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1. Context

From June 20 to 22, 2012, the United Nations Sustainable Development Conference, better known as Río+20, will be held in Río de Janeiro (Brazil). This conference will be held amidst a period defined by a global crisis and unprecedented attacks on social and labour rights. In Río 92, global leaders already gathered to discuss poverty, access to resources and environmental deterioration ... and to set up an agenda to tackle these problems.

The symptoms, twenty years later, are clear and unmistakable. The planet is now facing a systemic crisis of neoliberal capitalism that is deeper than it was back in 92. The environmental situation is worse overall today than it was yesterday.

We are running out of resources at an ever faster rate, while we are also saturating the sinks that absorb the waste generated. Today, biodiversity is being destroyed at an unprecedented pace. Ecosystems are deteriorating and losing the ability to regulate the climate, provide food, purify water, etc. Land is becoming less fertile. Water and the atmosphere are facing ever greater problems of contamination. Deforestation also continues apace. Greenhouse gas emissions have not been stopped. We are witnessing changes in biogeochemical cycles. Invasive species pose a growing threat...

At the same time, hunger, poverty reduction and access to basic resources such as drinkable water continue to be unsolved problems. The vast gulf between the wealthiest and the poorest continues to widen.

Furthermore, there are similarities but also differences between those responsible for this systemic crisis: the Global North (specifically the State, capital and the population that has the most purchasing power and consumes the most) historically bears much more responsibility than the Global South.

The situation is clear: there hasn't been the political will to resolve the social and environmental injustices that lie at the root of the aforementioned problems.

2. What must change

Ecologistas en Acción believes that not only will social and environmental injustice persist but the situation will worsen if we do not change the economic model that sustains them: a model based on perpetual endless growth, which requires ever greater consumption to continue working, and can only achieve this at the expense of the environment and the most vulnerable people.

The current system is based on maximizing individual profit in the shortest time possible. To achieve this, the global consumption of resources can never stop growing. The wealthy countries (and classes) will enter ever fiercer competition for resources (that they no longer possess) wherever they are and wherever they can be obtained for the lowest price (in impoverished countries), blocking the local populations' access to said resources, threatening their food sovereignty and their lifestyles, whilst poisoning the air and water (governed by lax or non-existent legislation), exporting waste and contaminating emissions

(which will not be recorded in their territory), all of which reduces wage costs and social protection. A massive productive machine required to sustain spiralling credit and the financial economy that would all come falling down if production stopped growing. We are talking about a system that justifies the exploitation of people, that uses war as an instrument of geopolitical control and domination, that corrupts and perverts democracy and leads to incredibly dangerous populist and neo-fascist formulas.

Therefore, **any international efforts aiming to solve this social and environmental crisis must first understand that this cannot be achieved without questioning and transforming capitalism.** 20 years ago many claimed that economic growth would bring social justice and that, by overcoming poverty, the problem of environmental degradation would also be solved. It should be clear by now that exactly the opposite has occurred: a model of unlimited economic growth is not possible on a planet with finite resources, given that it consumes all resources and prohibits large swathes of the population from leading a dignified life.

Likewise, we cannot be so naive as to believe that the global crisis will be solved without questioning and changing power dynamics, as if the world were not run according to self-interest. Even in an optimistic post-Río+20 scenario, one in which world leaders have bravely taken the correct decisions, will it be possible to implement them? Inevitably bold and smart decisions will entail **changing the global power structure and the current relations of exploitation and domination**¹.

3. Important factors to consider at Rio+20

3.1. *Natural resources*

The exhaustion of natural resources is one of the areas in which we can most readily see the physical limits of the planet. Fossil fuel extraction rates are nearing their peak, there is increased international competition for certain natural resources, ...

The United Nations International Resource Panel, which forms part of the United Nations Environmental Panel (UNEP)², acknowledges that in order to fairly distribute access to resources worldwide, in a global consumption scenario with the levels registered in 2000, the wealthy countries would have to sharply reduce their use of resources (of up to 66-80%) and a moderate reduction (10-20%) in some recently industrialized nations, while the poorest countries could increase their consumption of raw materials and energy.

