



FALSE SOLUTIONS: CLIMATE COLONIALISM AND TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS

Stories From the Ground*

'In Fiji, renewable energy projects like hydrodams and wind farms have negatively impacted our communities. Women are not part of consultations and were even blocked out from accessing land and other resources they were once able to access freely'.

- Fijian woman activist during the South to South Feminist Learning on Climate Justice, August 2022



Jalaur Dam in Panay Island, Philippines

The Western Visayas or the Panay region is the home of the indigenous Tumandok, whose ancestral territory sits on the watersheds of the Central Panay mountain range. The Jalaur River Multi-Purpose Project Phase II was pushed by the Philippine government with the support of the Korean government and the Korean Export-Import Bank at an investment cost of 250 million USD. Its proponents are also touting it as a climate adaptation project to address floods in the region, aside from being a source of 'clean' and 'renewable' energy. However, independent studies found a lack of process to obtain the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of the Tumandoks. It was also found to directly displace 17,000 Tumandoks from

their ancestral territory, submerge nine Tumandok communities including sacred grounds and cause floods and water diversion impacts expected to affect at least 1.2 million residents in the region.¹ In December 2020, synchronised police operations simultaneously killed nine Tumandok indigenous leaders and members who were vocal against the dam project and arrested 16 more in a supposed operation against ‘communist rebels’.

In many other countries in Asia and the Pacific, a similar pattern of opacity, lack of genuine engagement from community members and violent reprisals are being experienced by women and their communities opposing mega-dam projects repackaged as renewable energy and climate solutions. These projects, however, are perpetuating, if not exacerbating, injustices being wrought by development aggression, particularly against rural and indigenous communities.

‘Clean’ Coal from the Rampal Power Plant in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is home to the world’s largest mangrove forest called the Sundarbans. Spanning 140,000 hectares, it acts as a natural flood and wave barrier protecting residents of the country’s south-west coast from the harshest impacts of tropical cyclones. However, the Sundarbans and the two million farmers, fisherfolk and rural people who rely on it are under threat by the 732-hectare development of a 1,320MW coal-fired power station in Rampal, incredibly being touted as a ‘clean’ and ‘green’ energy solution jointly developed by the Bangladesh and Indian energy ministries.

Despite being one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate crises, the government of Bangladesh is not just building power plants that burn Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emitting coal, it is also deceiving the peoples by labelling the coal plant as ‘green’. The Rampal power plant will also destroy vital natural barriers to climate disasters.

**These case studies are based on the contributions of grassroots women from the Philippines and Bangladesh who attended the South to South Feminist Learning on Climate Justice (SSFL) series of APWLD organised in 2022.*

Stories of the Indigenous Tumandoks and the rural communities of Rampal above, clearly show that projects which supposedly tackle climate crises are often implemented without genuine social and environmental impact assessments that uphold individual and collective human rights of the peoples. Instead, the projects are depriving communities of their lands, territories and livelihoods, which further incapacitate them to meaningfully adapt to the rapid change of the climate — hence directly attacking peoples’ right to life.

¹ Scheidel, A. (2015). *Jalaur River Multi-Purpose Project Phase II Dam, Iloilo, Philippines*. Environmental Justice Atlas. <https://www.ejatl.org/conflict/jalaur-river-mega-dam-project-philippines>

Climate Solutions Explained



Climate solutions are the various initiatives, policies and actions undertaken by governments, businesses, schools, nonprofits and communities to address climate change. These range from actions that mitigate or reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, adaptive measures that strengthen the resilience of communities and food systems against the impacts of climate change, to measures that compensate for the loss and damage already suffered by the peoples.

While there are meaningful climate solutions such as agro-ecological practices and community-led renewable energy systems, climate solutions led by big corporations and rich countries often worsen the ecological crisis and power and wealth inequalities.

Feminists and grassroots women in Asia and the Pacific believe that real climate solutions must recognise the complexity of climate action, address not only the excessive emission production at present, but most importantly, address the historical responsibility of the polluters. Real climate solutions must also significantly reduce emissions, avert, minimise and address loss and damage and strengthen the adaptive capacity of communities. Real climate solutions must tackle the root causes of climate injustices and address the systemic inequalities between and within countries, rich and poor and men and women.

THE CLIMATE SOLUTIONS CHECKLIST:

- ♀ Does it recognise the leadership of grassroots women and their communities and is it guided by their realities?
- ♀ Does it recognise the complexity of climate action, or claim to be a silver bullet?
- ♀ Does it address the historical responsibility of the biggest polluters, or just focus on present and future emissions?
- ♀ Does it contribute significantly to reducing emissions, enabling adaptation, and compensating for loss and damage, or is it a band-aid solution?
- ♀ Does it recognise the needs and rights of communities, or trample on human rights along with collective community rights?
- ♀ Does it empower communities, or reinforce systemic inequalities and power relations?



