
In June 2012, two world summits will take place back-to-back on the global stage that could well have a dramatic impact in terms of both the economic and environmental future of humanity on this planet.

The United Nations Rio+20 Summit and the 2012 Group of 20 Mexico Summit are very different events in terms of legitimacy, multilateralism and transparency. The former is happening under the auspices of a body that, despite all of its flaws, is the most multilateral body of global governance today, the United Nations General Assembly, with over 60 years of history, wherein 193 countries (counting South Sudan) are equally represented and a negotiating process exists that follows a widely multilateral debate. The latter is taking place under the management of a global elite club representing the world’s leading economies, both North and South, that have appointed themselves as the “premier forum for international economic cooperation” without receiving any mandates by the 174 countries left aside, and keeping all of its negotiating processes behind closed doors and close to big business.

However, the contents of the agendas being drafted for both Summits are fundamentally similar in many respects: both reinforce a model of development based on privatizing the commons, hyper-financializing the economy and further liberalizing trade and investments. It is a model of development that, despite the recent global economic crisis, promotes false market solutions while ignoring the causes of poverty, rising inequality and the urgent need to change unjust and unsustainable economic structures. Despite the differences in the democratic nature of the two global governance spaces, therefore, the current correlation of forces is aimed at achieving a victory of the corporate-led model of development in both agendas, as well as through the policies which most governments are already implementing in their own countries.

Moreover, these threats are not only appearing in the negotiating texts of these Summits. Even worse, these Summits are largely designed to catalyze the false market solutions for the multiple environmental, social and economic crisis which are already being promoted throughout the globe. In this sense, the Rio+20 and G20 are being orchestrated as spaces for legitimizing the increasing corporate control of the commons.

This threat poses a strategic challenge to social movements in countering this corporate-led model of development with some key strategies and messages for common mobilization at both Summits.

Rio+20
Consolidating the corporate-led ‘green economy’ agenda
Rio+20 is expected to bring together the leaders of all 193 countries in the United Nations General Assembly for the Earth Summit, 40 years after its inception in Stockholm in 1972 and 20 years after the Earth Charter was launched in Rio in 1992. A key component of the 2012 Earth Summit is supposed to be the approval of the proposed declaration called “The
Future We Want.” The centerpiece of this Rio+20 declaration to be signed by world leaders is the so-called “Green Economy” agenda, supposedly a new road map for sustainable development.

For all intents and purposes, the proposed Rio+20 declaration, “The Future We Want” is rather innocuous and nebulous. Like most UN documents from world political leaders, it is laced with euphemisms, platitudes and contradictions. Its negotiating versions amount to hundreds of pages filled with brackets and suggested edits by member-states showing a lack of agreement on how to address the environmental crisis. One of the main stumbling blocks here is the notion of the ‘green economy’. The term is deployed for tactical reasons, namely, to confuse the public and divide the opposition.

In most regions of the world, the idea of a ‘green economy’ is generally positive. Its original meaning implied changing the economic model to make it more respectful of the environment, nature and sustainability. It included measures such as reductions in reliance on carbon polluting forms of non-renewable energy; the development of renewable forms of energy [e.g. wind, solar, geo-thermal, small scale hydro etc.]; strong measures to substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions from resource-intensive and manufacturing industries; and the creation of green jobs in an economy designed to reduce carbon emissions, among others. For Rio+20, however, this view of the ‘green economy’ is being twisted, distorted and replaced by another ‘green economy’ vision.

To understand the real agenda at stake, one needs to take a look at the background document issued by the UN Environment Program called “Towards a Green Economy.” Released in 2011, this document is some 635 pages in length. It outlines how a monetary value needs to be applied to the remaining elements of nature and how a new industry of environmental services needs to be created to buy and sell the remaining elements of the commons as the new commodities, thereby developing a new sector of profitable businesses on financial markets. Under this regime, nature and its newly created “environmental services” will be priced and subject to market mechanisms which will determine their access and allocation. Those with capital, beginning with the world’s billionaires plus the largest corporations and financial institutions, will be able to control both access to and allocation of these resources.

This process is not new. At the Earth Summit 20 years ago, the door was opened for the privatization of 23.8 percent of the periodic table by allowing the patenting of a variety of natural products. Now, at Rio+20, the stage is being set for accelerating the commodification and commercialization of the remaining 76.2 percent of the elements of nature. The difference is that this time the focus is no longer turning natural products [e.g. trees] into commodities [e.g. wood] but taking control of natural processes [e.g. forests] by rebranding them as “environmental services” to be bought and sold through market mechanisms. As a result, the last and greatest frontier of the ‘commons’ on this planet, namely nature itself, will be subjected to the same system of derivatives trading and financial speculation which recently dealt serious blows to the global economy and the capitalist system itself.

The pretense for enacting these strategies is to pull the “global economy” out of its deep recession and thereby save capitalism from imminent collapse. Moreover, this corporate-led ‘green economy’ agenda is being actively promoted for Rio+20 by a powerful alliance of global interests and institutions including the World Economic Forum, the World Bank, and the International Chamber of Commerce. Indeed, it was the Deutsche Bank, which teamed up with the UN Environmental Program to produce the main background piece in 2010 [noted above] concerning the Green Economy agenda for the Rio+20 Summit.