1 The Green Economy: the Wolf in Sheep's clothing
<http://www.tni.org/report/green-economy-wolf-sheeps-clothing>

2 "Decoupling report", UNEP
http://www.unep.org/resourcepanel/decoupling/files/pdf/Decoupling_Report_English.pdf

3.1.1. Eco-efficiency versus resource caps

Faced with this scarcity, the answers coming from many governments have mainly been based on improving eco-efficiency, in other words, produce more with less. We at Ecologistas en Acción think it is far-fetched to believe that these reduction targets can be reached by merely improving efficiency. The path that should be considered by the Governments participating in Río+20 is to tackle the problem of resource exhaustion by setting usage caps. Countries should develop plans to reduce their use of resources in order to meet their “ecological quota”. These plans should set ambitious and binding targets that are measurable and mandatory. Therefore, the mantra of efficiency should be replaced by sufficiency.

3.1.2. Decoupling

Faith in efficiency is based on the assumption that it is possible to decouple the use of raw materials and energy from economic growth (and its consequent environmental impact). Ecologistas en Acción believes this is a myth that needs to be debunked. Improvements in efficiency have been surpassed by the growth of global resource consumption inherent in the logic of perpetual growth. In fact, we are more efficient now than we were in the past regarding the use of raw materials and energy, and yet at the global level of consumption of both has increased. It has been demonstrated that there is also a rebound effect, by which greater efficiency can lead to a greater use of said resources.

Furthermore, we should also point out that behind the partial or relative decoupling that are usually claimed as a guarantee for eco-efficiency measures, often there is a hidden “export” of the impact: an economy can allow itself to reduce the intensity of its energy or raw material consumption if it relocates the most intense processes, so they are registered in other countries. Río +20 should set up a system to accurately calculate each country’s consumption of raw materials and energy, in order to fairly plan their usage. In a globalised world, the accounting must also be global.

3.1.3. Exhaustion of fossil fuels

The evident and imminent exhaustion of fossil fuels should be a clear sign that it is necessary to establish alternatives. Even more so considering there is no plan B for when there is no more oil, which is the fuel that powers the world as we know it today. Without oil, it will be impossible to maintain the current food, agriculture and transport systems. The globalised economy of today will be unsustainable when the industrial production of food and the transport of merchandise become unsustainable. Therefore, Río+20 should establish a protocol for progressively adapting to the exhaustion of fossil fuels, one that makes it possible to achieve a post-fossil fuel society in a manner that is planned and fair. This protocol should consider maintaining reserves in the subsoil, especially in cases that affect regions with sizable biodiversity or indigenous communities.

Río+20 must also rule out attempts to tackle the energy crisis by insisting on dangerous technologies that only perpetuate the current obsolete model: nuclear, agro-fuels, different types of biomass, synthetic biology, etc.

3.1.4. Land grabbing

The Río+20 Conference must define policies that can stop the serious problem of land grabbing by multinational companies in the South, as they try to guarantee control of strategic resources such as food production, forage, other types of vegetal biomass, wood,

minerals, etc. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), international investors have acquired between 50-80 million hectares in the Southern hemisphere, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa³. In many instances, these lands were not empty and were being used by local communities, which were suddenly disposed of their land⁴.-

3.1.5 Commodification of the environment and financialization of natural resources

There is a growing pressure to privatize and commodify nature, which aims to bestow a financial value to ecosystems, but also the processes that occur in these ecosystems that are directly useful to human beings (so-called 'environmental services', such as carbon cycles, nutrient cycles in the soil and water, food production, substances with therapeutic properties, etc.).

An ever increasing number of natural resources, which still mainly belong to the public domain, are susceptible to being privatized and converted into financial instruments and thus being subjected to speculation, with the consequent appearance of financial bubbles that can cause prices to soar. This can affect things as essential for human survival as water or food.

As such, governments should put a stop to the privatization and commodification of natural ecosystem cycles, and basic common goods such as water or biodiversity, establishing a universal right to access these cycles and goods through new policies and laws.

Furthermore, they cannot avoid the debate on the limitations of the financial economy. The governments need to put an end to these speculative bubbles by, for example, pegging currencies to a basket of staple foods or to the population.