False Solutions Gallery



False solutions are those that pose as ‘climate actions’ but in reality, do not address the root causes of the climate catastrophe. They can be largely characterised by the neoliberal corporate capture of climate action and corporate greenwashing, essentially perpetuating climate injustices.

Below are some examples of false solutions being peddled and marketed by the world’s biggest and historical polluters:

1. The Carbon Market

The carbon market was introduced in the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. Instead of real and decisive GHG emission cuts, emitting countries were allowed to buy carbon credits, equivalent to one tonne of carbon dioxide (CO₂) per credit from countries that had real GHG emissions to spare. The transaction allows rich countries to continue polluting the air. A new market was created that made clean air a tradable commodity, monetised climate action and created a new arena for

the same mega-corporations that pollute our planet and cause the climate crisis to generate even more profit.

The Kyoto Protocol also introduced what is called the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) that created carbon offsets where rich countries can 'offset' the actual carbon and other GHGs that they continue to emit by funding emissions-reducing projects in other countries especially where it is cheaper to do so.

Southeast Asia is host to 15 per cent of the world's tropical forests. Despite a high deforestation rate of 1.2 per cent per year, the sub-region remains a target for carbon offset initiatives,² wherein rich countries and Transnational Corporations (TNCs) finance climate mitigation projects targeting developing countries in exchange for carbon credits.

CDM projects in Asia and the Pacific include large-scale wind and solar projects in the Philippines and India, power generation using biogas from state-owned palm oil mills in Indonesia and solar farms in Pakistan.³ These projects, if not developed with community members, have been shown to lead to displacement and loss of homes, livelihoods and heritage of indigenous and farmer communities, and their violent suppression when they oppose these projects. These can also cause further degradation of ecosystems and destruction of carbon sinks, for example in the case of palm oil plantations to feed biogas plants and the flooding of forest areas for large-scale hydropower projects.

Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation or REDD+ incentivises forest conservation in developing countries to reduce carbon in the air through conservation, sustainable forest management and enhancement of forest carbon stock. In reality, it became another mechanism for carbon offset where rich countries finance forest conservation projects in developing countries but are allowed to continue emitting GHGs. REDD+ areas are often in the ancestral lands of Indigenous Peoples leading to their displacement.

A non-biodiverse definition of forests also means that ecologically toxic monoculture tree plantations such as oil palm can be included in REDD+. It is critical to also mention that monoculture plantations, by their nature, negatively impact biodiversity and the quality of lands and water resources. REDD+ scheme is not a genuine solution, instead it exacerbates the climate emergency while putting more profit in the pockets of the rich industrialised countries in the Global North.

² Hardcastle, D., Kulkarni, V., and Lichtenau, T. (2021). *Southeast Asia's Carbon Markets: A Critical Piece of the Climate Puzzle*. Bain & Company. <https://www.bain.com/insights/southeast-asias-carbon-markets-a-critical-piece-of-the-climate-puzzle/>

³ See: list of registered programmes on the UNFCCC Clean Development Mechanism website. <https://cdm.unfccc.int/ProgrammeOfActivities/registered.html>



In October 2021, the government of Sabah, Malaysia, granted extendable monopoly rights of 100 years over two million hectares of forest lands to the Singapore firm, Hoch Standard Pte Ltd. without any FPIC of the indigenous communities living in the area. With this agreement, Hoch Standard was given the exclusive right to develop 'nature conservation management plans' and to manage the 'natural capital benefits' over the forest lands.⁴ This was done under the auspices of REDD+. Similarly, in Papua and West Papua, REDD+ projects were undertaken by the government on customary lands of indigenous communities without their FPIC as well.⁵

Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) were first put forward by the World Bank in 2008⁶ and then defined in the 2016 World Conservation Congress as 'actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural or modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well being and biodiversity benefits'.⁷ In reality, however, large corporations have co-opted NBS as another form of carbon offsets that allow them to continue burning fossil fuels as long as they plant new forests. But these forests are not necessarily endemic to the area and eventually end up as monocultures and may displace rural farmers and indigenous communities. NBS are also used to own and control swaths of forest land that include ancestral domains of Indigenous Peoples, effectively forcing them out of their lands similar to REDD+ schemes.

