

ENERGY, FOR WHOM AND FOR WHAT?



Publication of the Committee for Human Rights in Latin America
March 2017

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Printed by Katasoho



This project is made available thanks to the financial support of the Ministry of International Relations and Francophonie (MIRIF) of the government of Quebec through the Public Education and Engagement Fund for International Solidarity (FEEPSI). The Fund is delegated to the Quebec Association of Organizations for International Cooperation (AQOCI).

INTRODUCTION

The 2010 visit to Montreal by a representative of the Movement of People affected by Dams in Brazil (MAB) brought to light many commonalities between the energy models in place in Brazil and in Quebec. The MAB delegate expressed interest in meeting with environmental groups from Quebec to internationalize social movements' struggles against the global energy model and to participate in collectively building alternatives, especially in regard to energy sovereignty. The Committee for Human Rights in Latin America (CDHAL) team was then invited to analyze Quebec's energy model and become better acquainted with the activists who denounce it and fight to change it in Quebec, in order to contribute to reciprocal ties between social movements in the South and the North.

This is how the project "Energy: for Whom and for What?" originated in 2013. One of its goals was to explore collectively the concept of energy justice to better understand its meaning and practical implications, drawing on the analyses of energy sovereignty movements in Latin America, in particular the MAB (Brazil), the Mexican Movement of People Affected by Dams and in Defense of Rivers (MAPDER) and Ríos Vivos (Colombia), with a view to finding ways and places of entrenching this concept in the Quebec context. The energy justice movement, as seen by these movements in Latin America, aims at developing a grassroots-based energy model that is inclusive, fair and respectful of human rights while allowing for democratic, decentralized control of energy sources. The notions of common good and social acceptability lie at the heart of this concept.

ENERGY JUSTICE MEANS :

- » developing energy alternatives that are not based on fossil fuels, which are locally and globally destructive, and promoting lower-impact renewable energy sources;
- » considering various forms of securing energy supplies, which should be available for the entire population;
- » contributing to a better quality of life for the population;
- » decentralizing energy production and making it more autonomous and diversified, and adapting it to the place of origin and local needs;
- » stopping all kinds of projects that are based on dependence and the destruction of common goods, compromising well-being and good living locally and nationally.

This document is aimed at getting people to think about energy justice. The principles of decentralization, access to energy, respect for the environment and citizen participation that characterize it are illustrated in comic strips based on real cases. Two initiatives from Quebec, one from First Nations in Canada and one from Latin America were used to put together scenarios created by the illustrators.

ENERGY, FOR WHOM AND FOR WHAT?

TOWARDS A MORE JUST, SUSTAINABLE AND DEMOCRATIC ENERGY MODEL

Energy is a complex topic that can't be dealt with solely from the angle of technology, disconnected from issues of power. Energy is a social, political and economic issue. Implanting large-scale energy projects, even in what are considered to be "green" energy sectors, has irreversible consequences on ecosystems. They cause violations of human rights – in part because land and national resources are taken over, populations are forcibly displaced and defenders of human rights and the environment are criminalized.

The current energy model responds to market demand, the interests of big corporations that control the energy sector and the growth of productivity at all costs. In this model, the State and government intervene as little as possible in order to guarantee free market forces and establish mechanisms of support for the private sector. In doing so, neoliberal policies promote aggressive development dominated by private enterprise and the big international financial institutions. The social and political system is increasingly eroding while the elites promote economic interests that are harmful to the well-being of the population as a whole, mainly with respect to economic and social rights and freedoms and freedom of expression. In terms of the environment, the neoliberal model is accompanied by intensified exploitation of natural resources (forests, arable lands, oil, water, mines, natural gas, biodiversity) aimed at generating greater economic wealth and satisfying a growing market.

At the present time, in both the South and the North, we see an absence of social acceptability and consent for many energy projects - for example, the Puebla Panama Plan and the Initiative for the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America (IIRSA), Alberta's tar sands and the extraction of hydrocarbons in the Saint Lawrence valley and Gulf in Quebec. In the majority of cases, the right of peoples to be properly informed regarding development projects and to free, prior and informed consultation and consent, notably for indigenous peoples, is not respected. Various movements denounce these violations and demand the establishment of a democratic process for decisions on whether or not to exploit our common good.



