



The impact of neoliberalism on Indigenous nations, organizations, and cultures of the Americas has been severe. The reformulation of the world economy according to the globalization of capital has not been translated into benefits for our communities. Rather, it is precisely this globalization that has sharpened our problems.

Foreign investors continue to view Latin America as the place from which riches can be extracted or where the first world's toxic waste can be dumped, often with the consent of the national governments. Part of this continuing movement for economic appropriation is the increasing attempts to collect and commercialize Indigenous peoples' knowledge and biodiversity.

This practice of seeking to mine our minds—and even our bodies—is commonly known as “bio-prospecting,” and brings with it the threat of tremendous new misappropriation of Indigenous resources. To counter this intensifying threat, Indigenous peoples' organizations urgently need to develop continental strategic responses of mutual support based on our rich experience of resistance to colonial forces. A basic understanding of the processes shaping Western forms of ownership and access to biodiversity is an important first step in this struggle. Through this issue of *Abya Yala News*, we hope to promote the exchange of information and experiences that the situation demands. We wish to emphasize, however, that securing protection for Indigenous knowledge and biological resources is only part of the struggle we have been carrying out for 500 years, the struggle to secure self-determination, human rights and territory.

Until now, Indigenous peoples' knowledge and innovations have never been recognized, but rather have been expropriated, without compensation, along with land and resources. Current national and international initiatives dealing with “rights” to biodiversity are vague, are not being implemented, or are directly counter-productive.

Appropriate conservation of biodiversity in Indigenous territories at the genetic, species and ecosystem level is fundamental to the survival and development of our societies. Yet, the globalization of the market and free-trade ideology, today often equated with democracy and participation, have in the last years increased the commodification and erosion of biodiversity. Businesses are focusing on Indigenous peoples' traditional homelands because they are biologically rich areas. They are seen as reservoirs of genetic resources for the food, agriculture and pharmaceutical industries, escalating pressures on the land, resources and cultures of Indigenous societies.

Consequently, Indigenous peoples around the globe are facing enormous pressures to commercialize their traditional resources and knowledge. We are not, by any means, trying to encourage Indigenous communities to become part of the so-called free market, or to join in the commercialization of Mother Earth's resources. If Indigenous communities want to sell their resources or to get compensation from the corporations or other bodies seeking access to these, they have the right to do so. But we have to remember that future generations will also depend on the land and ecosystems to survive, much more than on any money the sale of these resources would bring.

We wish to emphasize the need to continue fortifying an Indigenous movement which envisions itself at the continental and even the global level. We cannot afford to let the corporations and national governments divide Indigenous peoples and communities from each other while they seek to plunder our resources. It is imperative to face this latest assault with a common agreement and a unified strategy for survival in the short, medium and long-term.

SAIIC Board of Directors