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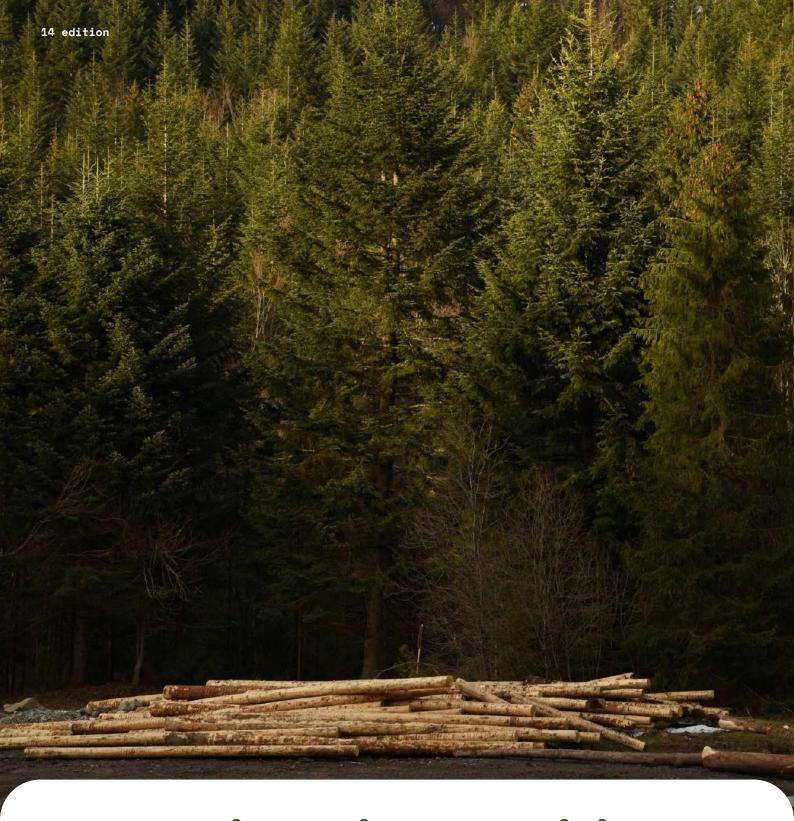
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The year is 2024; natural disasters surround us at every corner. Mountains are burning, lakes are drying up and life in the cities starts to be affected by that. No one can be really surprised: these are the effects of climate change that scientists have been warning us about for ages. We are used to seeing the wildfires in other parts of the world, but now it's getting closer and closer to home and we start noticing those effects in our lives as well. CLIMATE CHANGE: This is one of those topics where most people fundamentally agree on the same thing, like World Peace. Who doesn't want World Peace? It's easy for most of us to agree on the fact that our planet is suffering from all the damage we have inflicted upon it, that some action is absolutely necessary, and that we'll probably keep experiencing worse natural disasters as the years go by. However, as a society, we can't seem to agree to start doing things, to start real action against climate change. This is one of those topics like World Peace: we feel it's not really up to us to change the world, so we "delegate" these tasks to other people, others that might be more committed than us.

In the debate of who is responsible for climate change, or who should be in charge of dealing with it, is where the differences start to show. Some people don't believe there is anything to do about it but to expect the end of the world, others think that small actions can make a big impact, and some others believe our entire system needs to change in order to save the planet for our future generations. Here is where we can see nuances and different takes on this subject, and here is where things get complicated. This is the situation that this edition of Speaks seeks to examine. We asked: what is your personal (and maybe unpopular), opinion about Climate Change? The answers in this edition range from every corner of this spectrum. From takes against our politics, to approaches that center around the idea of self-responsibility, we can see that in order for anything to improve, all aspects of life must change. It is not enough for single people, or for single companies to change: all of us must do it if we want to survive another generation. That's the broadest conclusion of this edition of USTA Speaks and we want readers to approach it from the perspective of recognizing our own impact and finding ways to support the fight against it for the planet we all call home.





