

## The emergence of the Green Economy or the hijacking of the economy by the ecosystem?

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Statistics and numbers presented at the conclusion of the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 21) in Paris have stunned many inhabitants of this vulnerable planet. Compared to the content of the 1987 Montreal Protocol, agreed and accepted by governments, the average global temperature has nearly reached the red line. However, what has grabbed the attention of reporters, journalists and NGO environmental activists and garnered serious criticism is that carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub> - the main gas that produces the Greenhouse effect, which results in an increase in the average temperature) is produced by a specific and limited number of companies and international organisations. The main question then remains: who are the beneficiaries of these companies and organisations who cannot be stopped from harming the life of future generations, and how is it that the profits of this minority outweighs the life and health benefits of millions of human beings and billions of other creatures on the planet?

In response it is my aim to place the research budgets of developed countries next to official statistics released by UNEP, to easily analyse how to encourage investment in new forms of energy which is currently moving ahead at a slow pace and in a limited number of countries only. According to these statistics, until 2012, the average electricity produced from solar energy throughout the entire globe amounts to 100 billion KW, 80 billion KW of which were produced in Europe.<sup>1</sup> This demonstrates the fact that poor countries in Africa, despite their great potential, due to a lack of financial resources, or those with fossil energy sources, have not yet entered this important area of activity. There is one significant difference: these countries, such as Middle Eastern countries, produce more CO<sub>2</sub> than the entire African continent<sup>2</sup>, so ultimately it is these under-developed countries that are more environmentally friendly and are living within their resources.

However, the sharp contrast between sufficient investment and economic poverty results in discrimination in the right to access global resources, one that deepens greatly when considering access to drinking water and food. In 2013 UNDP announced that there is a significant relationship between under-developed countries and lack of access to drinking water.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, with regard to the issue of access and preservation of resources on the one hand, and the more advanced challenge of desalination and efficient methods of water storage on the other, it is money and investment that plays a fundamental role.

In addition to access to resources and investment in energy, water and food, which in certain respects account for the main aspects of advancement and investment in sustainable development, as well as sustainable growth, there is another important aspect that relates directly to economic interests. Large and small deals involving natural resources, on land, deforestation and cutting down trees, construction, exploring mines, changes in land use for pasture or urbanisation, extermination of animals for use of their body parts for meat, or exploiting sea waters, over-fishing, construction on land reclaimed from the sea, desalination, water pollution and poisoning as a result of garbage and sewage – these are all by-products of the industrial gains and investments by major companies dealing in energy, oil and gas.

However, the important issue remains that, contrary to appearances, most major industries are increasingly losing workers. As a result of climate change and desertification, more and more are losing their jobs, land and security, facing marginalisation and displacement. In effect, an increase in the number of people living adjacent to overly populated cities, the unproportionate growth of super cities around the globe without the necessary provisions for green space, or challenges such as the lack of access to water and sewerage, or city planning without proper provision for floods or earthquakes, or planning for the infrastructural investment essential for the environment in an urban setting are among various forms of damage caused by such patterns of urban development.

With regard to access to food, there is much to include. However, it may suffice to highlight statistics published by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) at the 2015 Milan Expo<sup>4</sup> (the largest economic expo and platform for presentation of products according to themes chosen at the global level), which indicated that, despite a daily increase in the price of food and agricultural wages, farm workers (particularly

<sup>1</sup> Angus McCrone et al. Global Trends in Renewable Energy Investment 2013, Frankfurt School-UNEP Collaborative Centre for Climate and Sustainable Energy Finance, <http://www.unep.org/pdf/GTR-UNEP-FS-BNEF2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> David Ramin Jalilvand, Renewable Energy for the Middle East and North Africa: Policies for a successful transition, February 2012, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/08959.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2013- The Rise of the South, Human Progress in a Diverse World, (in particular p.37), 2013, <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/philippines/docs/HDR/HDR2013%20Report%20English.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, The State of Food and Agriculture 2015- In Brief, November 2015, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4953e.pdf> see also [http://www.fao.org/publications/sofa/2015/en/?utm\\_source=faohomepage&utm\\_medium=web&utm\\_campaign=featurebar](http://www.fao.org/publications/sofa/2015/en/?utm_source=faohomepage&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=featurebar)

in Far Eastern countries which are experiencing rapid demand growth) are using chemical fertilisers and pesticides and genetic modification to satisfy increasing demands by land owners and food production factories. At this expo, focused on the theme of 'Feeding the planet, energy for life', it was announced that 70% of children who lose their lives each year as a result of malnutrition are below the age of 5. There may then be a cycle that involves environmental resources and capital invested in this process that increases economic discrimination and environmental monopolisation.

What we are witnessing at the global level is what we see repeated within Iran's borders each day. The budget allocated to the environment for 2015 increased a mere 4% compared to the year before.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, the water shortage crisis and the decrease in the level of underground water resources in Iran are resulting in serious and irreparable damage compared to the insignificant budget allocated.

The building of dams continues to benefit a few. In addition, the flow of wastewater from petrochemical factories into the Persian Gulf and its surrounding wetlands without legal investigation or financial ramifications continues unchecked. The push to take over land in forests, under rivers or over mountains and seas in order to carry out construction projects for business complexes, hotels and shopping malls has reached such levels that the Supreme Leader Khamenei had to present his flawed environmental order as a circular among the three forces and governmental offices.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, at the same time as all the challenges caused by mismanagement on the part of the parliament, he determined rules for the new ministers of energy and agriculture that safeguarded profits for the same few. These include the laws, currently under review, pertaining to land ownership rights, which allows the issuing of permits to figures associated with the regime taking over land or natural resources, and endorses a form of speculation.

Often behind environmental damage at such significant levels, lie the interests of groups who focus on their short-term gains by weakening the most fundamental rights of citizens and people, and ignoring the living conditions of an entire country, keeping to the lowest rules on the management of natural resources and energy, irrespective of the impact on the life and health of future generations. Examples include the case of Iran's automotive industry, the actions of which resulted in empty and dry dams that continue to cost several billion rials in repair and maintenance.

There are other projects that may never happen, or through the hard work of informed environmental activists may never come to fruition, but do carry great profit for their investors who often lack knowledge or a social conscience. These include dubious water projects from the north to the south, nominally covering a wide range of river and wetland areas.

There is another side to this account and that is economic gains from development that are in line with the environment and nature. Investors in cars, houses or home equipment that are environmentally friendly, or food industries, farming and tourism that is in line with the local ecosystem and planned in accordance with local conditions can lead to a new world of profits for investors—profits that may be reached in the long-term but which will also be more long-lasting. Investment in education and training is one of the fundamentals of reaching environmental sustainability. The path essential for survival in the future is necessarily built on respect, cooperation and coexistence with global and national ecosystems and nature.

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<sup>5</sup>Radio Zamaneh, Iran's environmental needs dwarf actual budget allotment, October 2015, <https://en.radiozamaneh.com/articles/irans-environmental-needs-dwarf-actual-budget-allotment/>

<sup>6</sup>Arash Karami, Khamenei says Iran must go green, November 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/11/iran-green-climate-change-khamenei.html>