3.2 Green economy

This subject will be central to the conference. The green economy has been introduced with great pomp and ceremony as the new path, the responsible alternative to 'business as usual'. UNEP defines it as "one which is low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive"⁵. For *Ecologistas en Acción*, however, these objectives are neither sufficient, nor able to accomplish what is being proposed at this moment in time. Because the green

3 « Land Tenure and International Investments in Agriculture »
[http://www.google.com/url?](http://www.google.com/url?q=http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/hlpe/hlpe_documents/HLPE-Land-tenure-and-international-investments-in-agriculture-2011.pdf&sa=U&ei=478KT-yRMYPD8QPx6-iaAQ&ved=0CBAQFjAG&client=internal-uds-cse&usg=AFQjCNGc--0Ag2dP7WecaFT7cJVDY12PLA)

http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/hlpe/hlpe_documents/HLPE-Land-tenure-and-international-investments-in-agriculture-2011.pdf&sa=U&ei=478KT-yRMYPD8QPx6-iaAQ&ved=0CBAQFjAG&client=internal-uds-cse&usg=AFQjCNGc--0Ag2dP7WecaFT7cJVDY12PLA

4 <http://www.fian.org/noticias/noticias/nyeleni-mali-una-alianza-mundial-contra-el-acaparamiento-de-tierras/pdf>

5 « What is the "Green Economy"? », PNUMA.
<http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/AboutGEI/WhatisGEI/tabid/29784/Default.aspx>

economy that is currently being proposed is yet another form of capitalism, which can never become inclusive because of its structural logic of differentiation. Because on top of that we have seen that resource efficiency is not enough. And because the reduction of emissions will largely be based upon false technical solutions, rather than a reduction in production and consumption in wealthy countries allowing an increase in more impoverished countries so that material living conditions there can become more dignified.

It is important to highlight who will control the green economy: it will be the large corporations that are, symptomatically, demonstrating more interest in the conference than the governments themselves. These companies are already rubbing their hands with glee at the business opportunities offered by the green economy, for selling water, energy, seeds, fish and seafood, processing and selling food, chemicals, fertilizers, pesticides, mining, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, etc.

And they will exercise their enormous power during the conference, to attempt to substitute the global debate with a list of good practices, and legally binding regulations for voluntary guidelines and corporate responsibility.

In fact, the approval of a convention on corporate social responsibility is on the agenda at the conference. Ecologistas en Acción wants to seriously warn against this strategy of the large companies that is aimed to increase business and disarm criticism. Specifically we went to unmask the complex myth promoted by big business, and for society and politicians to battle together for a better world, because this is clearly different from the aims of business. As such, the social and public interest should prevail, which would mean that companies would be required to adhere to obligatory regulations and standards imposed by politicians with power bestowed to them by their democratic mandate.

It is hoped that biomass, in its widest possible sense, can play a key role in this new scenario, not just as an energy source and as one of the desired solutions to climate change. With the exhaustion of fossil fuels meaning that visions of the future cannot base industrial production upon their extraction, the large corporations seem to see the possibility for a new biological economy where biomass, from land or sea, shall be the raw material to be processed, using technologies based upon bioengineering (genetic manipulation, nanotechnology, synthetic biology, etc.), into high added value products (food, energy, materials or pharmaceuticals)⁶. In line with proposals from the UNEP in its (previously mentioned) report the scene is set for heavy investment from the financial sector in this new economy. As such we are likely to see more privatization, commodification and speculation on the natural heritage that as yet still serves a purpose or belongs to us all.

Confronted with this drive, Ecologistas en Acción strongly urges the governments convened in Rio+20 to work towards a new definition for the green economy before beginning to lay its foundations. A real green economy should be an ecological economy,

6 « ¿Quién controlará la economía Verde? » ETC Group.
http://www.etcgroup.org/upload/publication/pdf_file/ETC_wwctge_ESP_4web.pdf

that operates within the limits of the ecosystems and that should help to put a stop to the destruction of biodiversity. It should be an economy that serves people and not profits; that works on a local level; that fosters short supply chains; that closes the material loop; that drastically reduces the absolute consumption of raw materials and energy; that has an important role played by solar power; that fosters local energy self-sufficiency; that satisfies the real needs of society; that is based on agroecology; that brings with it justice and equality between genders and within society; that respects rights, cultures languages and the knowledge and wisdom of indigenous and local people. An ecological economy is one that does not need to continually grow in order to avoid imploding. That is why it has a monetary system that is not based on compound interest, but that money circulates without accumulating interest. An ecological economy fosters the education of culture, peace, cooperation, solidarity and spiritual growth.