Photo : Ríos Vivos

Exploitation of natural resources may seem “natural” and necessary for the production of energy in the short run, as well as for economic development, progress and a better quality of life. But does this approach to energy really lead to “development”? When we dig into “how”, “for what” and “for whom” we are generating energy, we realize that the local, rural and even urban populations are often negatively affected by the existing energy model.

Many citizens and social movements in the South and the North are mobilizing and organizing to propose alternatives. Defending human rights and protecting the environment and the common good are becoming central lines of demands. Solidarity among the movements is necessary and desirable, because the serious and complex issues involved mean that the struggle has to be globalized. A number of movements are therefore seeking to build ties with a more diverse array of allies nationally and internationally. In this context, we suggest some lines of thinking through the presentation of principles related to energy justice based on scenarios drawn from real cases, while recognizing that these experiences themselves have their limits.

1

DECENTRALIZATION

This scenario is inspired by the Tomchyrs farm in Mauricie (Quebec, Canada), which heats its poultry houses, some buildings and its silo dryers through biomass (organic fuel). Biomass is an abundant resource and is accessible throughout the region.

PRINCIPLES LINKED TO THIS SCENARIO:

- » **Decentralization**, which aims at responding to needs in energy services by drawing from local energy resources, often managed directly by users.
- » **Respect for the environment**: biomass is a renewable source of energy that uses, in this case, forest residues. It is therefore not a source of biomass derived from environmentally harmful monocultures. This farm is also energy efficient.

The principle of decentralization advocates for the development of community-based alternatives oriented towards self-production and the sharing of resources, energy efficiency, consumption reduction, the recognition of traditional knowledge and the ownership of energy production techniques by communities. To this end, the objective of decentralization is to respond to the energy needs of the population making the most of local resources through the knowledge and ability to use energy systems by and for the population.



Photo : Ríos Vivos

[THE DECENTRALIZATION OF ENERGY MEANS] « SELF-PRODUCING AND SHARING ENERGY IN A PROCESS THAT IS ACCOMPANIED BY A PHASE OF DECREASE IN WHICH WE CAN DRASTICALLY REDUCE OUR CONSUMPTION OF ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES. »

Bruno Massé, RQGE

« WE ARE BUILDING A NEW MODEL OF ENERGY PRODUCTION AND USAGE, AND WATER MANAGEMENT THAT SATISFIES THE NEEDS OF THE POPULATION BEFORE THE INTERESTS OF NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS. »

Declaration of Temaca, Mexico, 2010

An innovative poultry farming for and by farmers.

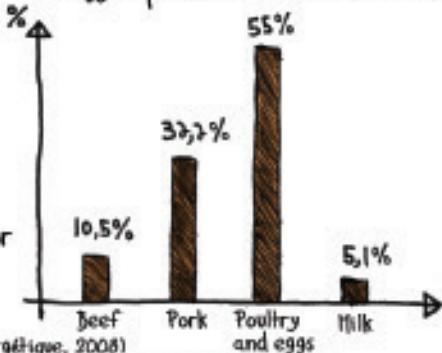


by Martin PM

In the province of Quebec, heating represents an important energy expenditure, in the residential sector as well as in the farming sector.

(Agence de l'efficacité énergétique, 2008)

Energy expenditures related to heating



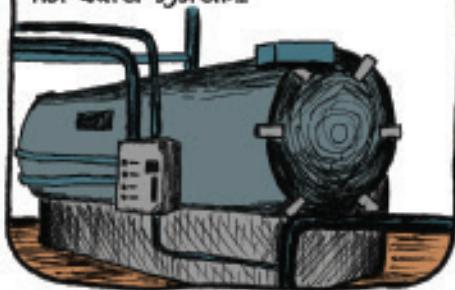
To heat their machines, most farmers stay dependant on hydrocarbons.