Colombia's Climate Crisis: How Economic Priorities are Fueling Environmental Destruction

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Abstract

This article discusses how public policies in developing countries like Colombia prioritize economic growth over environmental concerns, exacerbating climate change. Despite initiatives like corporate social responsibility and environmental seals, powerful stakeholders and a dependence on fossil fuels hinder effective climate action, leading to significant environmental degradation and insufficient investment in renewable energy.

*KEYWORDS

Climate change environment developing countries

public policies economy companies

In the crucible of progress, public policies in developing countries often ignite the flames of economic development; unfortunately, they also fuel the fire of climate change. Currently, developing countries like Colombia face challenges in their growth and development that, together with a lack of resources and internal problems, lead them to take desperate and uncommitted measures to mitigate climate change, a problem that is beyond any particular interest. It is worrying to see how, although there are notions such as corporate social responsibility and environmental public policies (Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, n.d.), which seek to encourage companies to incorporate socio-environmental measures, the Government and the big corporations in the country move their pieces and influences to particular economic objectives and not towards combating climate change. By February 2023, only 101 Colombian Environmental Seals had been issued for companies in various sectors in Colombia (ANLA, 2023). A worrying view, considering that according to the RUES (Business registration) of Confecámaras, approximately 1.600.000 active companies were registered in that period (MINCIT, 2024). So, it is painful to see how little effort is being put into this issue from both the public and private sectors. By looking at the

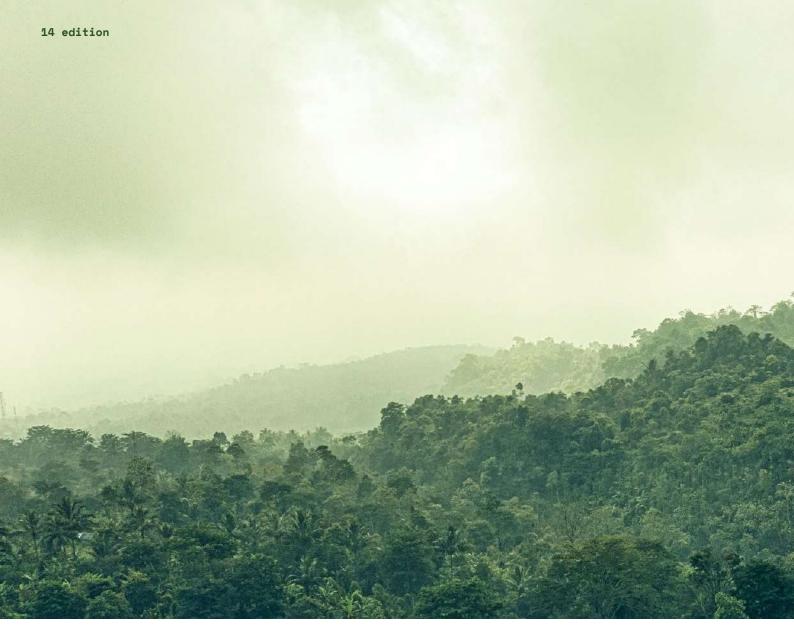
bigger picture, it is possible to see why and how this happens, as there are concealed motivations that outweigh the concern for keeping the planet healthy. Public policies of developing countries do not favor climate change mitigation due to economic and political pressures, dependence on fossil fuels and the prioritization of an industry that does not consider environmental impacts.

Short-term economic and political pressures, by powerful stakeholders in supported developing countries, who prioritize their immediate economic interests over long-term environmental concerns, contribute to the factors that deepen climate change. This situation is reflected in the influence of extractive industries, such as mining and oil production, over the policy-making efforts to protect the environment. In Colombia, investigations and lawsuits are being advanced around an alleged inconsistency in the environmental policies, which shamelessly do not include the coal industry. From the outside, the coal industry is committed to the environment, but in reality, they advance projects that seek to double the production of coal, generating great impacts in the areas where it is extracted, such as the Sutatausa coal mine (Monsalve, 2023). According to World Bank data, more than 70% of energy in many of these countries comes from fossil fuels, which reflects a resistance to the transition to renewable energies (International Energy Agency, n.d.). This is evidenced by the constant exploitation of resources that also causes conflicts in local communities and significant environmental damage.

