA corporates a free hand to loot the African continent.

We are still unsure how Britain will negotiate after BREXIT but it is saying it will strengthen ties with Commonwealth countries and the focus is on extractives (e.g. tin, tantalite, tungsten and gold).

We will see a renewed scramble for minerals from Africa, increased risks of armed conflicts and terrorism, and also greater illegal financial transfers out of the continent. The Mbeki’s panel already found that presently these illegal transfers are greater than all the “aid” money Africa receives.

Social movements need to keep a close eye on these developments and develop a critique of the “African Mining Vision”, an American and European vision for Africa. What we witness here instead are water and land grabs and violence.

Shifting terms of trade – Colonial terms of trade were replaced by WTO agreements and these are now being replaced by “sand box licences”. Large companies bring their own legal frameworks which are not governed by either local legal systems or the WTO’s. The agreements under which a company will operate are negotiated with the local state. D. Trump will change the architecture under which USA companies will operate. We need to find new ways of trading and to challenge new trade agreements.

EXTRACTIVISM, THE DEEPENING ECOLOGICAL CRISIS AND FORMS OF RESISTANCE:

As the ecological crisis deepens and given the destructive impact and role of extractivism, it is demoralising to tell people “we cannot extract” when it is the only way they see coming out of poverty – people say “it is our turn to develop and progress”. On the other hand people and their movements are finding different ways, on the ground, of resisting dispossession.

In Latin America those who are resisting extractivism the most are indigenous people who are said to still “*live in the dark*”. We heard of cases of successful resistance to the building mega projects on the Amazon eco-system and to the massive increase on the country’s external debt. Lessons learned included:

- Intervention before the “development” started;
- Extensive research so as to know “*more than the government*” by being familiar with data and information gathered by appointed consultants and by pointing out contradictions,
- Shifting discussions from focussing on a local problem into a national problem. The local opposition organisation forged alliances with others (rural/urban alliance between indigenous people and urban middle classes) by drawing out interests that were common (e.g. consequences of massive increase in external debt) but also interests that were different but overlapping (violations of indigenous peoples and Mother Earth’s rights *versus* the destruction of forests resulting in less humidity, lower rainfall and severe water supply restrictions in urban areas).
- Organisation and actions at all levels, including on the legal side and shifting from the defensive to the offensive (indigenous people arranged a short blockade);
- We need concrete examples of resistance (and victories) against extractivism. Such cases are not enough to defeat capitalism but they present us with battles we can win and galvanise people and a movement.
- Resistance is also being seen elsewhere. Artisanal coastal fishers in Southern Africa , India etc continue challenging the government (e.g. trying to reserve 5 nautical miles off the coast for artisanal fishers; reclaiming their traditional rights even if deemed ‘illegal’) and the companies who have investments in fisheries.

Artisanal miners, deemed “illegal miners” by law are being violently persecuted and killed. They were trained in and for mining and mining skills are often the best marketable skill they have. Made redundant when no longer needed by capital and never involved in economic decision making, mining is a way they see to confront poverty. So they are now organising and demanding their right to work.

A successful struggle against beach grabbing in Mauritius fought by a coalition of activists and communities who put forward their own proposals for “development” (eco-tourism jobs, solar energy farms also used to power buses, vegetable gardens, etc.).

EXTRACTIVISM, VIOLENCE, GENDER AND PATRIARCHY: Extractivism is a very violent, disruptive form of accumulation – there is increasing repression, murder of activists, the destruction of livelihoods, of peoples’ knowledge, of our environments and health, our food systems, controlling what we eat, knowledge production, the violence of GMOs and their expansion etc.

Patriarchy is a central part of the extractivist process and it has to be placed at the centre of the extractivist debate. Both are very violent, both kill. Extractivism sees people as “surplus” – surplus in the logic of production but NOT surplus in the logic of consumption and reproduction. The costs of environmental and health damages linked to extractivism are externalised and carried by communities but women carry the burden in the care economy and in reproduction.

Privatisation, commodification of our commons and hierarchies of dispossession – There are strong liberal philanthropic initiatives to conserve the environment packaged in corporate terms (“*invest and buy nature to protect it*”) and also corporate investments that focus on nature conservation. For instance, holiday resorts (whereas inland or coastal) are corporatized. Carbon trading also comes out of a free market approach that sees the market and the private sector as solutions to climate change.

A conservation focus is also on the agenda of some international movements and some of the large international NGOs (e.g. Green Peace, WWF) that often mean well, but seem to think that we will find alternatives if we offer corporates the possibility to make a profit. Even some of the alternative proposals we and activists in social movements are making are also packaged in the language of capital – e.g. the demands for individual quotas in artisanal fisheries, title deeds, etc.

