

MINGA TELLS YOU

SPECIAL NEWSLETTER

JULY - DECEMBER 2021

Territories at risk

IMPACTS ON NATURE AND
PEOPLE IN COLOMBIA

CATATUMBO · NARIÑO · CAUCA · PUTUMAYO · CAQUETÁ

MINGA TELLS YOU. SPECIAL NEWSLETTER

Territories at risk: Impacts on nature
and people in Colombia

**Association for the Alternative Social
Promotion MINGA**

July-December 2021

RESEARCH AND TEXTS:

Diana Sánchez
Javier Marín
José Yepes Sará
Katherine Hernández
Lina Sua
Mayerli Garzón
Olga Lucia Suárez

EDITORIAL COORDINATION

AND PROOFREADING:

Javier Marín
Sonia Fernanda Cifuentes

GRAPHIC COORDINATION

Sonia Fernanda Cifuentes

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Claudia Patricia Rodríguez

PHOTOGRAPHS

Archivo Asociación Minga

PRINTED BY

Producciones GER

WITH THE SUPPORT OF

Norwegian Fund for Human Rights

Bogotá, Colombia.



FONDO NORUEGO PARA LOS
DERECHOS HUMANOS



MINGA TELLS YOU

SPECIAL NEWSLETTER



CONTENIDO

Just, democratic and peaceful environmental sustainability. 3

The Duque government's simulation with the Escazú Agreement. 7

What does operation Artemis consist of? 11

Biodiverse Catatumbo in the face of extractivist development of palm and oil 17

Cauca: Land, monocultures and resistance 23

In the capital of Putumayo the Amazon is torn between climate crisis and extractivism 27

Defending Popular Consultations to protect water and life in Northern Nariño and Southern Cauca 31

Peasant women in the environmental fight 35



EDITORIAL

Just, democratic and peaceful environmental sustainability.

We are approaching the final stage of a government that consolidated a political regime implemented since the beginning of the century that openly adopted war as a factor of wealth accumulation, after a decade of violent disarticulation of the democratic and popular forces of the country that disputed the constitution of the Social State under the rule of law. In its different expressions, this condition of “war” has accompanied the imposition of all economic and social policies corresponding to its neoliberal and extractivist development model, which implied loss of sovereignty, privatization of public assets, commodification of rights and nature. But, in addition, the establishment of open authoritarianism of a Party government that reduced institutionality to itself; that is to say, today there is no State to defend citizens from government abuses.

The militarist development model that we have known for 20 years, when the National Consolidation Plans were promoted, has been directed to the absolute control of the territories where the transnational capital concretizes the globalization of the economy. Especially during this time, the intensive exploitation of nature and people has produced the highest levels of devastation and degradation of living conditions, multiplying socio-environmental conflicts in the face of a regime dedicated to disregarding and annulling democratic procedures and systematically appealing to the repressive force of the State. The new Citizen Security law that is advancing in Congress seeks to further criminalize social protest and legalize the brutal actions of the National Police, which were, once again evidenced in the last citizen mobilizations.



According to the Global Witness registry presented in September of this year (2021), in 2020 Colombia ranked first in the world for the number of murders of land and environmental defenders. As in the other murders of social leaders, this regime has shown that it will not lift a finger to investigate and much less to provide guarantees, one of the reasons why it opposes the ratification of the Escazú Agreement established to promote participation in environmental issues and the protection of people who take on this work. Nor will it act in the face of the generalized violence maintained by armed groups in the territories, disputing illegal economies, as it is a context that favors their intentions to maintain social processes in tension, reducing their capacity to resist the implementation

of the extractivist model and the construction of alternatives.

On the contrary, military interventions such as those carried out through the so-called Operation Artemis, under the pretext of halting deforestation to comply with international agreements on climate change, are aimed at expelling communities from strategic territories, as it is now doing in the Amazon and Orinoco regions. The intention is similar to that of the military operations of forced coca crop eradication in the departments of Putumayo, Caquetá, Meta and Guaviare, the same as Operation Artemis.

If the governments of the North agreed on false solutions to the climate crisis derived from their mercantile perspective at the recent Conference on the subject held in Glasgow,

Scotland (COP26), one can only expect greater irresponsibility with the country and the planet from a government that deepened the country's dependence on the global market of the transnationals. Mountaintop moors such as Santurbán, forests such as Galilea, basins such as Magdalena and Cauca, the Amazon jungle, the Macizo, the Sierra Nevada and the coastlines, are part of the business fair that the mining, hydrocarbon and trade agencies promote every year, promoting the intervention of these territories with mining, hydropower projects, oil extraction, corporate driven agriculture and tourism megaprojects, which include methods of great environmental impact such as fracking.

However, inside and outside the country, fewer and fewer people believe the Colombian government's environmentalist chatter, no matter how many media spectacles it puts on, such as the one in Leticia, where in October of this year (2021) it installed a Summit around a pact that no one will comply with, in a scenario cataloged as an offense to the identity of the Amazonian peoples. Duque's is a natural green discourse to continue channeling international aid -as he does with those of peace and migration-, but which conceals the camouflaged green of the militarist regime



that makes viable the economic intervention of essential ecosystems of our biodiversity.

In the trajectory of the country projected from the narco-business power bloc and its political representatives at the end of the last century, two transcendental events have taken place that began to contain it: on the one hand, the peace process with the FARC, which has been resisting the attacks of that warlike right-wing for five years; and the social mobilizations of the 21N in 2019 and the National Strike this year (2021), which revealed the character of this regime and placed the conflicts in the key of government dispute. The growing social and environmental awareness positioned nationally in these gestures constitutes

the opening of more favorable political conditions to advance in the change from extractivist development in the function of capital, towards an environmentally and culturally communitarian development in the function of life.

This newsletter accounts for this from different collective experiences of the diversity of peoples, cultures and social groups who live in territories threatened by interests and policies against nature and the peoples, such as Catatumbo, Cauca, Nariño, Putumayo and Caquetá, which, as a human rights organization we accompany, ensuring the effective participation of communities, especially women, in the defense of life and their territories with the strengthening of the environmental fabric and their Plans of Life.