In reality, what is at stake is the sovereignty of indigenous people and local communities over ancestral territories and the -often common- ownership of their lands, the preservation of species, ecosystems and ways of living, along with the growing scarcity of clean water and air, and indeed, life on this planet. What’s more, if the proposed amendments to the Sustainable Development Goals are adopted at Rio+20, then the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ which has provided a more equitable approach to global governance on environmental issues between developed and developing countries will be further diluted.

Yet, it is not only by looking at Rio+20 and related documents that these threats become visible. For instance, carbon markets are a reality; indigenous and local communities everywhere are signing contracts of carbon credits. Environmental services laws are being drafted (e.g., in the state of Acre in Brazil). At its current pace, it won’t be long before the pollination by bees, the cleaning of the Earth by rain and any other natural cycle will be monetized and the “rights” over it controlled by corporate power. The future that awaits us is frightening and portends a level of injustice unknown to us thus far.
G20: Legitimizing the corporate model of development and practices

Since its inception during the financial meltdown of 2008, the G20 has been moving along the same track with its ongoing emphasis on the liberalization of trade and investment, stimulus followed by stiff austerity measures, hyper-financialization of the economy and resisting any regulation of natural resource extraction. At the same time, the G20 has taken trivial steps toward the promised governance reforms of the IMF and keeps endorsing the role of the World Bank in managing the proposed Global Climate Fund of the UN which will have a major effect on strategies for mitigation and adaptation in developing countries.

Indeed, the G20 are virtually the same actors which have been scrambling to salvage the global economy and capitalism since the financial meltdown, while not making any fundamental changes to the structures that brought the world these multiple crises. It should, therefore, come as no surprise to find that the corporate-led 'green economy' agenda is being crafted in the framework of neoliberal solutions to the global economic crisis. These include false solutions such as the deregulation of financial institutions, massive bailouts for private banks, the continuation of excessive levels of financial speculation, and stiff austerity measures, which is intended to reduce sovereign debt. However, since these measures demolish jobs, aggregate demand and growth, they compound debt problems.

Moreover, these solutions are also compatible with the neoliberal trade and investment regimes [Free Trade Agreements and Bilateral Investment Treaties] created in recent decades, allowing transnational corporations to profit most from the expansion of so called "green markets" without being subjected to obligations like performance requirements or capital controls. What’s more, these free trade and investment regimes allow corporations to sue governments in unaccountable international tribunals, if they take any action in the public or environmental interest that may hamper the profit maximization.

Although the G20 agenda has touched on green economy issues in the past few years [e.g. the reduction of government subsidies for fossil fuel industries], the Mexican Presidency of the G20 in 2012 suddenly put a sense of urgency and priority on these issues.

In January 2012, the Mexican Presidency issued its priorities document for the G20 Summit (http://www.g20.org/images/pdfs/disceng.pdf) in which it identified the five main agenda topics, one of which is: "Promoting sustainable development, green growth and the fight against climate change." Later, in the meeting of the Ministers of Finance and Central Bank Presidents of G20 countries on February 25/26, they declared:

"11. Recognizing the importance of "green growth" we ask the OECD, with the World Bank and the UN, to prepare a report that provides options for G20 countries on inserting green growth and sustainable development policies into structural reform agendas, tailored to specific country conditions and level of development. We will contribute to the preparation of the report by voluntarily informing on our actions (sic) to integrate green growth and sustainable development into structural reform agendas. We will continue to work on climate finance and report to our Leaders in June."

In effect, the G20 Summit is appropriating the label 'green growth' to rationalize its own stiff austerity recipe for saving the global economy from collapse. In the name of "green growth" [a term coined in OECD investment documents], the G20 is setting the stage for making its stiff austerity measures sound more reasonable, despite the fact that they are rapidly leading several countries, especially in Europe, to a level of economic recession and social desperation unknown since the Great Depression.

Clearly, the economic agenda for Rio+20 is closely intertwined with the economic agenda of the G20. Both agendas are being promoted to save the system from collapse, without any meaningful changes to the structures that have created the current crisis and will continue to generate ever deepening chaos, leading not only the economy, but also the planet to a deadlock, a civilizational crisis. Yet, both are rooted in the same neoliberal framework that caused the current economic and financial crisis. For these and related reasons, they must be firmly denounced as false solutions.
What's needed Now is SYSTEM CHANGE !