There are also concerns about the social and environmental consequences of extracting gold to benefit the interests of Colombian local governments, and mining companies such as the Arab multinational Mubadala, which supports Minesa. This company seeks to continue their practices in any way possible, despite not having environmental licenses in order. Minesa is seeking to generate a lot of money mining the Santurbán Moor, while also generating impacts for up to three generations later, putting a natural sanctuary endowed with flora, fauna and the important hydric resource at risk (López, n.d.). It is clear then, how private interests and parallel agendas are contributing to climate change behind the mask of economic development.

The ability to generate this significant economic development and employment fuels the dependence on fossil in Colombia. The oil and mining industries, pillars of the Colombian economy, provide an important source of income to the country and employ many people in various regions. As mentioned in a report made by different organizations, 32% of the country's current income corresponds to fossil fuels and around 109,000 workers depend on them (Rubiano, 2022), so it would not seem viable to give up almost half of the country's income and assume the unemployment of so many people who could not be relocated until a different perspective is at sight. For example, oil exploitation in the Amazon and mining in areas like the Cerrejón, in La Guajira, are key sources and wealth for local of employment communities and the government. It can be seen how measures to mitigate climate change





can involve significant short-term costs or have negative impacts on certain industries or economic sectors (Open Democracy, 2021). However, this dependence on fossil fuels has a high environmental cost.

The growth of these industries has led to the deforestation of large areas in the Amazon, which are considered the lungs of the planet. According to reports made by the Amazonian Network of Geo-referenced Socio-environmental Information and Mapbiomas, the deforested area has gone from 490,000 square kilometers to almost 1,250,000 in the last 40 years, showing how it has more than doubled, taking with it 10% of the vegetation and the habitat of thousands of species (Infobae, 2022). Mapbiomas states that out of the nine countries that have a stake in the Amazon, Colombia ranks fourth among those with the greatest negative impact. By 2021, mining had an increase of 1461% in this area, including illegal mining. This activity left approximately 7.7 billion dollars in profits, but immeasurable water pollution and soil degradation as well. If we make realistic calculations, the cost of the damage to the ecosystem is not covered by the profits, which also go into the pockets of only a few (DANE, 2021). So, we



come to the point of understanding that not only greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels contribute to climate change, but also their production makes a considerable dent in the face of our rainforests, leaving in their wake deforestation, droughts and extreme weather problems such as the high temperatures that are now being felt in all over the country. Despite these negative environmental impacts, prioritizing economic interests over environmental conservation has led to a lack of investment in renewable energies and clean technologies, perpetuating this dependence on fossil fuels and their harmful effects on the environment, making it evident how public policies of countries like Colombia do not consider climate change to be a priority.

Economic growth and industrialization are some of the highest priorities of developing countries because that is where progress can be materialized and evidenced, so public policies privilege projects that focus on resource production and infrastructure, even despite the environmental wellbeing of the country. There are many known cases in Colombia; such is the case of the Hidroituango Hydroelectric Dam that initially constituted a social and economic

model with only benefits for both the government and the community. However, the environmental impacts that it had due to its geographical location are far from what is mentioned: construction the of hydroelectric plant destroyed the ecosystem that was there, it significantly changed the morphology of the Cauca River, and it also affected endemic vegetation and thousands of species that had to flee from the site (Medina Parra, 2021). Another case is the construction of the road that connects Villavicencio with Bogotá, which never ceases to cause problems. This mega construction was aimed to connect the capital city with the agricultural hub of the Eastern Plains, to solidify the national economy and ensure food sovereignty. Despite having some of the most expensive tolls in the country, this road carries during the course of its construction the invasion of a large section of natural resources (Rey Ladino, 2023). The consequences are quite visible; the rivers seek to resume their course, so floods, landslides, and droughts occur. The most recent impact occurred in 2023 with the avalanche in Quetame, Cundinamarca. The mountain came down and took an entire town with it, leaving dozens of people dead and countless material damages (Trucco, 2023). Climate change does not budge an inch and the public policies of the countries do not favor measures that mitigate it because they put the economic and interests of the people with the most power above.