The Duque government's simulation with the Escazú Agreement.



Colombia is the most dangerous country for people who defend the environment. This is at odds with the recent recognition given to President Iván Duque with the International Conservation Award, granted by the ICCF Teddy Roosevelt Institute in the United States. According to the British organization Global Witness, during 2020, 65 environmentalists were murdered in Colombia, that is, 30% of the 227 registered worldwide¹. In another country, no doubt this dishonorable figure, similar to that of 2019 with 64 murders throughout the national territory, would be a scandal, but here, it is not even a headline. Let's remember that the increase in violence against these men and women who dedicate their lives to protect the land, occurs precisely

¹ Global Witness. 2021. The last line of defense. Industries causing the climate crisis and attacks on land and environmental defenders. Retrieved from: <https://www.globalwitness.org/es/last-line-defence-es/>





during Duque's mandate, since in 2018 and 2017 the records reached 25 homicides in each period².

But well, for the sake of furthering the discussion, let us assume that President Duque is not responsible for this exponential violence against environmental leaders, but does he is obligated to take measures and policies aimed at curbing it and protecting these people. However, he does the opposite, he disregards national and international instruments created for that purpose. That is the case of the Peace Agreement signed between the National government and the former FARC guerrilla, which contains a series of legal, political and institutional tools to guarantee the lives of social

leaders, expressed in point 3.4³ of the final agenda. The Duque government, despite the high statistics of crimes against environmental leaders, had the luxury of throwing these policies into the trash can, without any blushes.

The same happens with the Escazú Agreement, a binding international instrument, created by the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean so that the States have more effective tools concerning: one, face climate change, if we take into account that,

³ Point 3.4. refers to "Agreement on security guarantees and the fight against criminal organizations and conduct responsible for homicides and massacres, that attack human rights defenders, social movements or political movements or that threaten or attack people who participate in the implementation of the agreements and peace building, including criminal organizations that have been named as successors of paramilitarism and their support networks".

according to scientists, some indicators are grave and irreversible, such as the highly worrying increase in global temperature (1.1°C), the rise in the sea level caused by high temperatures (5 mm between 2014 and 2019) and the increase of 20% of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere between 2015 and 2019⁴.

Two, to guarantee the life, physical integrity and work of environmentalists who, from the local and territorial level, are dedicated to caring for the land, protecting nature, and carrying out actions that involve confronting the aggressiveness of national and international extractivist companies and predatory governments. In the case of Colombia, also, violent and criminal powers that see in these environmentalists a thorn on their side for their interests of particular accumulation and territorial control.

The Escazú Agreement is not just any agreement, it is the result of many years of debates on climate change and specifically, it gives life to Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration of 1992, seeking that all people have access to information and can participate in decisions related to the environment so that this right is not a chimera, but a reality.

⁴ BBC, News World, 2019. Climate change: the worrying scientific report that warns of record global warming numbers and more catastrophic natural disasters. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-49791588>

The perversity of Duque and Escazú

The Colombian State, as is customary, signs agreements, treaties or international conventions on human rights, and then fails to comply with them. The government of Iván Duque signed the Escazú Agreement in November 2019 and boasted of a great commitment to the environment⁵. However, senior officials know that, if said Agreement is not ratified by the Congress of the Republic, it will remain a dead letter. Two years have passed and the government's legislative bench did not approve it and without weighty arguments, it was shelved.

Thus, the expected ratification of Escazú entered into the perverse game of the national government, the same as it does with the Peace Agreement: pretending that it is complying with it, but in reality it does the opposite. After the rejection of the government benches, Duque promised to present the Agreement again before Congressmen "with a message of urgency"⁶,

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, December 2019. Colombia signs "Escazú Agreement" in favor of the environment and human rights. retrieved from: <https://www.cancilleria.gov.co/newsroom/news/colombia-firma-acuerdo-escazu-pro-medio-ambiente-derechos-humanos>

⁶ El Colombiano, November 2021. If necessary, an emergency message for Escazú will be presented: Duque. At: <https://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/presidente-ivan-duque-apoya-mensaje-de-urgencia-para-acuerdo-escazu-AK15974554>

responding to media and political pressures, but especially because he had no intention of arriving at the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, Scotland, without having this instrument, at least in the process of ratification. Consequently, it was presented again before the Congress of the Republic, one day before the Conference, but well, well: without a message of urgency. Probably the ratification of the Agreement will have the same fate as the first attempt, shelved after 11 months. However, Duque achieved his purpose, to sell his image as a man committed to the environment to the international community.

While the fight against climate change is part of vacuous official rhetoric and discussed in the midst of international business by governments and multinational companies that look to Colombia for its natural wealth; the real men and women defenders of life, nature and harmony with mother earth, continue to die in the absolute lack of protection of the Colombian State, and meanwhile, those who analyze these perverse realities and accompany the communities, will await with pain the next Global Witness report in 2022.



What does operation Artemis consist of?

This is the expression of a woman, a social leader from the north of the department of Caquetá to explain, in summary, the events in which peasant and indigenous communities suddenly found themselves involved in military operations that had declared them as an objective of “environmental security”. A new concept used by the government in the Defense and Security policies in order to “preserve and defend natural resources as strategic assets of the nation”. Thus, without any dialogue, with surprise and horror, they saw how heliborne troops landed on their farms, which a few hours later they would see, regardless of their rage and pain, destroyed: partly burned, livestock confiscated, poultry scared away, with wounded relatives and without the presence of those who had just been arrested “for occupying National Natural Park (usually abbreviated as PNN for its acronym in Spanish) territories”.

The government called this type of military interventions, carried out by the Attorney General's Office, the Ministry of Environment and PNN, among others, “Operation Artemis” - the Army refers to it as “Mayor Artemis” in its web sites. Since 2019, including the year of the pandemic, the campaign took place in the Serranía del Chiribiquete range, Tinigua, Picachos and Sierra de la Macarena Natural Parks, in the departments of Caquetá, Meta and Guaviare, and in La Paya Park, in the





southeast of the department of Putumayo. In 2018, the Environmental Policy of the Defense Sector was issued, since then, it was agreed that Military and Police Forces would provide support to the National Environmental System, and in the same year, the Integral Force for Environmental Protection was created in the National Development Plan. Likewise, the priority target of Operation Artemis was defined: La Macarena Special Management Area, established in 1989 by Decree 1989.