... a farm can get its biomass supply from local companies, whether it is sawdust, wood shavings, or demolition wood, which is most of the time handled as waste.



By changing its central propane system to a biomass boiler and a hot water system...



Mr. Sicard and his family have chosen to take this path.



I used to waste a lot of propane for my turkeys.



Then I realized that the village's windmill was trying to get rid of its wood shavings.



I told myself we could reuse those wood shavings.



And then I was told about biomass heating, so I began studying this system and its benefits.



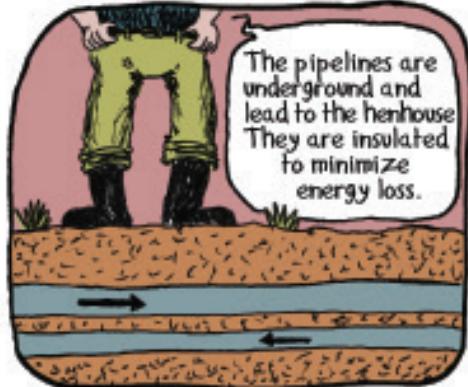
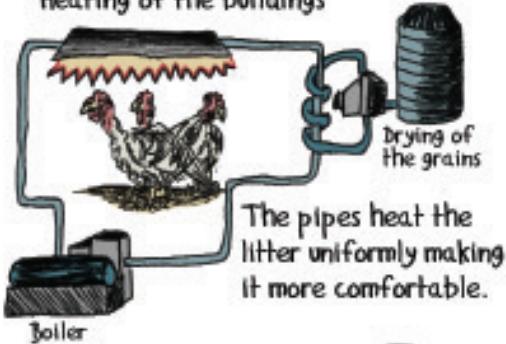


The boiler is like a big stove. It heats the water that circulates through the pipes and across Mr. Sicard's henhouse.

The water mill increases the value of its fuel chips and Mr. Sicard saves up to 40% in energy expenditure.



Heating of the buildings

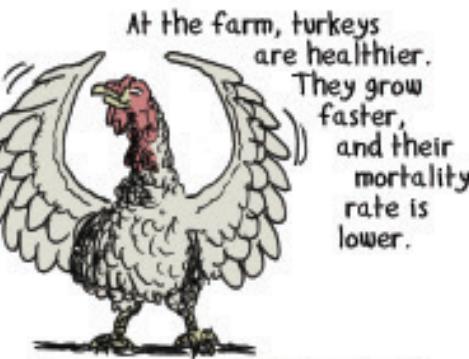
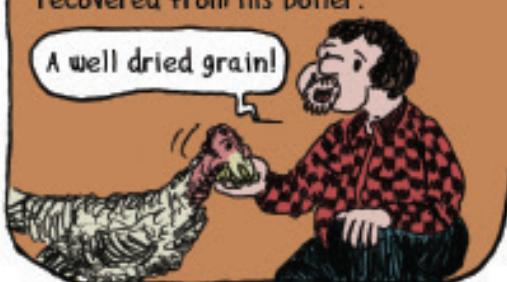


Little by little, we realized that we could have more control over our energy production and reduce our ecological footprint.



Moreover, in the fall, M. Sicard dries his grain with the heat recovered from his boiler.

A well dried grain!



With this new heating system, I've created links with my community and I've finally mastered my energy production.



ACCESS TO ENERGY

2

This scenario is inspired by an initiative led by several movements that are part of Ríos Vivos (Colombia) and that have launched various forms of energy self-sufficiency and efficiency aiming at interlinking food sovereignty and energy sovereignty. In 2014, a workshop took place to share different experiences on alternative energy systems, allowing to expand the debate and to reflect with other organizations involved in processes aimed at transforming social relations.

PRINCIPLES LINKED TO THIS SCENARIO:

- » **Access to energy:** this scenario reflects the idea that energy is a common good that must be shared amongst all.
- » **Respect for the environment:** alternative energy forms and the political project for energy and food sovereignty aim to establish the least harmful relationship with nature.