The public policies of developing countries such as Colombia are not fully focused on implementing measures that counteract climate change. Although it is a requirement and is present on paper, the costs of long-term change imply lower profits and better short-term benefits that favor those who oversee such measures. Fossil fuels, mining, industrial growth and money production are charging a very expensive price for the environmental impact that is already reflected with the Niño and Niña phenomena, strong droughts, high temperatures that end the crops, sudden rains that do not stop, floods and landslides. Climate change is not an invention, its effects are not a lie, and we are living them. What is the government waiting for to implement effective and significant measures to combat this climate change?





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There are no excuses for not taking climate change seriously

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Abstract

This article covers the different conversations and reactions the climate crisis has generated from people in recent years, where a large part of the population forgets their responsibility in issues of pollution and other environmental damage by pointing out only how luxurious and millionaire lives deteriorate the planet, ignoring important issues of activism and self-responsibility.

*KEYWORDS

Climate change | Ecological crisis | Ecological ethics

Responsibility

As many things in life, Climate Change has become an issue of wealth disparity. In today's hot weather, the conversation around Climate Change is cramped with the ignorance of the rich and poor. While some are enjoying their luxuries without thinking of consequences, others deny being part of the problem and just blame it on the wealthiest. Every day, news come out about how the world is wrecking because of our way of life; activism tries to raise awareness of our negative impact on the environment, but all those efforts are useless. The ongoing degradation of our environment continues due to factors like industrial practices, consumer behavior, and inadequate policy implementation. Meanwhile, it's likely to see people blaming everyone but themselves: rich people tend to be responsible for excessive carbon footprints, but the rest of the population seems to run away from their own responsibility by only focusing on the damage caused by the most privileged and their lack of concern for protecting the environment. This social confrontation is distracting people from the real issue and focus of the conversation: Climate change and its negative impacts on the planet and all of our lives. It's very concerning how, even though the consequences are so

noticeable today, we collectively don't take the subject as seriously as we should for focusing on who is more to blame, instead of thinking how to individually help the planet.

Despite making significant progress and providing valuable assistance, environmental advocates often face resistance and ridicule from the highest ranks of power, rendering their efforts insufficient. An example of this is the case of the Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, who has become an important figure for her environmental campaigns since 2018. She guestions the lack of action and criticizes the prioritization of money and economic growth over the well-being of present and future generations. In September 2019, she gave a moving speech at the United Nations, accusing world leaders of ignoring climate change, telling them: "You stole my dreams and my childhood with your empty words". An act that made her the butt of the joke on social media. People were quick to criticize her, saying she is too young or naive to know what she is talking about, with the biggest example being U.S ex-president Donald Trump, who took it against her in Twitter (Stracqualursi, 2019). However, Greta isn't the only environmental activist facing criticism; other young climate activists have also spoken out about the abuse they endure, including comparisons to Nazi propaganda and experiences of racial profiling (Nevett, 2019). This type of response to activists' discourse ends up being a total setback in the great advances that their campaigns have managed to create, but mainly, it has been an obstacle to creating a true environmental awareness in each person's conscience, and examples like Greta's show