The conflict arises, in the first place, because of a historical condition that the government refuses to recognize: the presence of communities prior to the declaration as National Natural Parks of the territories they inhabit, which were included in the National System of Protected Areas established by Law 165 of 1994, in compliance with

the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity and Sustainable Development, and whose regulation was only consolidated until 2010 with Decree 2372. For example, with resolutions 1038 of 2010 and 1256 of 2018, the extension of the Serranía del Chiribiquete National Park was extended twice over six municipalities of Caquetá and Guaviare, leaving many communities within the park who literally had the Chiribiquete come down on them, as the social leader says

The same has happened with communities settled in Amazonian territories since the times of the colonization directed by the State between 1959 and 1964, through different resolutions that established programs in this sense under the auspices of the Caja Agraria (Agrarian Bank), to facilitate the interests of landowners in the Andes who had expelled thousands of

peasant families from their lands in the so-called era of La Violencia (The violence). Colonization was also encouraged at that time by the beginning of oil exploitation in the Amazon by Texas Petroleum, and also by the expansion of the cattle industry in these territories. It is after these migrations that occupied the Amazon region, when most of the territories began to be declared natural parks and protected areas, without the State having been concerned about involving the communities in these processes of environmental conservation.

But the main factor of conflict is the new plan of corporate recolonization of the Amazon and Orinoco regions, expressed in the expansion of oil, mining, hydroelectric, corporate-driven agriculture and tourism businesses in these territories, now that the former FARC is no longer present. In Putumayo, there has been considerable growth in oil activities in recent years, also, in Caquetá, in the same hydrocarbon basin, other blocks have been activated. In the hills of Mocoa, the copper mine titled to Libero Cooper has become a priority in the government's extractivist development plans, given the demand for this material in the new energy transition businesses. Hydroelectric power plants are planned on the San Pedro and Guayas rivers in Caquetá, as well as on the Pepino river in Putumayo, those would be the first hydroelectric plants in the

Colombian Amazon. The carbon businesses in which Amazonian communities are becoming involved are mechanisms for the dispossession of forest territories. Agro-industrial plantations and extensive cattle ranching, especially in the Orinoco region, together with large-scale tourism industry projects complement the business package that is pushing for control of a region with a historical absence of the State.

It is this set of economic interests that seek land grabbing, the commodification of biodiversity and the extraction of natural resources, which in reality is covered up with Operation Artemis and with the false measures to control forest loss used by the government to sell the international image of being consistent with the climate crisis. A policy of zero net deforestation rate as stated in the National Development Plan, implies that deforestation equals reforestation, which means tolerating the loss of forest of about 250,000 hectares per year, according to current figures. What is this policy for if not to give environmental openness to the business of capital in these territories of the Amazon and Orinoco, while repressing and expelling the peasantry?

Operation Artemis reflects the authoritarian and warlike character of the bloc of interests confabulating in a government that refuses to dialogue and comply with agreements, using the repressive force of the State to impose measures that favor them. In this case,



neoliberal governments lack is expressed in different alternatives proposed by territorial social processes. In response to Operation Artemis, the communities raised the flag of “Parks with peasants”, pointing out the recognition of conservation practices in the peasant culture, as well as the demand for dialogue scenarios. However, the military operations continued with all their impacts on the rights of the population, until the National Strike allowed the installation of a joint work table in Caquetá and the agreement towards a concertation agenda. The route traced under the slogan “No decision on our territories without our participation”, constitutes a very important reference for the definition of a policy of civil treatment for this socio-environmental conflict.

The vision of integral and democratic human development that neoliberal governments do not have, is expressed in the different alternatives proposed by territorial social processes. In response to Operation Artemis, the communities raised the flag of “Parks with peasants”, pointing out the recognition of conservation practices in the peasant culture, as well as the demand for dialogue scenarios. However, the military operations continued with all their impacts on the rights of the population, until the National Strike allowed the installation of a joint work table in Caquetá and the agreement towards a concertation agenda.

The route traced under the slogan “No decision on our territories without our participation” constitutes a very important reference for the definition of a policy of civil treatment for this socio-environmental conflict.

In fact, it was around the popular concentration in Altamira, a municipality on the border between Caquetá and Huila, on the southern trunk road, where commitments were established for “environmental protection and the development of the peasant economy under models of sustainability”, with a specific route: the Participatory Environmental Zoning process as a tool to update the status of the Areas of Special Environmental Interest. These exercises, already carried out in several municipalities, involve the participation of the Community Cells, the Ombudsman’s Office, the Attorney General’s Office, the Ministry of the Environment and the UN Verification Mission, promoted by the Departmental Coordinator of Social, Environmental and Peasant Organizations of Caquetá (Coordinadora Departamental de Organizaciones Sociales, Ambientales y Campesinas del Caquetá) COORDOSAC.

The Altamira Agreements were also constructed from the integral perspective of the social and environmental problems of Caquetá that the community organizations have. Based on rights, particularly on the constitutional mechanisms of participation, and on

the Peace Agreements, the alternatives presented assume the necessary interdependence between them, so that the peasant, ethnic and popular environmental agenda for the defense of the territory and the protection of the Amazon may contain different aspects that correspond to an ecosystemic and sociocultural vision.

In this scenario, the proposals for regularization of occupied protected areas, community environmental oversight, productive reconversion, go hand in hand with land titling, development plans with a territorial approach, illicit crop substitution programs, Peasant Farmer Reserve Areas (Zonas de Reserva Campesina) and their sustainable development plans, integral reincorporation, rural health and education, and pedagogical and assembly meetings as mechanisms for participation.