The principle of access to energy involves guaranteeing the physical possibility to have access to electricity, heating and transport as well as the economic capacity to afford these services. Access to energy also reflects the idea that energy is a common good that must be shared and accessible to the population as a whole, and that must not be privatized. This principle also implies that we must avoid harming the equilibrium of the ecosystems.



« WATER IS A COMMON GOOD.
THUS, WE OPPOSE ALL FORMS OF
PRIVATIZATION, COMMODIFICATION,
AND FINANCIALIZATION OF THE
TERRITORIES THAT SUSTAIN IT. »

Ríos Vivos, *Confluencia nacional por el agua*, 2016

« THE MAB SUPPORTS THE IDEA THAT ENERGY
USED FOR CONSUMPTION OR PRODUCTIVE
ACTIVITIES SHOULD ALWAYS AIM TO
FULFILL THE NEEDS OF THE POPULATION
AS A WHOLE AND ACHIEVE BOTH A HIGH
DEGREE OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY. »

Key political statements of the 7th national MAB meeting, 2013

ENERGY TO SHARE, ENERGY FOR THE "BIEN VIVIR"



FOR MANY YEARS, MY COMMUNITY AND I HAVE BEEN VERY PREOCCUPIED WITH THE VARIOUS ENERGY ISSUES AFFECTING US.



OUR COLOMBIAN COMRADES SHARED THEIR RESISTANCE EXPERIENCES WITH US.

... AND INVITED US TO PARTICIPATE IN VARIOUS WORKSHOPS.



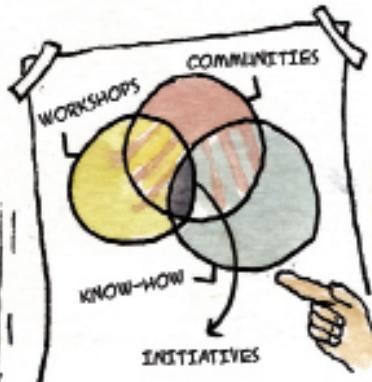
ONCE I GOT THERE, I READ THE ACTION PLAN.



FOOD PROCESSING



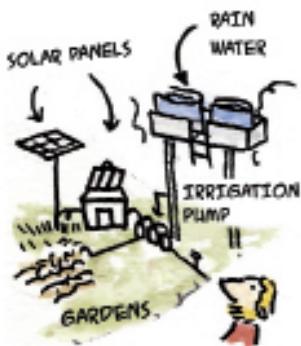
VARIOUS COMMUNITY MEMBERS SHARED SOME OF THEIR INITIATIVES WITH ME.



I - THE BIODIGESTER



II - SOLAR ENERGY



III - WOOD STOVE



THESE ACTIVITIES ALLOWED PARTICIPANTS TO LEARN AND SHARE EXPERIENCES AND SUCCESSES, DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES



"SHARING PUBLIC
GOODS AND RESPECTING
COMMUNITIES' RIGHTS."



END

2015

RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

3

This scenario is inspired by an experience implemented by the city of Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec, the first city in the province to produce natural gas using organic materials. This gas comes from organic residues from twenty-three neighboring municipalities and is used to provide heat to the City Hall and to run ten municipal vehicles.

PRINCIPLES LINKED TO THIS SCENARIO:

- » **Respect for the environment:** this project reduces the volume of waste produced while also reducing oil dependency. Previously, trucks had to drive over 100 km to bring waste to the landfills.
- » **Citizen participation:** the population takes action by recycling, and a public institution, the municipality, uses the biomass produced to convert it to energy. The gap between the energy production system and the citizens is thus reduced.

The principle of respect for the environment consists of implementing a set of practices to find a balance between the different forms of life on Earth. For the energy sector, this means not to deteriorate the ecosystems in the name of so-called economic development and the well-being of society, only replicating the parasitic relationship between "colonialist" societies and their habitats.