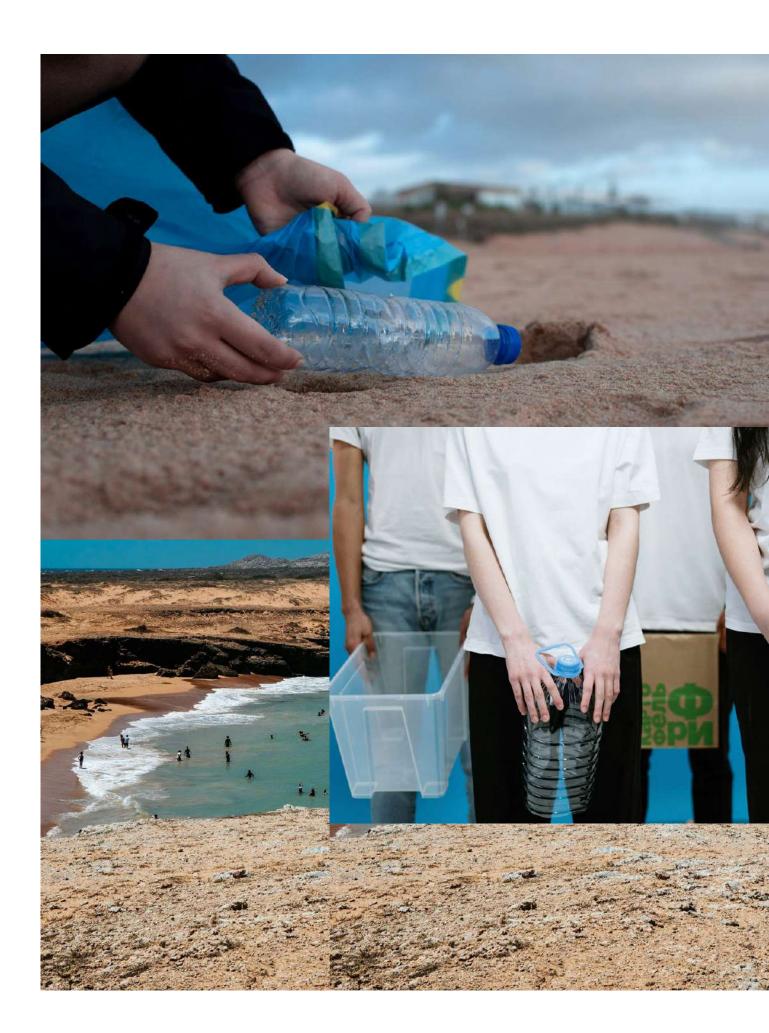
how the general population only responds with indifference and mockery to a serious problem. This is concerning, as the lack of collective environmental awareness comes from a lack of self-responsibility, and this in the long run will only leave us exposed to much more serious problems and poorer quality of life.

Most of the population tends to focus on the role of the visible faces in the problem of pollution, even giving way to false information and forgetting what matters the most: self-responsibility. Despite the great indifference in terms of the pollution produced across social classes, many ordinary people base their approach to blaming those who pollute the planet the most. Many people think that: Since the rich pollute twice as much, then why would they even try to help? Regardless of this mindset, this doesn't exclude each of us from our own responsibility with the environment. Pollution comes from every single layer of society because all of us, no matter our socioeconomic status, contaminate with our actions. No matter how small, we can't let go of these small responsibilities that even those of us who aren't so wealthy have with the planet.

Likewise, the attitude some people take towards the issue is important. Detaching ourselves from the responsibility with a tone of defeat or annoyance isn't very different from the ignorant and conceited hostility of millionaires. When information comes out about the amounts of private plane trips some celebrities take on a daily basis, it's common to read comments like: "I feel that there is no point in reducing one's own carbon footprint if there are billionaires who pollute 100 times









more than you", "Cancel Beyoncé", and "You at home using paper straws". While the issue of private jets is a real and important issue to consider, the need for people to condemn any harmful action to the environment except their own is quite notorious. All this indifference between classes ends up distracting from the main issue, which is of course climate change. It's not possible for there to be progress if there are no actions that allow it to happen. The fight against the environmental crisis cannot stop just because there's someone who is polluting more than I am. As hard as it may seem to believe, many of these rich people can even help move us away from this useless blaming conversation, and instead, act out against climate change.

The luxury lives of rich people are one of the biggest issues that emerge as responsible for climate change nowadays; however, their privilege and influence allow them to be a great channel of consciousness for others as well, and some already have made great progress. Despite the great responsibility for environmental damage that the wealthy bear, there are "many wealthy people such as Leonardo DiCaprio who founded the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation in 1998". The foundation has more than 35 projects for the conservation of wild ecosystems on Earth, applying sustainable solutions to create a healthier relationship between people and nature (Corporativa, 2021). At the same time, Stella McCartney, seeks to make the future of the fashion industry (one of the most polluting), increasingly sustainable through her foundation Stella McCartney Cares, with initiatives such as fundraising to protect the ecosystem of Leuser (Indonesia), or her collections, such as the ecological and vegan one designed for Adidas or her line of biodegradable jeans. Among other important wealthy people, they lead all these types of organizations and in that way, do their part (or even more than that) in the conservation of the planet (Volunteer Fdip, 2022). Despite the aid provided by some, the question is: What about the rest of the privileged people?