The experience that is being lived today in Caquetá and southern Meta with the methodology of participation and dialogue, questions and generates dynamics different from the militarization of environmental conservation on which Operation Artemis is focused, in addition to a bias that understands the environmental issue only as a matter of nature. Hopefully, this government will allow the development of this process and that the next one, above all, consolidates it as a national policy. It would be historic!

Biodiverse Catatumbo in the face of extractivist development of palm and oil

The Catatumbo region was one of the 16 territories prioritized in the framework of the Development Programs with a Territorial Approach PDET (Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial), agreed in the Peace Accords. The hope of putting an end to the conflict and its structural causes has vanished, because today in the region the concept of development is the same one that the economic and political elites have historically tried to impose with violence throughout the country.

The government of Iván Duque has fulfilled its campaign promise “to tear the Peace Agreement to shreds” and for this purpose, one of its strategies has been the simulation of the measures contemplated in the Agreement. “Sustainable Catatumbo”, as the Single Roadmap for the implementation of the PDET in the region has been called, is the materialization of the lack of comprehensiveness and the reiteration that the political class represented by the national government is not willing to respect the vision of development that the communities have for their territories.

The region is currently facing various conflicts especially regarding its environmental dimension. The expansion of oil palm monocultures; the increase in crops declared to be of illicit use, largely due to non-compliance with the National Integral Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops PNIS (Programa Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos Ilícitos) and the lack of economic alternatives; as well as the interest in open-pit coal mining extraction, represent a



threat to the permanence of peasant and indigenous communities in their territories.

In the first place, palm oil monocultures in the Catatumbo region have been linked to a context of pain and violence, after being installed in blood and fire since the '90s, where social, territorial and land control was effective due to the presence of economic agglomerates in the region, supported by paramilitary structures and with the connivance of the State. Today, this monoculture continues to be a major social and environmental problem, as palm production has led to indiscriminate logging, contamination of water sources and infertility of the land, and the transformation of tropical forests into "green deserts".

However, palm oil monoculture has not only had devastating effects

on the environment but has also generated social conflicts such as the fragmentation of the social fabric and the community vision of its inhabitants, in addition to land grabbing. Control of palm oil cultivation and production is concentrated in the company Oleoflores, owned by Roberto Murgas, former Minister of Agriculture, known as the "palm oil czar" for being the main actor in the business in departments such as Cesar, Magdalena and Sucre, and other companies such as Palnorte. The model implemented is that of "productive alliances" in which peasant associations of palm growers place their land and labor force and depend on the financing, inputs and commercialization of the companies and, therefore, on the prices they set.

Secondly, the increase in coca leaf crops, declared to be of illicit use, and

the strengthening of "coca enclaves" especially in the municipality of Tibú have been another ingredient in the environmental conflict in the region. It is important to point out that the national government has not used efficient strategies to substitute crops declared to be of illicit use, since there is sufficient evidence showing that voluntary substitution plans have lower levels of replanting compared to forced eradication and aerial spraying, they have refused to implement the PNIS, they have failed to comply with collective and individual agreements, leaving the communities and leaders of the region who have committed to substitute their crops at imminent risk.

Finally, the possible exploitation of large extensions of open-pit coal constitutes a threat to the biodiversity of the territory and the permanence of its inhabitants. According to the government of the department





of Norte de Santander, there is a potential of 349,595,000 tons of coal to be mined in an area of 712 km² in the region⁷. Aiming at starting up coal exploitation, the Coal Road is being built, which will pass through Astilleros, Tibú, El Tarra, Convención and La Mata in Norte de Santander and will end at the Port of Gamarra in César. It is im-

⁷ Loingsigh, Gearóid Ó. (2008). Mining and energy resources in the hands of others. In: Catatumbo: A challenge for the truth. Pp. 239 - 248. 2nd edition. Colombia.

portant to note that since August 2012 “the National Mining Agency declared the Municipality of Sardinata a Special Reserve Area, an area containing 4,576,963 tons of coal” and “the mining company La Esmeralda Ltda. in La Gabarra, holds titles over 4,000 hectares to exploit around 18,756,656 tons of coal, through an open-pit mine on Rio de Oro and La Esmeralda⁸.”

⁸ Carmen Tarazona. (2019). The accelerated exploitation of Catatumbo. Retrieved from <https://rebelion.org/la-explotacion-acelerada-del-catatumbo/>



These projects will bring noteworthy environmental impacts to the region, in which the Catatumbo-Bari Natural Park and its fauna and flora reserves, as well as its biodiversity, will be the most affected. The communities’ resistance to the exploitation of the region’s natural resources has resulted in the militarization of the territory. The national government has denaturalized the PDET, both in the participation processes and in the territorial approach, prioritizing business

initiatives. To this extent, it instrumentalizes the will of the peasantry to build a plan to materialize their vision of community development, and on the contrary, persists in the violent imposition of a development model that responds to extractivist interests in the region.

Cauca: Land, monocultures and resistance

Cauca's social organizations and communities are permanently confronted with various environmental conflicts related to the loss of biodiversity, water contamination and soil degradation, in addition to the social and cultural impacts caused by land grabbing and the extractive economy.

These contradictions stem from one of the deepest structural roots of the armed conflict: land tenure in Colombia. This is particularly inequitable in the department of Cauca, where its concentration is highest. In 2008, only 14% of the departmental territory was owned by the indigenous, black and peasant population, the majority in the area⁹. The numerous economic projects related to mining, oil and forestry exploitation and agro-industrial activity require large tracts of land and auction off natural resources without consultation with the communities whose access to these resources has been restricted.

Forestry exploitation plays an important role in the extractive economies of the region, particularly in the central (Cordillera central) and western (Cordillera occidental) mountain ranges, where the richness of the soil is characterized by optimal conditions for productivity, making large monoculture plantations of sugarcane and pine a profitable economic option for the sugar mills and the paper industry in these territories.

⁹ Observatory of Environmental Conflicts -OCA-, Institute of Environmental Studies, National University of Colombia. 2019.