The push for blue carbon in Asia and the Pacific region is also an example of a nature-based solution that ostensibly protects the oceans as a carbon sink but rather leads to the ocean grabbing and displacement of fisherfolk communities from their traditional fishing grounds and sources of livelihood. Blue carbon projects are targeting coastal ecosystems such as mangroves, salt marshes and seagrass meadows. The narrative of blue carbon as a climate solution is threatening the lives and survival of grassroots women particularly fisherfolks and other coastal living communities.

Net Zero is an inherently scientific concept of a net balance of gains and losses; in terms of climate action, it means a balance of GHG emissions and reductions so that CO₂ emissions peak before 2030 and fall to Net Zero by around 2050.⁸ Akin to the 2015 catchphrase 'carbon neutrality', Net Zero was applauded by many government leaders during the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) in

⁴ Cali Tzay, F. (2021). *Communication regarding a Nature Conservation Agreement granting monopoly rights on 2 million hectares of Sabah's forested lands to a private company – Extremely Urgent*. Land Empowerment Animals People Sabah Malaysia. https://sarawakreportdocs.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/UN+Special+Rapporteur+Letter+-+Final_Revised.pdf

⁵ Forest Peoples Programme. (2011). *Papua and West Papua: REDD+ and the threat to indigenous peoples*. <https://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/publication/2011/10/papua-briefing-6.pdf>

⁶ The World Bank. (2008). *Biodiversity, Climate Change, and Adaptation: Nature-Based Solutions from the World Bank Portfolio*. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank. <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/149141468320661795/pdf/467260WP0REPLA1sity1Sept020081final.pdf>

⁷ International Union for the Conservation of Nature. (2016). *WCC-2016-Res-069-EN: Defining Nature-based Solutions*. https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC_2016_RES_069_EN.pdf

⁸ Fankhauser, S., Smith, S.M., Allen, M. et al. (2022). *The meaning of net zero and how to get it right*. *Nature Climate Change*. 12, 15–21. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-021-01245-w>



Glasgow in 2021. It is actually a repackaging of carbon offsets and carbon markets and does not provide the real and drastic emission cuts urgently needed to avert planetary climate catastrophe. It promotes 'business as usual' for the planet's biggest polluters and emitters and relies on other false solutions ('green' energy, high tech solutions and nature based solutions) to continue to profit off the climate crisis. Instead of Net Zero, feminists and climate justice movements have been demanding real zero which requires drastic emission cuts by the polluters. Real zero requires the Global North to stop using the Global South as a tool to take climate actions and cut carbon emissions while the polluters continue to extract profit at the expense of the peoples and the environment.

2. 'Green' and 'Clean' Energy

Corporations and governments are taking advantage of the climate crisis to repackage old, dirty and discredited sources of energy like mega-dams, nuclear power and agrofuels into 'climate- friendly' projects. These also lead to the displacement of farmers and Indigenous Peoples from their lands and livelihoods.

A 2019 study by risk analytics company, Verisk Maplecroft, found 'high to extreme risk' for violations of Indigenous Peoples' rights including their collective land rights along with violations by security forces for wind energy projects in China and India. It also found 'high to extreme levels' of occupational health and safety risks to workers involved in solar panel production in Vietnam, China, Thailand and Malaysia.⁹

Mega-dams flood entire districts, destroy biodiversity, cause deforestation and displace indigenous and other rural communities, and are in fact sources of GHGs due to methane emissions from decomposing trees, vegetation and other flooded organic materials inside and around the dam reservoir.

134 large-scale mega dams are being planned in the 4,909-km Mekong River and its tributaries and channels under the name of climate change mitigation.¹⁰ This is despite numerous studies showing serious potential social and environmental impacts of mega dams on the targeted communities and riverine ecosystems.¹¹

⁹ Nazalya, S. (2019). *Human rights cast shadow over green energy's clean image*. Verisk Maplecroft. <https://www.maplecroft.com/insights/analysis/human-rights-cast-shadow-over-green-energy-clean-image/>

¹⁰ Open Development Mekong. (2016). *Regional Hydropower Dam*. <https://data.opendatacommons.org/dataset/greater-mekong-subregion-hydropower-dams-2016>

¹¹ Soutullo, J. (2019). *The Mekong River: geopolitics over development, hydropower and the environment*. Policy Department for External Relations. European Parliament. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/639313/EXPO_STU\(2019\)639313_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/639313/EXPO_STU(2019)639313_EN.pdf)

Agrofuels like ethanol and biodiesel promote monoculture plantations that undermine food production, the environment and human rights. Their production emits substantial GHG due to the extensive use of fossil fuels and agro-chemicals. When burned, biofuels release similar amounts of GHG as fossil fuels; this is only an offset because biofuel plantations act as carbon sinks.