Photo : Ríos Vivos

« HYDROELECTRIC DAMS TRANSFORM THE TEMPERATURE, THE CHEMISTRY, THE DISTRIBUTION, THE QUANTITY, AND THE CYCLES OF WATER SYSTEMS, TRANSFORMING THE NATURAL DYNAMICS OF RIVERS. »

Ríos Vivos, March 14, 2012

« THE IMPOSITION OF MEGA-PROJECTS, SUCH AS DAMS AND LARGE-SCALE MINING EXPLOITATION, ENTAILS THE VIOLENT AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT OF NATIVE AND PEASANT COMMUNITIES FROM THEIR TERRITORIES. »

Ríos Vivos

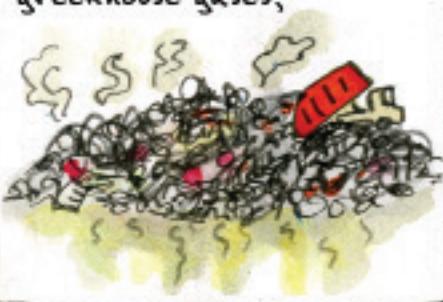
THE BIODIGESTER

Imagine...

...if we stopped throwing organic waste in the garbage.



Instead of acidifying soils and significantly increasing greenhouse gases,



We could produce
ENERGY!



Enough to heat buildings and make cars contaminate less than with gasoline.



Moreover, we would get compost to grow fruits and vegetables.

Which represents 44% of domestic waste.
* according to Recyc-Québec (2010)



Too good to be true?



In recent years, a Quebec municipality decided to go into action.



It collects organic waste in the surrounding municipalities...

and transforms it into biogas and compost with its biodigester.



There are many benefits:

- ① Significant decrease of waste mass
- ② Energy production for buildings and cars
- ③ Decrease of greenhouse gas emissions
- ④ Compost production



It is thus a real benefit for the city and its environment!

So, when do we start?



by Chloé Germain-Thérien 2015

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

4

This scenario is inspired by the T'Sou-Ke community initiative in British Columbia, Canada, where a collective solar energy project was led to enable the community to be more independent in terms of energy.

PRINCIPLES LINKED TO THIS SCENARIO:

- » **Citizen participation:** the success of this project lies in its horizontal and inclusive approach.
- » **Access to energy:** the energy is perceived as a common good, moving away from the dominant vision in which energy is viewed primarily as a commodity.

Citizen participation means that each community can be guaranteed access and participation in the decision-making process regarding issues that concern them. With respect to energy justice, the right to protest and to freedom of association, assembly and expression, are central to ensure to all the possibility to take part in decision-making and in the implementation of equitable energy systems and economic development models.



Photo : MAPDER, 2016

« MAB LOOKS TOWARD A LARGE POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN THE PLANNING, ORGANIZING, AND CONTROL OF THE PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF ENERGY, AS WELL AS IN THE WEALTH GENERATED. »

Key political statements of 7th national MAB meeting, 2013

« THE ROLE THAT CITIZEN PARTICIPATION SHOULD HAVE, IN MY OPINION, IS LINKED TO THE HUMAN RIGHT OF COMMUNITIES TO SELF-DETERMINATION. THAT MEANS THAT THE COMMUNITIES SHOULD BE ABLE TO DECIDE WHETHER A PROJECT SHOULD TAKE PLACE OR NOT, AND HOW, AND IDEALLY, WHAT TYPE OF DEVELOPMENT IS DESIRED. »

Bruno Massé, RQGE

In Canada, many communities are not connected to energy networks.

NRUM

Among those, there is a majority of indigenous communities.

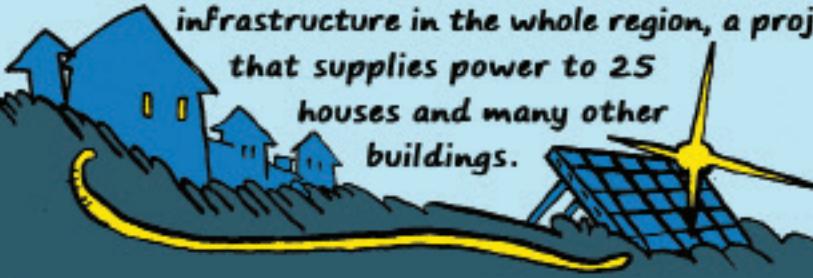
These are often dependent on fossil fuels.