To which comes into conversation about the rise of technology and the desire of people to follow the ideal model of life that is constantly shared on social media. Even though this lifestyle can lead down a very polluting path, there are also those who use this media to raise awareness and combat climate change. Influencers like Carlota Bruna, Gotzon Mantuliz, Jon Kareaga use their platforms to inform their followers about sustainable practices (Team Lewis, 2022). They recommend ways to save on electricity and water, or to recycle waste. They also collaborate with innovative brands with eco-sustainable products such as Baggu, The Better Packaging Co. and Ecoologic, that pay

them to promote and recommend their products to the rest of the world. Even though this promotes a consumeristic lifestyle, promoting these brands inspires people to adopt more responsible practices, such as recycling, reducing plastic consumption and changing consumer preferences, as they are now motivated to choose more sustainable options and consider the environmental impact of their purchases. Despite the high level of pollution for which they are responsible, we can see how many public figures, brands and companies are already acting on the matter, abandoning luxuries and harmful practices for more eco-friendly and sustainable options, while encouraging others to do the same, contributing an important and effective solution to an increasingly serious problem.

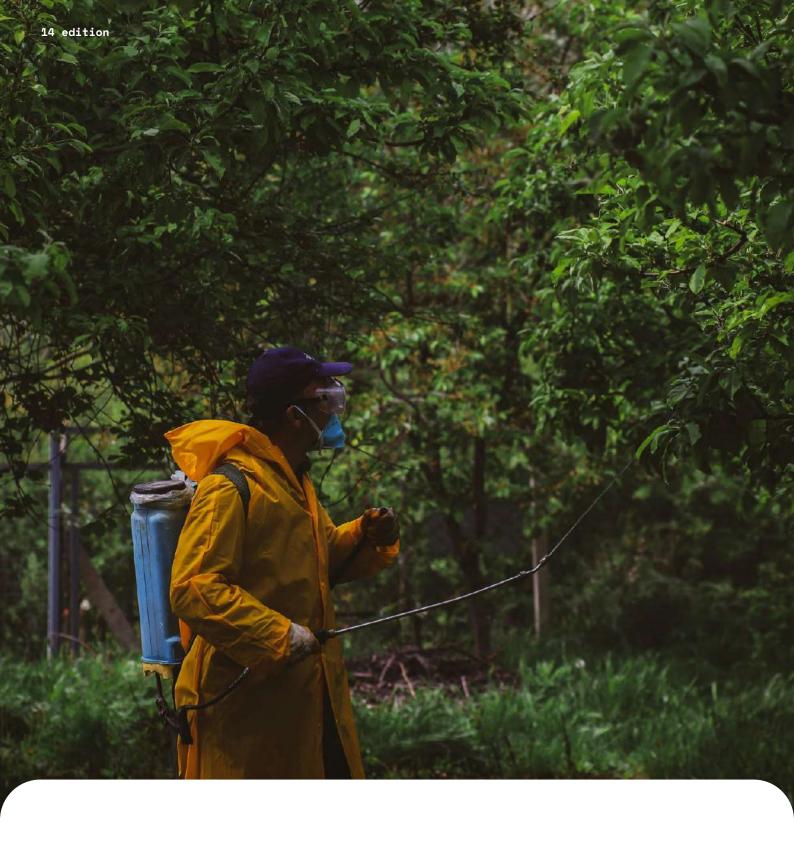
In the scorching heat of today, everyone should be aware of their impact on climate change and what they can to help the planet we all live in. Our self-awareness of the impacts of climate should transcend social class change boundaries. As we already saw, some rich people do their best to help the environment and raise awareness among others, so there is no need to focus on the actions of others when the most important thing we can do is make good use of social media and implement eco-friendly practices in our daily lives. We can avoid buying products that are polluting and harmful to the environment, and we can support and promote the various causes that, like us, seek to help the planet. Whether we live in a luxurious penthouse or modest apartment, our choices impact our planet. Every action, no matter how small, contributes to the collective ecological footprint, balancing out the tons of