The extensive tree plantations for industrial extraction in Cauca are being carried out mainly by Smurfit Kappa Cartón Colombia. This Irish company entered the territory in the 1970s, planting pine and eucalyptus monoculture tree plantations. Its expansion has impacted other regions such as the Eje Cafetero, Risaralda and Valle del Cauca, positioning itself as one of the largest paper producers in Colombia.

In addition to productive consolidation, with plantations whose timber extraction surpassed those of the United States and Canada, tax exemptions stimulated its growth, and dispossession and displacement due to the armed conflict drove land grabbing, leading to multiple difficulties for the natural and social life of the region.

The water consumption of these introduced species is up to three times more than native species, so Smurfit Kappa Cartón de Colombia's plantations are located in strategic areas with abundant water resources, causing irreparable damage such as the destruction of part of the rainforest in Valle del Cauca and the Andes.

The fertile lands of the department are losing their productivity, the basins of several rivers have been polluted, losing the quality of the water sources, native trees have been cut down to expand the exploitation frontier, and new settlers have migrated, generating greater competition in the local labor market, as well as cultural changes. The presence of these large plantations has affected people with

an agricultural vocation who live in neighboring areas and has exacerbated interethnic conflicts between indigenous, black and peasant communities.

Through Corporate Social Management programs that allow companies to further reduce their tax payments, they promote specific projects as social palliatives of their intervention. Schools, roads, small productive projects, among others, are part of the opportunistic and clientelist dynamics that are sown like weeds in the region in the face of community precariousness and state absenteeism in terms of social investment. The extractive zones have adequate infrastructure, but the neighboring peasant, black and indigenous communities have been marginalized to areas with fewer facilities, difficult access and land with low productivity.

In the face of collective aspirations and the absence of the State, including the failure to implement a true Integral Rural Reform, peasant, indigenous and black communities are carrying out processes of liberation and recovery of mother earth in areas occupied by the multinational Smurfit Kappa - Cartón Colombia, as a way to retake their ancestral territory, redistribute land tenure and stop the damage caused to ecosystems.

However, within the framework of these processes of legitimate recovery of their lands, the communities have denounced the violation of their rights by the Colombian State. The violent actions that the security forces have taken against the communities have left several people injured and a young indigenous man murdered. The death of the young man as a result of being shot in the back by a Mobile Anti-riot Squadron (Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbios -ESMAD) agent has affected his family and the community. This type of action sends a message to the population that reaffirms the complicity of the State with the company that has grabbed and dispossessed peasant, indigenous and black lands.

In the capital of Putumayo the Amazon is torn between climate crisis and extractivism

The climate crisis caused by the unbridled combustion of fossil fuels such as oil, coal and gas, demanded by the Western model of life, has led to the emergence of a powerful industry that seeks to position itself in the necessary substitution of energy sources, making it a lucrative business whose green promises are far from being a real alternative to the millions of victims of this system of production and consumption. Much less does it correspond to the environmental and cultural realities of the global South, as it is these territories that will be intervened to plunder the new minerals required for “alternative energies”.

Green growth policies are once again placing the South as a source of mineral exploitation, as stated by the World Bank in its report presented last year, where it points out that the production of minerals such as graphite, lithium and cobalt could increase by almost 500% by 2050 to meet the growing demand for energy technologies. It is estimated that more than 3 billion tons of minerals and metals will be required for the implementation of wind, solar and geothermal energy, as well as for energy storage (batteries), in order to achieve a temperature reduction below 2°C in the future¹⁰. Copper, cobalt, nickel and lithium are also needed for the use of electric vehicles, energy storage and wiring.

Between 2017 and 2050, the same World Bank report forecasts more than 900% growth in global demand for lithium, while demand for cobalt would increase nearly sixfold

¹⁰ <https://www.bancomundial.org/es/news/press-release/2020/05/11/mineral-production-to-soar-as-demand-for-clean-energy-increases>

over the same period¹¹. And According to Bernstein's European mining and metals research team, to meet governments' commitments under the Paris Agreement, between 11 and 72 million tons above current industrial demand for copper would be needed¹².

The World Bank's strategy is to create a "Climate-Smart Mining Fund" with a focus on transforming mining activities to become "forest-smart". The Bank then plans to "compensate" for any pollution, forest or biodiversity loss that occurs during this intensive mining transition, even though, in practice this policy has proven to be a failure in terms of achieving the goal of securing ecosystems and the rights of nature, yet proves effective for carbon credits speculation and onerous green business.

In Colombia, the debate on energy transition boomed months after the most strict period of confinement, so the economic reactivation emerged as the ideal scenario for the impulse of green businesses that had already been spreading in the country. Thus, in July 2021, Congress approved Law 2099, which promotes the production of energy from new non-conventional sources, such as green and blue hydrogen. However, the development of

hydrogen requires energy from the exploitation of gas, a fossil fuel. The same analysis should be applied to other alternative energy sources, such as wind and hydroelectric power, also promoted in the aforementioned law with subsidies and other economic facilities.

With the 2050 energy plan outlined in said law, it is intended to carry out a process of electrical conversion of transportation and the vast majority of public activities developed by the State, generating a strong pressure on mineral exploitation and occupation of territories. It should be noted that the government's energy transition goals have been the main argument for promoting the copper, gold and molybdenum mining project in Mocoa, capital of the department of Putumayo, in the Amazon and part of the protection zone of the upper basin of the river that bears the same name of this municipality. Mineral exploitation there dates back to the signing of the mining concession contract in 2006, when five polygons were granted, the ownership of which has passed through several companies, from Anglo Gold Ashanti to Libero Cobre, which is currently carrying out prospecting and exploration activities.

The Canadian company Libero Cobre has ignored calls and warnings about the serious impacts of mining in a highly biodiverse area, including the deforestation of the Andean Amazonian foothills, or the pollution of



the waters of the Caquetá basin - to which the Mocoa River belongs - one of the most important water ecosystems in the Amazon. The damage is not only caused by extraction, but also by transport, production and waste disposal. Already from the drilling phases to locate the seams, the impacts are considerable: the amount of soil and rock removed, leaves the earth's surface desertified and modified. These conditions put the population on alert given the environmental tragedy experienced four years ago when an avalanche of mud and rocks destroyed a third of the municipality and claimed the lives of nearly 300 people.

