

Corporate Interests v. the Environment



Economics and globalization affect the environment as the capital flowing into the developing nations are often funding projects that are potentially damaging to the world's environment. Yet, many of these are presented as either development projects or countered as actually being favorable (or at least not harming) the environment.

In the late 1990s attention was drawn to a United Nations project to get corporate collaboration/sponsorship in development projects, supporting human rights and the environment, and being generally more responsible and accountable. However it fell under a lot of criticism for involving corporations that are known to have contributed or caused some of the more severe human rights and environment problems, allowing these companies to attempt to repair their tarnished image, while not actually tackling the problems.

In May 2002, the United Nations Environment Program released an extensive report saying that, "there was a growing gap between the efforts to reduce the impact of business and industry on nature and the worsening state of the planet" and that "this gap is due to the fact that only a small number of companies in each industry are actively integrating social and environmental factors into business decisions."

One sharp example of environmental problems caused by multinational corporations is the drive to extract oil from Nigeria. Corporations have even backed the military to harass, even kill, local people who continue to protest at the environmental and other problems the activities of the various oil companies have caused.

The interests of the various big polluters, such as the auto, mining, oil and chemical corporations influenced the Kyoto Global Climate Change Conference outcome. Corporate interest could be said to be behind biotechnology and genetically engineered food production, which may be counter to issues relating to feeding the world's hungry. The concerns on the environment are therefore magnified.

With increased consumerism, there has been a rise in the number of environmental groups campaigning on various issues such as environmentally friendly products. To varying extents then, environmental concerns are issues that sometimes make the mainstream news. However, a cover story, of Down To Earth magazine from Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment as an example, warns that the latest craze in green and ethical consumerism may just be another way for corporations to exploit people and make money by misrepresenting the facts. As another example of this, Earth Day Resources' annual Don't Be Fooled Awards highlight some of what they call the corporate "greenwashing" that goes on through advertising and lobbying campaigns.

There are countless examples where corporate involvement in various issues could contribute to environmental problems as a result. Corporations are major entities in the world and thus have an enormous impact (negative and positive) on all our lives. And concerns of overly corporate-led globalization contributing to environmental problems are increasing, as reported and documented by countless environmental and social justice groups around the world.