Verisk Maplecroft's 2019 human rights study also found that there is a 'high to extreme risk' of labour rights violations for agricultural workers in plantations of biofuel inputs, specifically palm oil in Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, sugarcane in India and Thailand as well as corn in China.

Nuclear plants cause more harm than good from the mining of uranium and production of uranium fuel, the construction and operation of nuclear power plants and the disposal of nuclear wastes that still consume immense energy and produce substantial GHG emissions, to the well-studied dangers of nuclear meltdowns, leaks and other accidents. The tragic 2011 Fukushima Daiichi disaster in Japan underscores how a region regularly visited by earthquakes, floods and volcanic eruptions can be brought to its knees by a nuclear meltdown, affecting marine ecosystems and food supplies continents away.

3. High-Tech Solutions

Business and governments have been showcasing high-tech solutions as novel and innovative approaches to tackle the climate crisis, as discussed below.

Climate Smart Agriculture is a catch-all phrase for a range of actions aimed at shielding agriculture from climate shocks. These include changes in cropping systems, integrated crop-livestock management, agroforestry, digital agriculture, better weather forecasting, resilient food crops and risk insurance. But corporations, especially big agrochemical TNCs have co-opted this and promoted their own brand of climate smart agriculture that include genetically modified crops that have terminator seeds and are reliant on synthetic fertiliser, and intensifying industrial livestock production that actually create more GHG emissions. These agrochemical giants even penalise and criminalise farmers practicing traditional agroecological methods such as seed saving and propagation, using harsh trade and intellectual property rules crafted with millions of dollars of their lobbying funds. In essence, TNC-led climate smart agriculture makes farmers even more vulnerable to climate change as they squeeze them out of their livelihoods and make traditional farming even more expensive to do.

Shifting to electric vehicles and renewables will lead to more damage to the environment and communities if it will rely on the hyper-extraction of minerals using processes and practices that pollute and displace communities. There is

now a scramble for deep-sea mining in the world's oceans to access nodules in the sea floor that contain metals such as copper, nickel, cobalt, iron, manganese and rare earth elements that are in higher demand because of their use in renewables and electric vehicles. Deep-sea mining, however, can destroy delicate ocean ecosystems and affect our marine food systems.

7.5 million hectares of the Indian Ocean — an estimated resource of 380 million metric tonnes polymetallic nodules — is currently allocated for deep-sea mining sponsored by the Indian government. These nodules contain copper, nickel and cobalt that are presently in high demand as components of batteries to power electric vehicles. Scientists and environmentalists, however, caution that deep-sea mining can wreak havoc on delicate ocean ecosystems and are calling for a moratorium until more knowledge is gathered on both its short-term and long-term impacts.¹²

In the Pacific, island nations namely Nauru, Tonga, Kiribati and Cook Islands are keen to support deep-sea mining in the Central Pacific Ocean, namely the Clarion-Clipperton Zone (CCZ) where polymetallic nodules of transition minerals such as copper, nickel, cobalt, iron, manganese and rare earth elements are believed to be found. Civil society and the governments of Fiji, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, however, have called for caution and a moratorium on deep-sea mining citing impacts to food supply, fish catch and marine ecosystems.¹³

Geo-engineering technologies include the deployment of mechanical or physical shields to reduce the amount of sunlight that reaches the planet. It also includes the use of large-scale mechanical devices or the high-tech manipulation of natural carbon sinks in order to capture or remove massive amounts of CO₂ from the air. These high-tech Carbon Capture Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) technologies are very expensive.

Currently, there are CCUS projects in Japan and China, and others are under development in Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. These do not directly address the roots of the climate crisis which is overproduction and overly high GHG emissions. China, for example, has begun to reinject what they plan to be hundreds of thousands of tonnes of carbon per year into existing oil-rich offshore seabeds with carbon captured from its offshore oil and gas activities.¹⁴ Instead of veering away from dirty fossil fuel based activities, this only encourages its further use.

¹² Shankar, P. (2022). *Deep-sea mining efforts gear up to meet clean energy demands amid concerns*. Mongabay. <https://india.mongabay.com/2022/10/deep-sea-mining-efforts-gear-up-to-meet-clean-energy-demands-amid-concerns/>

¹³ Alberts, E.C. (2020). *Deep-sea mining: An environmental solution or impending catastrophe?*. Mongabay. <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/06/deep-sea-mining-an-environmental-solution-or-impending-catastrophe/>

¹⁴ Reuters. (2021). *China's CNOOC launches first offshore carbon capture project*. <https://www.reuters.com/business/sustainable-business/chinas-cnooc-launches-first-offshore-carbon-capture-project-2021-08-30/>

Feminist Demands for Climate Justice



Year in and year out, the world's richest companies and their governments, who rake in trillions of USD from ecosystem plunder and fossil fuel burning, are finding novel mechanisms and loopholes to stick to their 'business as usual'. False solutions have been setting the stage for resource grabs and the displacement of grassroots women and their communities. These also go hand-in-hand with militarisation, harassment and killing of women's human rights and environmental defenders.