In British Columbia, a community decided to come up with a plan to become self-sufficient in energy.



The community now has the most important solar energy infrastructure in the whole region, a project that supplies power to 25 houses and many other buildings.



This project is the result of the social mobilization of the whole community.



It developed its know-how on its own, based on a teaching method adapted to its reality.



In that way, cultural elements have been integrated to the project's engineering.



The community also sensitized itself to its energy consumption.



... and in that way, succeeded in reducing it!



"What's even better is that all of us got involved in the project!"



RETHINKING THE CURRENT MODEL

The fruit of 20 years of struggle, the MAB's work and analysis has inspired the process of developing this document. Conscious of the major problems posed by the current energy model, the movement proposes the developing of a new grassroots model that would mean reviewing our demands and our behaviour. The heart of the problem is not a scarcity or lack of energy, but rather the production of low-cost energy for the industry and a development model that does not take into account the needs of the population and the limits of the planet. Energy from so-called "green" sources all too often follow the same logic. In contrast, a grassroots energy model involves producing energy that meets real needs and stops subsidizing cheap energy that doesn't generate much collective wealth and instead encourages the accumulation of huge profits for industries and have negative effects on human rights and major socio-environmental conflicts.

After reading the initiatives presented in this document, we invite you to think about energy sovereignty:

- » For whom and for what is energy produced? What direction(s) do our collective choices about energy take our economies and societies in?
- » Why is energy generated? Do we really need all this energy?
- » What impact does the current model have? Which groups benefit and which are left to bear the costs, notably through forced displacements caused by energy mega-projects?
- » How should the urban relate to the rural? How are we all affected by the energy model?
- » How should we analyse so-called "green" technologies, which feed into the existing energy model and don't offer real solutions to the problem?

Energy sovereignty means fighting the privatization of rivers, opposing the modification of the use of natural resources and proposing a model for the production, distribution and sale of energy that favours inclusive, sustainable development instead of the current model that provides in energy-guzzling industries with subsidized energy.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS FIGHTING FOR ENERGY JUSTICE

THE MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DAMS (MAB, BRAZIL)

The MAB is a national, autonomous and popular movement of struggle. It is managed collectively and without regard to gender, religion, skin color, political party or level of education. The MAB has been affirming since the 1970s the need to create a model based on energy sovereignty. The militant practice is guided by the pedagogy of example and the struggle is nourished by a deep feeling of love towards people and life.

THE MEXICAN MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE AFFECTED BY DAMS AND IN DEFENSE OF RIVERS (MADPER, MEXICO)

MADPER combats the neoliberal development model presently guiding the Mexican government, which facilitates the appropriation of natural resources essential for life (water, biodiversity, forests, etc.) through the concession of resources and territories to transnational corporations and to national business groups. It is in this context that the movement was formed in 2004 with the purpose of bringing together national networks, civil society organizations, and communities affected by the construction of dams. They fight together for the defense of the Earth, rivers, human rights, water and life.

RÍOS VIVOS (COLOMBIA)

The Ríos Vivos movement is the articulation of several communities affected by the implementation of dams on their territories in the name of a developmentalist vision that opposes their plans and projects of life. The movement works for the construction of alternative social projects and for the construction of an energy model by and for the people.

RÉSEAU QUÉBÉCOIS DES GROUPES ÉCOLOGISTES (RQGE, QUEBEC)

Active since 1982, the RQGE is a networking space for organizations dedicated to the protection of the environment and the emergence of an ecological society. It promotes the sharing of knowledge and actions. The network represents its members in their joint demands to the government, in particular concerning the recognition and adequate funding of the environmental movement for its contributions to the protection of the natural heritage, public health and the well-being of Quebec society.