We insist that governments adopt a development model based on true social and environmental justice, and ensure the protection of the commons through an approach that would include the following:

- End the financial dynamics that privatize gain and nationalize/socialize risk and loss. This dynamic is creating inequality and stripping away basic rights and social protections from the most vulnerable, particularly women and racial/ethnic minorities;

- Promote human rights and equal access to productive assets (e.g., land, credit, water, seeds), particularly of and for the most vulnerable in society;

- Stop the financial capture of government regulation by, among other things, breaking up big banks, enacting and implementing anti-trust laws, and using public resources for election campaigns;

- Eliminate government subsidies to the fossil fuel industry (e.g. big oil, big coal etc) in ways that protect the poor and vulnerable;

- Fulfill the commitments of historical responsibility, established in International and regional conventions and agreements, to modify patterns of production-consumption for a low carbon society;

- Rethink the prevailing models of resource extraction and their dependence on carbon-intensive fossil fuel sources and other environmentally unsustainable practices, transitioning to models based more on respect for the Rights of Nature;

- Call on all industrialized economies to develop a national plan of action to substantially reduce their dependence on dirty fossil fuels and nuclear energy by 2030;

- Develop national strategies now for making the transition to clean renewable energy through public investments in wind, solar, geothermal and small-scale hydro by 2030;

- Set as a target for national government programs and strategies the creation of one million or more green jobs in all of the G20 countries and economies;

- Require all proposed mining, energy, forestry, tourism and agribusiness developments on community and Indigenous lands to obtain ‘free, prior and informed consent’ for any project that affects them or their lands;

- Withdraw all government subsidies to agriculture, mining, energy and other extractive industries and reinvest this capital into making the transition to clean renewable energy developments;

- Introduce measures to ensure that foreign and other forms of investment, as well as trade and intellectual property laws, contribute to local community development and respects domestic laws;

- Establish new ground rules designed to prevent any corporation, foreign or domestic, from engaging in practices that amount to an assault on the rights of nature and the commons;

- Advance in debt audits, the elimination of illegitimate debts and the system of debt chain at all levels;

- Advance in the regionalization of global finance to decentralize global financial power, to achieve the protection of the commons, of ecosystems and food sovereignty.

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OWINFS, June 2012
Confronting the corporate development model at the G20 and Rio+20

Social movements, networks and organizations are organizing a diversity of activities to build bridges between the converging Peoples’ Summit for social and environmental justice in defense of the commons in Brazil (June 15-23, 2012) and the Peoples’ Summit on G20 in Mexico (June 12-19, 2012).

- On June 19 from 11:30 a.m to 1:30 p.m (Rio time) in Tent 3, the Session “Protect the Commons, not the Banks!” – convened by Our World Is Not For sale (OWINFS), Hemispheric Social Alliance, Latinadd, REBRIP and the Mexican Coalition on G20, and co-sponsored by a diversity of organizations like Attac-France, Attac-Argentina, Third World Network (TWN), Polaris Institute (Canada), Institute of Policy Studies Global Economy Project (USA), CNCD-11.11.11 (Belgium), etc., will be organized at Rio+20 Peoples’ Summit connected through videoconference with the People’s Summit on G20 in Mexico.

  Session description: Protect the Commons, not the Banks!

Rio+20 and the G20 Summit in Mexico are happening back to back not out of coincidence. Both Summits agendas reinforce a corporate model of development based in privatizing the commons, hyper-financializing the economy and further liberalizing trade and investments.

This session will focus on the connections between these agendas, the common strategic challenges they pose for social movements, as well as discuss common strategies of resistance. Speakers will explore how the creation of a new environmental services industry serves the interests of the financial sector, in desperate need of new commodities for speculation.

Further, the session will build upon the notion of the commons, exploring how finance should be viewed as part of the commons, since it is a much needed resource that should be managed to provide credit for sustainable and just production and consumption of goods and services. In that sense, the commodification of natural resources for financial speculation, bailout programs that protect the corporate financial sector and austerity measures to overcome sovereign debt problems, are all part of the same scheme of the global elites for protecting the banks and other financial institutions through legitimizing corporate control of the commons.

This workshop will be designed to discussion and debate amongst participants, and live from Mexico, will count with the participation of social representatives from the G20 Peoples’ Summit.

- At the Rio+20 Peoples’ Summit, during one of the Social Movements Assemblies, possibly on June 19 in the afternoon, interventions will look into establishing clear links with the G20, while focusing on the articulation challenges for social movements to confront the corporate model.

- On June 20 for the Day of Global Action of the Peoples’ Summit for social and environmental justice, partners present in Rio will carry messages during the Peoples’ march such as “Protect the Commons, Not the Banks!” and “Our Nature is not for Sale!”

The activities above are nodal moments but other links will take place between the G20 Peoples’ Summit in Mexico and other major themes and issues at the Peoples’ Summit in Rio such as the civil society strategies for challenging extractive industries, transitioning to renewable energy sources, and building campaigns for ‘one million climate jobs’ in countries around the world.

"Our World is Not for Sale" (OWINFS) is a worldwide network of organizations, activists and social movements which opposes corporate globalization embodied in the current global trading system and its underlying rules. OWINFS grew out of the successful international campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) and the 1999 popular uprising against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Seattle. OWINFS is committed to a sustainable, socially just, democratic and accountable multilateral trading system.

Our vision is of a global economy that asserts the interests of people over corporations and provides decent jobs and vital goods and services for all people. This new vision must be built on the principles of economic and climate justice, ecological sustainability, social well-being, gender equity and democratic accountability.