Women in Asia and the Pacific are already bearing the brunt of climate change impacts due to the unequal distribution of wealth, power and access to resources. WE WANT CLIMATE JUSTICE NOW! — to right the wrongs of false solutions and demand accountability from the world's biggest polluters and plunderers.

1. Climate Justice Now!

The climate crisis reflects a deeper systemic crisis of inequality and oppression at play. Real climate solutions address these inequalities by shifting power to the peoples. These benefit the historically and systematically oppressed communities and work towards changes in the system, as opposed to maintaining dominant unequal power structures and relations.

This is why climate justice cannot be achieved without gender and social justice. We recognise that the systemic roots of climate change, which includes neoliberal capitalism, fundamentalisms, militarism and patriarchy, need to be addressed in order to achieve genuine change towards climate justice.

2. Reject Corporate Greenwashing, Fight for Real Climate Solutions!

Since the introduction of carbon offset mechanisms in the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, big business interests have been greenwashing their way to climate inaction. We reject the corporate capture and commodification of our forests, seas and air in the guise of carbon offsets and Net Zero. To ensure a real transformational shift in our fossil fuel based production and energy systems, we should limit the influence and control of big corporations and fossil fuel lobbyists in climate negotiations.

Real and drastic emission cuts should be a priority to stay below a 1.5C change in global temperatures. On the other hand, reducing GHG emissions at the source should ensure that gender, environmental and ecological aspects are considered and human rights are upheld. At the same time, there should be a moratorium on the rapacious resource extraction of oligarchs and TNCs that destroy carbon sinks and render communities even more vulnerable in the face of climate catastrophe.

Real climate solutions should not limit and destroy the adaptive capacities of the marginalised and climate-vulnerable groups and communities. We want a Just and Equitable Transition towards an economy that benefits all, especially the most marginalised, including women, while wisely utilising and caring for nature for future generations.

We support sustainable community-led and managed approaches according to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) that includes coastal habitat restoration, agroforestry, sustainable forest and community-led and managed natural resource management and livelihood diversification that promotes food sovereignty of rural and indigenous communities.

3. Ensure Inclusive, Sustainable and Gender Just Climate Solutions!

In lieu of corporate profit-driven false solutions, we should promote gender-transformative, women-led, community-driven and holistic approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation. To ensure all of these, there needs to be meaningful and inclusive participation and leadership of women and their

communities in climate discussions and decision making processes at all levels as well as for both government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) actions. In turn, the capacity of grassroots women and girls should be strengthened to contribute further to climate actions and to help amplify women's voices, challenges and solutions in tackling climate crises.

4. Ensure Women and Community Leadership in Technology, Finance and Solutions!

Ensuring women and community access to knowledge, technology and solutions starts with promoting mass-oriented, massive climate change education in our homes, schools and communities. We should create spaces for women to discuss the reality of climate crises at the community level to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the complexity of the crisis and its solutions. Further, there should be more support for feminist climate action, research and solidarity.

Local wisdom, indigenous women's knowledge, science and community-led solutions exist and are developing, but are being sidelined. We should acknowledge, support and promote these. At the same time, there should be safeguards to ensure that all climate technologies are gender and socially-just and environmentally safe and sustainable. This includes transparency on climate financing and projects at every stage from planning, development, implementation and monitoring. Most importantly, climate finance must support meaningful solutions led by grassroots women and based on community experience and knowledge.

5. Defense and Solidarity for Women's Human Rights and Environmental Defenders!

Women and their communities who are at the frontline of climate action and rejection of false solutions are being harassed, demonised, criminalised, imprisoned and killed. We oppose and defy the criminalisation of just dissent against false solutions. We stand together to protect women's human rights and environmental defenders from all forms of human rights violations and demand the same from governments and human rights mechanisms. We should celebrate and defend our women and environmental defenders at our climate frontlines.



About APWLD

The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) is the region's leading network of feminist and women's rights organisations and individual activists. For over 35 years, we have been carrying out advocacy, activism and movement-building to advance women's human rights and Development Justice.

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