Let us remember that minerals and precious metals are obtained in small quantities, and therefore involve the removal of enormous amounts of waste, such as the fact that from each

ton of rock, in a project in Argentina, only six grams of gold and six kilograms of copper are obtained¹³. Likewise, heavy metals such as cyanide or arsenic are used in the leaching or dissolution of minerals, which irreversibly pollute drinking water. Wastewater from mining activities, contaminated with heavy metals and toxic agents, is deposited in piles called tailings dams, which often fracture or break and millions of liters of contaminated water reach rivers, streams and aquifers.

The communities and the local authority have opposed the construction and mining exploitation in Mocoa, arguing the serious impacts of mining in the Amazon, in full contradiction of

¹¹ Ibidem

¹² Mining MX, Glencore's green rebrand a complex brew for governments, society and shareholders, July 2019

¹³ Mercury, another Amazon threat, Retrieved from: <http://www.geonoticias.com/noticias/general/-mercurio,-otra-amenaza-amaz%F3nica.html>

the sentence 4360 of 2018 of the Supreme Court of Justice, the municipal agreement 020 of 2018 and the municipal development plan that in its article 5 prohibits large-scale mining. In the last two years, there have been citizen demonstrations rejecting mining exploitation in the mountains of Mocoa, from which the Civic Committee for the defense of territory, water and life has been formed, which carries out different educational actions, exchange with other experiences and political advocacy, to engage the various sectors of the population in this purpose.

The energy transition that the climate crisis demands with supreme urgency does not simply refer to a change of sources but to the whole energy model that also involves technologies, ownership and management of energy, necessarily in correspondence with a new culture where community values reduce the pressure on nature and restore the balance of all its ecological relations, in concomitance with similar social relations. Any alternative that does not take this perspective will repeat and multiply the environmental disasters that the model has caused so far. The energy transition must generate a post-extractivist process under the principles of democracy, social and environmental justice, in the exercise of relocalization of energy production and consumption, which does not only imply the change of the energy matrix, but on the contrary builds a process of energy and food sovereignty, allowing collective action, the rights of nature and permanence in the territory.

Putumayo is Amazonia and a source of life for the planet that requires strong and real actions for conservation. The prohibition of large-scale mining should be a unison mandate of the Latin American people, the energy transition is built from the communities and not from private profits and state co-optation.

Defending Popular Consultations to protect water and life in Northern Nariño and Southern Cauca



The Popular Consultations are part of the participation mechanisms established in the Political Constitution of Colombia, whose purpose is to fulfill the popular will of the communities. They stipulate a general question on a transcendental issue involving a given territory and its inhabitants, where the answer must be YES or NO; they can be held at national, departmental, municipal, district or local level and their results must be respected and executed by the corresponding entities in a period of fewer than three months.

However, the consultations carried out during the last years against the imposition of the mining and energy model in different municipalities of the country, were contained by the national government through the National Mining Agency and the pressure of the multinationals, because the results were overwhelming, expressing the resounding NO of the communities to the exploitation of mining projects in their territories and prioritizing life and water over the extractivist pretensions.

Likewise, the Constitutional Court made a review of the lawsuit filed by the oil company Mansarovar Energy to the popular consultation process held in Cumaral- Meta; act from which arises the Ruling SU-095 of 2018, which states that: “the Full Chamber found that the existence of limits on the matters to be decided in a territorial popular consultation, specifically what refers to the national constitutional powers on the use of the subsoil and the exploitation of non-renewable natural resources in the head of the State, implies that this mechanism of citizen participation can not be used to prohibit exploitation activities in a given municipality or district”

In addition, the Ruling also pointed out that there was an inadmissible deficit of constitutional protection regarding the right of citizens to participate in deciding on extractive projects, and therefore ordered Congress

to define, “as soon as possible” mechanisms for citizen participation and instruments of concurrence that would help to resolve this legal limbo.

This measure has limited the participation of the communities in the decisions concerning the development of their territory and has hindered the realization of nine more consultations that had already complied with the requirements for their realization. These were finally stopped by the refusal of the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit to transfer to the National Civil Registry office the economic resources to make the voting possible, stating that they are the municipalities who should assume these expenses.

However, despite this ruling, the popular consultation in the municipality of Fusagasuga, Cundinamarca, was carried out with the endorsement of the Council of State and other consultations were carried out by the communities autonomously and with their own resources, and their results were accepted by the Councils through Municipal Agreements.

However, during the last year, use has been made of the minutes of coordination and concurrence signed between the municipal mayors' offices and the National Mining Agency, which apparently seek to reach agreements regarding mining exploitation, giving the green light for implementation in the territories. This mechanism leaves out the direct and real participation of

the communities in the decisions on how they want to see, feel and be there, since these agreements are made with officials of the municipalities, contravening at least two constitutional dictates: i) Sovereignty resides in the people. ii) Colombia is a decentralized state.

Without taking into account the communities and the risks to water and food production, socio-cultural impacts and the peasant economy, foreign mining companies have been given the green light to benefit from the granting of licenses for the exploitation of gold and copper deposits in the Colombian Massif. Such is the case of Royal Road, Agnico Eagle and Barrick Gold, which have allied the exploitation of the so-called Metallogenic cord of the Andes in the department of Nariño. Faced with this situation and the denial of the right to participation, the peasant communities in the Colombian massif organized themselves to show their will to protect the territory.

In 2018, in the municipality of San Lorenzo, northern Nariño, in a self-managed manner and in response to the institutional refusal, social and community organizations and some local entities joined together in the Committee for the Protection of Water, Life and Territory to promote the legitimate and autonomous mining popular consultation that under popular election asked the following question: “Do you agree YES or NO with the exploration and exploitation of metals and hydrocarbons in the municipality of San Lorenzo”? For 2019 in Mercaderes, Cauca, in the face of the protection of biodiversity and water sources, another mining consultation also took place, which asked the Mercaderes community: “Do you agree YES or NO that in the municipality of Mercaderes metal mining or hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation activities, which require water for human consumption, nature and may affect the communities' economies are carried out? In both cases the results were overwhelming. The community of San Lorenzo expressed with 6,660 votes a NO to exploitation, and in Mercaderes 6,449 people voted as a popular mandate NO to mining.