Conservation and invocation of scarcity also underlies justification for increasing industrialisation of agriculture and fisheries and domination over nature – “*there is not enough food*” and to ensure “*food security*” industrial fishing /aquaculture and agriculture, underpinned by private ownership, are promoted. This food security is oriented to particular markets and thus we have to recognise hierarchies of dispossession, particularly racial dispossession.

EXTRACTIVISM AND FINANCE: We need to understand better the role of finance. In South Africa for instance government argues that if it embraces and implements redistribution the country will not receive foreign direct investments (FDIs). We see consolidation of land ownership for instance and banks repossessing land of those who work the land but are indebted. We also need to understand the role of asset management companies in driving and determining our food costs and to look at how DEBT intersects with extractivism. In Latin America external debt has increased since the “crises” of 2008 – more foreign exchange has to be generated to pay external debt.

HOW DO WE ENGAGE WITH CONSUMERS? How do we politicise consumerism and translate knowledge into the possibility for political action? Generally, consumers respond according to race and class. The conversations with consumers are dominated by those with the middle-class (e.g. quick successful actions for having GMOs removed from baby food produced by Nestle while apathy regarding the staple food of the country – maize – becoming overwhelmingly a GMO; publishing of “endangered fish species” lists to be avoided in middle class markets and restaurants, etc.). These conversations are ‘apolitical’, without critical engagements on production models, technologies and social impacts on the lives of the impoverished and the working class.

We need to also look at ourselves critically. We also have to ensure spaces where small-scale farmers and fishers can talk to each other directly around common struggles.

Building resistance

Social movements are fragile in both Latin America and Africa but there has been ongoing resistance against corporate plunder and extractives globally. Many struggles such as the pipeline struggle in Canada, the resistance to mining in the villages and communities in Latin America, throughout Africa, Germany and India etc highlight the determination of local movements to resist.

Small-scale producers (fishers, farmers and miners) are all criminalised. We need to organise subversive regional economies around regional production. But these have to be built, organised and lead by the communities affected. They must be built around peoples’ movements. Artisanal miners’ in Africa are already re-establishing networks of trade that existed before colonialism.

We need to link and build across different sectors, collaborate in common fights and create spaces for dialogue and overcome this “us” and “them” gap.

We have to think about building a common Assembly on Extractivism. But this is not to build a “single umbrella” as experiences in the LA, Africa and Asia are different.

Extractivism has to be fought in different ways:

- Local territorial resistance and
- By reclaiming our concepts, concepts that were part of the 'old left' – de-globalisation, de-linking, self-sufficiency, transition from fossil fuels (at local, regional and national levels), etc.

Building alternatives has to start with:

- **Learn from past failures** and understand how we got where we are now;
- **Reimagine a radical perspective** - in the past the 'left' saw the state as an alternative to the private sector and advocated public ownership of the means of production. We need to rethink from nationalisation to socialisation and communities' control;
- **Not assume we are as progressive movements have a blue print of alternatives** - There are no ready-made solutions – we need to create more spaces to hear the voices of grassroots activists and communities, unite rural and urban struggles, include more the energy and power of the youth and once again find an overwhelming theme that can unite our struggles (e.g. "*Our world is not for sale*");
- **We have take discussions beyond our small circles?** How does one change consciousness for an emancipatory project? Recognising that there is a link between social organisation and awareness and consciousness, how do we mobilise and organise? How to connect to peoples' own struggles?
- **We have to (re)define development?** Development for whom? On whose terms? How do people on the ground define their own position? Our governments in the South (progressive or not) continue to rely on the same extractivist development to sort out problems defined as "*poverty, inequality, unemployment, etc.*" This is part of the left's challenge – how do we reframe the problems facing us in different terms than those being used by neoliberalism?
- **Deal with tensions as NGOS** - how to rethink ourselves: not existing as NGOs but as social movements and be careful with our own practices;
- **Reclaim Language** - We can reclaim concepts that were part of the 'old left' (de-globalisation, de-linking, self-sufficiency, etc.), but some of our language has also been co-opted and we have failed in challenging this and providing a new language. We must also avoid incorporating military and aggressive language in our discussions (e.g. "bullet points");
- **How do we build alternatives, with who and what do they look like?** Which strategies will we use? How do we make the transition? Our analysis and proposals have to deal with what viable transitions we can propose that will make people believe in them. We need to be careful not to put forward alternatives based on the logic of capital. Some renewable energy models emerging follow capitalist models. The alternatives must be in economic (not in environmental) terms.