greenhouse gases that humans have pumped into the atmosphere. It is also important to remember that they are produced by the billions of people on the planet. So, if we all change even the smallest thing, we can make a big difference, for our present and for our future. Every single one of us deserves a good life without the struggles that climate change is already causing and that it can continue to cause. By recognizing this, we can make informed decisions and choosing sustainable advocating for change, practices, and cultivating global consciousness that transcends national and social class borders. As we have already seen, the pressure to have an eco-responsible lifestyle today is too high, and it's important that both the people who live today and the future generations enjoy a planet with enough resources to have a good life. It's also key to always remember: No action isn't useful in this struggle.









The dark side of industrial agriculture

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Abstract

This article discusses the negative impact of agriculture on the environment and its role in climate change. It also proposes alternatives to combat contamination and resort to healthier and more sustainable ways to produce food while minimizing its environmental impact.

*KEYWORDS

Contamination environmental impact agro-ecology

regenerative agriculture permaculture

sustainable development

Food production is killing the world. We might think that growing food is inherently an environmentally friendly practice, but what we don't know is that food production processes are destroying the planet, and consequently our lives. Every process behind the production of food increases contamination because agriculture requires the destruction of forests to make way for crops, the use of fertilizers, which damage the soil, the burning of waste, as well as the transportation and distribution of food, which generates large greenhouse gas emissions. Each of these agricultural practices deteriorates biodiversity, affects ecosystems, destroys soils and water quality, endanger human life, and in the long run affect us as a society. However, there are alternative practices, such as agroecology, regenerative agriculture and permaculture, which promote better development as they generate long-term positive change.

Deforestation for the creation of monocultures is one of the most aggressive agricultural practices in terms of its impact on biodiversity. To grow foods such as coffee, cocoa, rice, or corn, a determined perimeter of

land needs to be cleaned out. The Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies has estimated that, in Colombia, the natural forest surface area has gradually decreased from 56.4% in 1990 to 51.6% in 2014 of the total surface of the country, which represents 5.896.889 hectares of natural forest that have been lost (IDEAM, n.d.). It is worth noting that 66.7% of Colombia's forests are located in the Amazon region, one of the most biodiverse places in the world. Therefore, the planting of monocultures is a practice that endangers the Colombian land given the number of species of flora and fauna that are affected by the destruction of forests, plus the pesticides and fertilizers that are needed for pest control, which in turn pollute the air, land and water, further damaging these fragile ecosystems (Triviño & Smith, 2015). So, what is the long-term point of monocultures if they generate soil infertility, degrade hectares of land just for one crop, and completely exterminate an ecosystem? As consumers, we need to be aware of the ecological implications of drinking our coffee or chocolate in the morning, because these come with a price for the planet as well.

In any case, there are different alternatives to reduce these environmental impacts; one of them is agroecology. Agroecology is based on science to bring sustainability to the production of food, concentrates, and fibers for a better, safer, and more environmentally responsible agriculture. It analyzes the ecological impact of crops, pastures, irrigation and fertilization on the soil ecosystem, and uses strategies such as biological control, rotations, diversification, growth regulators, among others to reduce their impact (Gliessman. 2013). The mentioned strategies can even get a better result for farmers. For example, Rotation Systems, also known as alternating different types of crops in the same lot in different periods of time, optimizes the use of resources (Coronato et al., 2018). According to a study by Vargas et al., (2022), in Colombia. some producers implement different rotation systems in potato crops to manage the physical and chemical characteristics of the soil. In their research, they evaluated three rotation systems: potato-potato-oats, potato-oats-peas, Potato-peas-potato). Finally, they determined that the soil did not present differences in terms of physical properties; however, at the end of each cycle, they did observe





improvements in terms of soil stability and water retention capacity, as well as an increase in its fertility. While it benefits the sustainability of farmers, it also benefits citizens because better soil quality also increases the availability of minerals such as phosphorus, boron and zinc, nutrients that are crucial for our health (Vargas et al., 2022). Therefore, agroecology encompasses a whole process for efficiency and sustainability of food production, generating healthier and more nutritious food, while reducing the negative environmental impact of agricultural systems. More importantly, it provides us with safe food for our health. In other words, it benefits everyone by providing healthier food and a healthier environment.

