

# Life for Sale!

## Are markets the panacea for biodiversity conservation?



# The Neoliberal Approach to Biodiversity Conservation and Environmental Services' Markets:

- Give biodiversity and other environmental assets a market value
- Let markets do their work
- Requirements:
  - Commodification
  - Privatization
  - Ensuring free trade, locally, nationally and internationally



# Main Environmental Services' Markets

- Carbon Trade (Kyoto Protocol)
- Trade in Genetic Resources and related Knowledge (CBD, WIPO, WTO, ITPGR)
- Ecotourism (CBD, CSD, WTO)
- Biodiversity Offsets
- Watershed Services

# Private Sector Engagement versus Public Governance

- Corporations, large landholders and large conservation NGOs can surely profit from environmental services' markets
- At the expense of the poor?
- 'Money rules' versus democracy: Do partnerships with industry and rich NGOs undermine democracy? Who decides on country priorities?



# “Markets will be effective and equitable”:



- *If* all values are properly accounted for
- *If* they are equitably distributed to the proper “owners”
- *If* the market is properly regulated
- *If* those regulations are effectively enforced
- *If* there is an equal level playing field so that all biodiversity consumers and producers can participate equitably

# So what do we do on planet earth?



# “*If*s” that tend to be non-existent:

- Economic valuation: Will biodiversity survive on basis of economic incentives only? Does conservation make sense from a purely economic point of view?
- Equitable appropriation of private property rights: Who has the right to own biodiversity? Is biodiversity a “BioNullius” to be colonized?
- Regulations and enforcement: markets tend to replace public governance, not strengthen them
- the Costa Rican experience: carbon and genetic resources markets only developed as a result of government intervention, ODA and other governmental support. As soon as they were left on their own, they proved economically unviable.



# More “*ifs*” that do not exist



- On planet earth, there is no level playing field for biodiversity producers and consumers:
  - Only monetary wealthy consumers are ‘free to choose’
  - Only monetary wealthy producers will be able to compete in the biodiversity market
  - Main victims: Women, Indigenous Peoples, landless farmers, and the monetary poor in general



# The role of the World Trade Organization and trade agreements

- Trade agreements undermine or even prohibit social safeguards in the environmental services' market:
- The liberalization of trade in “ecosystem services” under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and similar clauses in bilateral trade agreements (BTAs) imply that giving priority to Indigenous peoples' and community rights “discriminates” against large corporations
- Public governance is undermined by the non-agricultural market access negotiations: Removing tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade to allow “equal competition” between small producers and large producers
- The privatization of biodiversity and traditional knowledge is facilitated under the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement (TRIPs) and similar BTA clauses

# Alternatives to neo-liberal approaches

- Reinvent the wheel or improve the GEF?

There is an existing mechanism to provide support to developing countries making extra efforts for the planet

- Rule Corporations or let Corporations Rule?

We need to strengthen democratic public governance instead of undermining it through corporate sponsorship and other dubious partnerships

- NGOs versus Communities?

We need to respect Peoples' rights and responsibilities and provide public support for community governance, instead of undermining it

# Support sustainable, democratic public governance