3.2.1. Controlling Technology

Resistance to changing the current model for development hides in the hope and belief that science and technology will one day find solutions for the negative impacts that it creates, which will allow us to indefinitely escape disaster. But science is not just knowledge for the sake of it: it serves a purpose and a set of interests. That is why it is important that a debate be opened in Rio+20 about the definition of a technology that is truly green and fair, about the need for social society to influence control over science, and about how science can be used to benefit society rather than the fortunes of a small number of people and corporations. A multitude of historical examples show that technology can increase inequality and social injustice if it is not developed in a way that takes into consideration the communities that it affects. These societies should always participate in producing the solutions to their own problems.

Similarly it is fundamental that this conference saves the Precautionary Principle, which was already present at Rio 92 but is now regularly put on the back burner in favour of short term interests.

3.2.2. False Technological “Solutions”

Faced with resource depletion, climate change, pollution, etc. corporations and governments have opted to look for ways to bypass impacts rather than confront them head on, although these tactics are often presented as solutions. Nevertheless, these so-called “solutions” create new hidden or disguised social and environmental problems or impacts, thus serving to prolong an unsustainable model that is in crisis.

And so, instead of reducing CO₂ emissions, the idea is to capture it; if our fossil fuel reserves (the cause of global warming) are being depleted, rather than reduce our energy consumption and commit to renewable energy, the idea is to develop technologies including hydraulic fracturing in order to access new sources, such as shale gas; when we note that industrial agriculture is a huge contributor to climate change, instead of moving towards agroecological production models, the current model is perpetuated while attempting to mitigate its impact with the use of techniques of dubious benefit for the climate, such as zero tillage...

A whole battery of technologies now constitute the Trojan horse of the green economy and are being postulated as the solution to resource depletion, energy security, environmental

restoration, emissions reduction, food security, climate change mitigation... These technologies include transgenic and other genetically modified organisms; biochar (spreading charcoal where carbon is more stable in the long-term); synthetic Biology (designing totally synthetic organisms in order to create new sources of fuel, capture CO₂, etc.); carbon sequestration (capturing and storing CO₂ at “geologically stable” sites); geoengineering (making major modifications to the global or local climate with the aim of combating climate change with techniques such as sea fertilization and bombing the skies with aerosols); nanotechnology (manipulating matter on a nanometric scale in order to produce substances and materials with totally new characteristics),...

However, these techniques are costly and require huge investments (which will inevitably be diverted from other budget items). And, what’s more, there is no guarantee as to the security of some of these techniques and others have already been proven to be directly harmful. Also, history is full of examples in which supposedly miraculous technologies initially presumed to be a panacea for certain problems are eventually found to be ineffectual after much long-term research and huge expense of (often public) funds.

Ecologistas en Acción asks that the governments attending Río+20 resist the huge pressure from large corporations to continue expanding these markets. We ask that they have the courage to tackle the real causes provoking climate change, resource depletion, pollution; CO₂ emissions, poverty and hunger, and confront them in order to transform them. **We need to combat false technological solutions with environmental and social justice.** Our world is in crisis and has limited resources, and we need to prioritize actions that help redistribute wealth and make a transition towards a truly sustainable model rather than continue to support technological ventures that, as demonstrated by past experience, only lead to more inequality and further weakening of democratic institutions while giving more power to corporations.

The UNEP suggests that, if we are to make the transition towards a *green economy*, major corporations and investors must find it attractive. Nevertheless, if we really want to make a paradigm shift, the rights and interests of the free market cannot become a glass ceiling for environmental protection policies. These technological “solutions” not only fail to contribute towards making this shift, they also, in many cases, aggravate the problem.