Another very important practice in the fight for better food is Regenerative Agriculture. To regenerate means to make something develop and become strong again; this entails a process of renewal and strengthening. Perez Casar (2021) states that the excessive use of natural resources, such as the soil, degrades its quality. So, Regenerative Agriculture is based on this definition to create production strategies that boost natural resources. While it is commonly understood that soil and water are not

unlimited, and even with the evolution of technology, we have not been able to create something that resembles them. How could we create something similar to soil and all the components that make it fertile? In that case, we wouldn't need all the precautionary measures we take against their degradation. This is why it is essential to produce organic matter, which translates into the use of fertilizers that promote and restore soil health and therefore have the capacity to produce food using nature's own devices. This can be done in a great scale, but it can also be done from the comfort of our own kitchens, as these don't practices require much Composting consists of decomposing organic matter, like food scraps, grass clippings, or other organic waste. If Composting became a regular practice in most homes, our society wouldn't have the need to use chemical fertilizers that poison our lands and instead, we could benefit from food that's both regenerating the planet and nourishing our bodies.

Another way, with the same objective of keeping biodiversity and reducing the impact on the environment, is Permaculture. According to Muñiz, Permaculture "involves a series of

practical elements such as the design and development of sustainable habitats for man and the environment, respecting the patterns of natural systems" (2019, p. 123). Therefore, permaculture follows a more integral vision that looks to create agricultural production systems that also focus on the social, political and economic environment in multiple types of communities (Muñiz, 2019). In this order of ideas, creating systems that take advantage of natural resources, permaculture can generate energy, reduce costs, and by directing in systems that benefit multiple communities, permaculture can generate job opportunities and education for people, promoting equity in society.

Taking measures against climate change is essential. As mentioned before, each process behind food production is not only killing human life, but all records of life on the planet. Agroecology, Regenerative Agriculture and Permaculture are sustainable development systems that work in harmony with natural processes to produce food in a healthier way for all (Sanchez et. al, 2012). More than ecological principles that increase the time we have left in this world, we need to think for a moment that the consequences of irresponsible food production affect us all, including the lives of the ones we love. We must ask ourselves: what are the consequences of following these polluting practices? How much time do we have left if all people in the world promote such pollution? Let's take this as an opportunity to reframe our priorities and as we all know, the answer is totally subjective, but change is objective.

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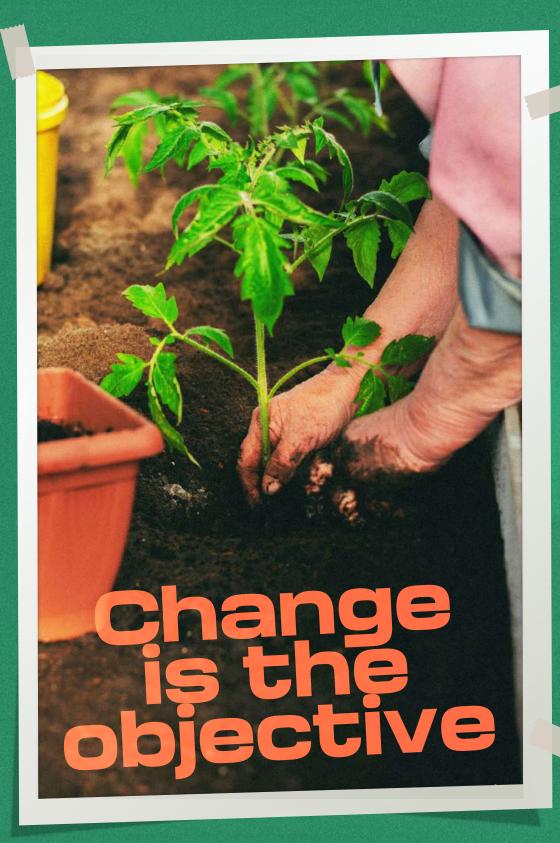
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Carrera 22 con Calle 1a - Vía Puerto López