With these results, a product of the direct democracy exercise promoted by the communities, advocacy actions have been carried out to transform them into a binding order. These have been publicly delivered as mandates for local and departmental authorities to assume them in their government plans and the elaboration of public policies for the protection of water, life and territory.

Given the impact that these autonomous actions have had on the territories and the latent threat of 102 mining company applications for exploiting the mineral resource and 16 existing mining projects; last December 19 in the municipalities of San Pablo, La Cruz, Belén, Colón and San Pedro de Cartago in the north of the department of Nariño and Florencia in the south of Cauca, autonomous popular consultations were held simultaneously, with the objective of reclaiming water as a fundamental element for life. With this legitimate democratic exercise where 30,202 votes (1) were obtained for the NO, the communities of these six municipalities of the Colombian Massif, whose vocation is agricultural, endorsed their decision to reject the development of mining exploration and exploitation activities on a small, medium or large scale, subway and/or open-pit in their territories.

After these popular consultations, the Committee for the Protection of Water, Life and Territory, where leaders and social processes of the municipalities converge and from where these events were called for, is involved with the construction of the ordinance to present and demand that it be adopted in defense of the territories; and in this way, protect, among others, the Mayo River and the Juanambú River. This struggle has been going on since 2008.

In addition to the voting days, which met all the criteria for ordinary voting, the organized community promoted awareness and popular education exercises, voting days were held for children in schools, and environmental tours that represent exercises of popular sovereignty, where it was seen, as confirmed in the voting, that the communities massively reject mining policies.

Finally, it is necessary to reaffirm that the popular consultation should continue being defended as a suitable mechanism for the communities to make decisions regarding the implementation of the extractive economy in their territories. Participation is the fundamental basis of a true democracy.

Farmer women in the environmental struggle

What is the role of women in the construction of the environmental vision of the National Agrarian Coordinator -CNA-?

With this question we triggered interesting reflections from the peasant women leaders attending the VII Assembly of the National Agrarian Coordinator -CNA-, held in the municipality of Saravena, Arauca, from November 14 to 19. Here are some of them:



Cindy Lorena Ule

"I am part of the Peasant Association of Huila -ACDH- (Asociación Campesina del Huila). From the women's perspective on the environmental issue, we from the countryside are beginning to transform our production dynamics, to make it more harmonious with nature, respecting all forms of life, playing a very important role in implementing the mandates of the CNA, food sovereignty and our own economy.

For this, let's say, women have a greater capacity for sensitivity, we are located within the spaces with greater sensitivity. So just by starting with a process of production of family gardens, or home

orchards that are produced organically, without any type of agrochemicals, we are also starting to transform these modes of agricultural production on a small scale. And just by stopping the use of agrochemicals, which is one of the main causes of climate change and all the effects on the environment, isn't it? And not only the environment, but also the whole issue of human health and all the complications that arise from that.

Significant efforts are being made in the regions to think about the whole issue of protected areas. We, who belong to the Amazon region, are making important commitments to protect natural reserves, and in this same path of changes in the modes of production, we are including agroforestry, people are also including

the planting of trees that also allow us to mitigate the impact of deforestation in the territories. Also, the issue of the very important role played by women in the protection and recovery of native seeds; because we have noticed that in the region, women are the ones who guarantee that the seed continues to pass from hand to hand to continue being reproduced and spread; it is not only the conservation of the seed but also the reproduction, the exchange and that the seed reaches everyone so that we can produce the food that guarantees food sovereignty.

The issue is also: how do we go beyond simply producing and start

transforming? Women have played a significant role in these handicraft transformation exercises. So they have been working on soap making, but they are equally working on costume jewelry, others are betting on the transformation of products from the area, such as coffee and panela (sugar cane). Also marketing; in fact, this same space is a space for exchange, for marketing products made by women, by hand, with the efforts of each one of them in the regions. In this way, women are empowering themselves and assuming the leadership of the processes to generate these dynamics of transformation integrally”.



Johana Milena Castaño:

“I come from the department of Tolima. I have been accompanying the Women’s Secretariat of the National Agrarian Coordinator. In this peasant organization, I believe that women have made historical contributions that go beyond the organizational form itself. That is to say, we recognize that historically women have been the ones who have helped to conserve (that word conserve) and above all to preserve and balance that harmonious relationship between humankind and nature.

We know stories of peasant women from other generations responsible for

saving seeds and identifying the species in their territory, both plants and animals. They have historically been the ones who have had this responsibility, closely linked to the history of agriculture since nomadic cultures, which moved from place to place; women always led the way, they were the ones who decided what could be hunted and what was healthy for nature for this harmonious balance and what was unhealthy. These experiences have been inherited by women from generation to generation. The peasant women have always been the ones who save the seeds, who preserve the balance between the plants that are cultivated in their orchards, in their lands, in their farms, and I believe that this is where the conservation of the environment is gained because it can not

remain only in an ethereal discourse, but it goes beyond, to real practices.

I believe that these real conservation practices are very effective in the countryside. There, the CNA has insisted a lot on the line of policy for women in the area of agroecology. That is where we have succeeded in summarizing and articulating our struggle for the protection of the environment, that struggle for the protection of natural goods, and that is how we have become guardians. We say that women in the CNA are historical guardians of

nature, guardians of the territory, guardians of life. Being guardians of life, but also being managers of life, gives us a very important responsibility, a very important historical role. In concrete actions, as I already mentioned, in many territories they are the ones who are in charge of seeking those harmonious relationships, of conserving, preserving and even generating a dialogue with nature itself because they can interpret nature and each phenomenon that occurs in nature and I believe that this is very important”.



