

Route Four: Defending the Commons

Open access resources – such as the use of the air as a sink for pollutants – in theory are available to everyone. In practice, they are used and abused by those with the power to appropriate them. Struggles to establish an equitable distribution of rights to these resources can both protect environmental quality and improve human well-being.

WHEN THERE IS NO FRAMEWORK of rights to govern access to natural resources – when harvesting fish, or cutting trees, or discharging pollutants into the air is simply a free-for-all – the result often is serious environmental degradation. In the scramble to exploit open-access resources, the advantage goes to those who wield the most power and the most ruthless technologies. At the same time, the costs often fall most heavily on low-income people. To combat these ‘tragedies of the commons,’ communities around the world are fighting for environmental justice.



In Thailand

the Yadfon Association is defending the coastal commons and restoring mangrove forests

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In the Philippines

the SAMMACA federation is reclaiming traditional fishing grounds that were plundered by industrial fishers

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From Delhi to Los Angeles

communities are fighting for the right to clean air

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In response to the threat of global warming

activists from both the South and the North are putting forward strategies based on the principle of ‘greenhouse equity’

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