3.2.3. The Limits of Renewable Energy

The debates on energy at Río+20 must be based on the clear premise that it is not possible to extend the energy consumption habits of wealthy countries on a universal scale. Governments must therefore have roadmaps with binding agreements geared at significantly reducing energy consumption, and especially the consumption of energy from non-renewable sources. Even with renewable energy sources, it would not be possible to maintain our current level of energy consumption, particularly considering the global trend towards increased consumption. We must bear in mind that renewable energy sources have a series of limitations: problems with storage, distribution, etc. They also pose challenges as far as their temporal (it is not possible to install them from one day to the next), budgetary (putting them in service requires a public commitment), material and energetic (a material investment is needed in order to make them viable vs. other unsustainable uses) requirements. Obviously, we must continue to develop energies such as solar or wind power, but always at the expense of an absolute reduction of other more pollutant sources.

Nevertheless, the main efforts regarding renewable energy are not aimed at energies such as solar or wind power, instead the most significant developments are focused on harvesting and burning biomass. In the future, increasingly larger percentages of arable land will be used to produce biofuel. The energy balance for these crops is questionable and is a constant source of controversy; they also exert a significant pressure on high-biodiversity areas, are driving many peasants in the South away from their means of livelihood, and cause price increases that could jeopardize access to basic foods.

Other recently developed sources of biomass (plant biomass using natural or synthetic algae), use of forest biomass, etc. do not offer a viable large-scale solution. They cannot replace fossil fuels on a global scale, nor is it rational to continue to maintain our current levels of carbon dioxide emissions (which these substances do not reduce).

On the other hand, the governments attending Rio+20 must promote popular control of energy sources. These cannot remain in the hands of large transnational corporations. As a strategic resource, energy must always be subject to the general interest, as must its planning (generation, transport, distribution, rates, etc.).

3.2.4. Agroecology and Food Sovereignty

World leaders at Rio+20 must see oil depletion as an opportunity to move towards an alternative agricultural model based on agroecology. Industrial agriculture is one of the main causes of the current environmental and social crisis, and sustainable small-scale agriculture, which currently produces 70% of our food⁷, is an essential element in the fight against global warming, the loss of biodiversity, soil degradation, etc. Ecologistas en Acción asks that world leaders look at agroecology as a means to largely eradicate hunger and poverty, and that they put it at the center of the solution, since it has the potential to increase our capacity to produce food in sufficient quantities while guaranteeing food sovereignty, “cooling” the planet⁸, empowering peasant farmers and acknowledging the key role played by women.⁹

3.3. Governance

The agenda for the Rio+20 Summit includes reforming the international environmental structure so that it will be in a better position to confront the global environmental crisis. The various organizations and different pieces of legislation we currently have often demonstrate a scarce degree of rationality, methodology or connection among all the different parts. At present, there are over 40 institutions with some sort of environmental mandate that are dependent on the UN. It is also evident that, to date, some international

7 « A Viable Food Future». Viklingsfondet. <http://www.utviklingsfondet.no/viablefuture/>

8 « Cooling the Planet with Agroecology». Ecologistas en Acción, 2011.

9 « A Viable Food Future». Viklingsfondet. <http://www.utviklingsfondet.no/viablefuture/>

agreements on environmental issues are mere compromises with no real support and little chance of being enforced or observed. Therefore, among the various options being contemplated is setting up a United Nations environmental authority (whether it is UNEP or another existing body, albeit with extended powers, or perhaps another newly created organization) with more power and money.

In principle, Ecologistas en Acción supports the aim of consolidating the environmental mandate on an international level and creating a more efficient and effective organization, whether this is done through a global environmental Authority, or through a similar figure with the power to impose economic sanctions.

However, in the process, social and environmental issues must be considered a serious priority, placing them ahead of the economic interests of markets and corporations, which means that international environmental agreements should prevail over business and financial decision-making (WTO, IDA,...) so that we can make progress towards ensuring systematic policy coherence.

Among other things, prioritizing environmental decisions above all others should serve to consolidate the precautionary principle and effectively control the impacts of emerging technologies, with the power to veto those that jeopardize people and the planet.

Also, in order to ensure that international environmental decisions are upheld, it is equally important to create an International Environmental Court before which any governments or corporations that do not respect international legislation will be held accountable.

Ecologistas en Acción also believes that reforming international governance should include a process of democratizing institutions, whereby citizens will have the right not only to voice their opinion, but also to actively and truly participate in decision-making. To this end, most decisions should be taken on the local level and only those with global implications should be taken within the above-mentioned frameworks.