Sonia López

“I think that women take as a starting point that we have always been present in all the processes of social movement building and resistance processes in the territories. From our experience and from the social organization, we have been building a political proposal that is materialized in our Life Plan. This Life Plan has been built from an integral perspective; we have received the teachings of our indigenous brothers to understand ourselves first as part of nature and in that sense to establish harmonious relationships between human beings and between human beings and the natural environment. From there, the different initiatives and proposals for the defense of life, defense of the territory

and permanence in the territory are then directed.

We women have been part of this construction process. Of course, understanding also the particularities, the macho culture that exists in these regions: there is a struggle from the social movement, and sometimes the participation that women have had in these scenarios is made invisible. Here in our region, in the department of Arauca, in which women, precisely in order to have their own space for discussion, for political training, for the development of their vital commitments, seen from the Life Plan approach, established the Dawn Association of Women for Arauca -Asociación Amanecer de Mujeres por Arauca -AMAR-). Later they joined with other women’s organizations in Casanare, Boyacá and Santander (Santander and Norte de Santander) to form the regional

association María Antonia Santos and, from there, they have been developing this axis of the environment and the territory, taking into account the territory as a whole. Seeking that the relationships that we develop, go in that harmonic balance.

Therefore, we women have proposed, along with other social sectors, a permanent struggle for the defense of the territory against indiscriminate exploitation, against the plundering that transnational companies develop in these territories. In our case, mainly the oil companies. We have defended the Lipa lagoon, here in the department of Arauca, together with the indigenous people and peasants, against all the aggression they have received in more than 30 years of oil exploitation by Oxy. We have participated in the peasant movement, in the construction, in determining the Agro-food Peasant Territories and contributed to a political approach of

what agroecology would be, or rather is, for us. The need to break with this model of economic and cultural dependence on the large corporations that manage agricultural inputs and pesticides, as well as helping to raise awareness of the need for the peasantry to also change these practices of how they have been producing historically.

And so we are called upon, we who are defenders of life, who think of a different world, who think of transforming these relations of domination and exploitation for ones of equity, of equality, that put life and dignity of both people and the rest of the species above, because we cannot continue with these same practices that subjugate other people, that subjugate other species and that subjugate the house in which we live. That is where we have been making these contributions.

the ones who are in charge of the caregiving and farm tasks, doing the more precise activities of the medicinal gardens, of the home orchards, and also of the caring of the forest, the caring of the mountain, the caring of the water.

We know that, in this capitalist model, and in the issue of agriculture, there is an invasion of monoculture in the region and there is excessive use of agrochemicals and, for the extension of these crops, what the peasantry is doing is cutting down the forest, destroying water basins. That is the fight we are fighting, we are defending

that ecosystems must be preserved, we are promoting that agricultural practices have much to do with agroecology, that relationship between human beings and nature without adding toxins to the soil, diversifying crops. We are also rescuing all the ancestral knowledge of the grandfathers, grandmothers and grandmothers of the people who came before us. And on the subject of health, and the care of the body, of the family, of the communities, we have been working very hard on natural and ancestral medicine.

So I think that the bet of us women is in that sense, the defense of life, of water, the defense of diversity, the way we have been doing it, from concrete actions in that sense: in defending. These are flags that we women have taken up. But also as a pedagogy that we must have sovereignty over food. Because the realities that we see today, for example, the pandemic, left us with a reality, and that is that the first need was to have food; and the peasantry, today, the great majority, has lost that focus on food production. It is the large landowners who have it, and much of the food comes from outside. That is why the peasantry is feeling the need to grow coca, or extensions of monoculture, which in the end often does not guarantee the welfare of the family, nor the economy, nor health. Rather, it deepens the inequality that the system brings. So we also do pedagogy to change these ideas, in the sense that this model is destroying the goods of nature, it is destroying the social fabric, the communities, the territory.

It has happened to me that when I look for a man to help me do the work, they have even fumigated my aloe vera, they have uprooted all my plants. I got tired, I don't go back to looking for a worker, I look for a woman to see if a woman understands it differently. And we looked for a woman, a Venezuelan migrant, who was looking for work. And I simply told her to help me clean and I left her to see what she would do. The lady cleaned like this, pulling up the weeds and so on, and she left me the plants, the ones that the men consider to be bush. And she began to prepare the soil, to bring black soil, to bring sand, and she began to help fertilize. And she told me "this can't be fumigated". I told her "they have finished with my land" in that sense of: as they see the bush, then it seems easier for them to go through with the fumigator.

It has happened to me that when I look for men to help me, they have even fumigated my aloe vera, they have uprooted all my plants. I got tired, I don't go back to looking for a worker, now I look for a woman to check if a woman understands it differently. So we looked for a woman, a Venezuelan migrant, who was looking for work. And I just told her to help me clean and I left her to see what she would do. The lady cleaned like this: pulling up the weeds and so on, and she left me the plants, the ones that the men consider to be bush. She began to prepare the soil, to bring black soil, to bring sand, and she began to help fertilize; and she told me "this can't be fumigated". I told her "they



Andrea Lizbeth Jiménez:

I am part of the Catatumbo Social Integration Committee -CISCA (Comité de Integración Social del Catatumbo) - and I work in the women's axis. The role of women in terms of environmental and ecological issues is precisely the fight we women have been fighting at a general level in the region to counteract the agroindustrial model in some other way. In what sense? In the sense that we are

have finished with my land” in that sense: as men see the bush, then it seems easier for them to go through with the fumigator.

I have noticed that this knowledge, the way of working with medicinal plants, is something that comes with us. It is given a different treatment. We women do not go to fumigate, we go to pull up the plant, to fertilize it, to take care of it; we know that it is wild. While the man, the worker,

has already lost that connection. For them it is easier to take the scythe or take the machete and cut everything down, or even worse, to take the fumigator and start fumigating what they think is forest. These are some of the observations we have made, and when I ask the women, most of them say: no, it's just that men can't be left to do this work.

**Asociación para la Promoción
Social Alternativa MINGA**

  @Asociacionminga

www.asociacionminga.co

The content of this publication is the responsibility of the authors and does not commit to the organizations and institutions that support it. This publication is of a cultural and pedagogical nature and its distribution is free of charge. It may be photocopied and reproduced provided the source is acknowledged.



