



TISHMAN CENTER · APRIL 18, 2019

# Cultivating Biocultural Diversity through Indigenous and Peasant Sovereignty

Hegemonic state-centric,  
intergovernmental and market based  
approaches to addressing climate  
change have not been able to  
address the root causes of the  
Anthropocene's climate crisis. It is  
time we shift our attention from

hegemonic global governance to the counter-hegemonic networks of grassroots organizations, particularly those based on indigenous, local and peasant communities. Both REDD+ and cap-and-trade mechanisms are proposed as a way to reduce carbon emissions, yet indigenous and peasant food systems already target this goal by decarbonizing agriculture (Gonzalez 2016, 410). The other goal of biodiversity conservation through REDD+ is another factor in which indigenous people find more success through food sovereignty and forest management (Gabay and Alam 2017, 28). An example of establishing land rights is found in Bolivia through “... Indigenous and Campesino Territories (TIOCs) [which] not only recognize the ancestral ownership of land to indigenous peoples, but also give them the legal mandate to manage their natural resources autonomously and with respect for their customary decision-making procedures.” (Temper et al. 2018, 757). To revitalize biocultural diversity, it is imperative that not only are lands returned but that cultural knowledge and memory are repaired after the trauma of continual colonization and dispossession:



In Latin America, there are valuable experiences of recovery of the historical memory of indigenous peoples made by the protagonists themselves, as part of strategies aimed at addressing the dominant model of development and its erosion and erasure of the identity of entire people...re-writing and revisiting history from the local perspective play an important role building environmental counter-narratives and counter-histories, which in turn and with time can help change the collective way of thinking and seeing the environment and environmental change. (Temper et al. 2018, 757). This process of memory repair and restoration allows indigenous people who have been subjected to an epistemological rift

to reproduce the knowledge systems necessary for high transformation toward sustainability. A potentially starting point is found in India with the Vikalp Sangam process which establishes transformations within varied spheres (Temper et al. 2018, 757). The two that seemed to fit in best with the concept of revitalization of biocultural diversity are “ecological integrity and resilience” and “cultural diversity and knowledge democracy” (Temper et al. 2018, 758). The first incorporates the stewardship of non-human nature of and the enhancement of its resilience by respecting ecological limits. The second incorporates the ideas that there are “...pluralism of ways of living, ideas and ideologies are respected, and where the generation, transmission and use of knowledge (traditional/modern, including science and technology) are accessible to all.” (Temper et al. 2018, 758).



Latin America contains levels of biocultural diversity as conserved and developed by the indigenous and peasant people who have been resilient in the face of colonialism and neo-liberal expansion. Examples of biodiversity conservation are found throughout the continent from the continued cultivation of vast varieties of chilies and potatoes, to the “...forest islands or *apete* created by the Kayapo people in the Amazonian region...”, and the seed exchanges practiced by Aymara and Quechua women in the Andes (Rozzi 2015, 94). The previous examples show how indigenous and peasant communities continue to guard both agrodiversity and biodiversity as traditional cultural practices, an effective counteraction to the

industrial monocultures dominating mainstream agriculture. In addition to agriculture, forest management by Indigenous people and peasants is tied to land sovereignty and CO2 mitigation strategies that are more ecologically and socially sustainable (Gabay and Alam 2017, 28). To better understand the global impacts of peasant and Indigenous forest management it is important to note that there are “...an estimated 37.7 billion tons of carbon is stored in the living biomass of the 513 million hectares of community forests globally. Community forests also provide water related services (both quantity and quality) through water regulation in the ecosystems and reducing soil erosion” (Gabay and Alam 2017, 29). The overarching point is that biocultural diversity is intrinsically tied to the social, cultural, and political shift necessary to address climate change, but the first step needs to be the revitalization of indigenous cultures in conjunction with land sovereignty.

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