The future global environmental authority should be a totally transparent organization in which civil society organizations play a key role as observers and guarantors of the public interest. Otherwise, we would risk repeating the same mistake and creating obscure organisms subject to the pressures of large lobby groups that represent business interests.

4. Concrete Proposals

- Establish a Universal Right of access to natural resources. In many cases, secure access to resources determines access to housing, food, health, etc. Establishing this right should go hand-in-hand with measures to guarantee it.
- Begin a process of reforming the financial system in order to anchor currencies to physical values and create a monetary system that is not based on compound interest. This implies creating a public banking system as a tool for financing whatever projects society democratically decides to fund.

- Adopt an international tax on financial transactions (Tobin tax) to prevent or limit speculation.
- Establish a system to keep track of extraction and use of resources and waste generation, so as to more accurately reflect the real impact of each economy on the planet. Thus, in order to establish fairly and realistically differentiated responsibilities, adequate consideration should be given to carbon fluxes, virtual water, embodied energy, etc.
- Establish plans to reduce the use of resources in wealthy countries so that their level of consumption converges with their “carbon quota”. These plans should establish ambitious, measurable and binding objectives. Impoverished countries should plan the use of resources intelligently in order to attain decent living standards for the majority of their populations while avoiding the path of waste and inequity the Global North has been following.
- Establish plans to reduce the use of energy, especially from non-renewable resources. These plans should establish ambitious, binding, measurable and enforceable objectives, including absolute caps.
- Establish limits for current biofuel policies in order to both prevent the pressure they exert on high-biodiversity areas and avoid the social and economic impacts they are currently having on many peasant populations. It is important to develop biofuels obtained from industrial or food sub-products, but never those that compete with food production for land or expand the agricultural frontier at the expense of vulnerable and high-biodiversity ecosystems.
- Establish measures to promote local production of renewable energy sources. Implement a process aimed at gaining social and democratic control of energy production.
- Establish an international protocol for adapting to the depletion of fossil fuels. This protocol should contemplate keeping reserves, especially in cases where high-biodiversity areas or indigenous communities living in reserve areas are affected.
- Agree on drastic and urgent measures to put an end to corporate land grabbing in impoverished countries. As a first step, establish an international protocol that places absolute limits on the acquisition of land or real estate by foreign natural or legal persons.
- Promote agroecology at the highest possible level as a tool to combat climate change and ensure food sovereignty. Implement mechanisms to discourage industrial agriculture activities. Impose an international tax on the use of agrochemicals in agriculture, which would be reinvested in R+D+I on combating biological plagues, genetic diversity of domestic varieties and breeds, etc.
- Revalue and consolidate the Precautionary Principle. Establish mechanisms to guarantee its application, introducing it as a prerequisite in all international conventions and protocols to do with the environment.

- Start a serious international debate about the use of technology, its social control, and its benefits to society. Elaborate a code to define fair and green technologies.
- Recognize biodiversity as a common asset that is essential to life and should not be turned into a commodity or privatized; prioritizing its conservation above all other economic and political interests.
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- Reject the approval of a Convention on Corporate Social Responsibility. Establishing mandatory environmental standards for companies must continue to prevail over voluntary regulation.
- Consolidate international environmental governance that allows for a new *status quo* in which environmental and social decisions and agreements are ranked above commercial and financial interests and agreements. Establish a totally transparent Global Environmental Authority with the power to impose economic sanctions and in which civil society organizations play a key role as observers and guarantors of the public interest.
- Establish an International Environmental Court with the power to effectively judge governments and corporations that violate international legislation.

Ecologistas en Acción urges the governments attending Rio+20 to set the foundation for an unavoidable and urgent paradigm shift. We must delay embarking upon the path toward a new way of living and organizing ourselves, under the prism of social and environmental justice, putting the brake on this crazy spiral of destruction and injustice and allowing life to develop equitably and in keeping with the planet's capacity and pace.

Lastly, Ecologistas en Acción would like to make an urgent appeal to the world's governments to take this event very seriously. As far as the climate and the environment are concerned, humanity has a very limited time frame in which to avoid reaching a tipping point.

If we don't stop this nonsense... There will be no Rio+40!