



SEEDS OF TRANSFORMATION, ROOTS FOR THE FUTURE:

Feminist Voices for Climate Justice

Climate and Gender Justice
Learning Group



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Seeds for transformation: roots for the future

Feminist voices for climate justice

Learning group on climate justice and gender

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Introduction

Seeds for transformation, roots for the future: feminist voices for climate justice is the result of a collective writing effort in which we reflect on the ways that a life of dignity is sustained in our territories¹. From Native and Afro-descendant peoples, cimarronas², campesinas³, and rural and coastal communities; we, women, trans and non-binary people, through our actions of defense and care, have become guardians of forests, lakes, rivers, mangroves, mountains, and crops that have been affected by the climate crisis.

In the face of the historical dispossession caused by the extractivist model imposed on the continent, our bodies and territories have done more than just resist. Drawing on our ancestral relationship with ecosystems, we have developed responses to the climate crisis that are rooted in the wisdom derived directly from our own ways of life, far removed from corporate logics and capable of challenging false climate solutions.

The Urgent Action Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean (FAU LAC), in recognition of this ability and respecting the autonomy of each organization, invited this group of voices that defend their territories and work for socio-environmental justice to be part of the Learning Group on Climate Justice and Gender, a safe space for co-creation, guided by the plurality of voices, active listening, and collective care. At FAU LAC, as a regional feminist fund for urgent

1) Note on language: Throughout this text, we have chosen to retain certain concepts in Spanish to preserve the richness of their meanings and the histories they carry. Many of these terms emerge from Latin American social movements and political traditions, and their communicative intent cannot be fully conveyed through direct translation. The use of the original Spanish also acknowledges the movements from which these concepts originate. A brief definition is provided in a footnote the first time each term appears, and a glossary of all untranslated terms is included in the endnotes.

2) Cimarronas refers to Black women who resisted enslavement and colonial rule by escaping, organizing autonomous communities, and sustaining collective forms of freedom. Today, the term is also claimed by Afro-descendant feminist movements as a political identity that honors this legacy of resistance, autonomy, and community leadership.

3) Campesinas refers to rural women whose lives and work are closely connected to the land. Beyond agricultural production, the term conveys relationships to territory, community, and ways of life that are not fully reflected in the English word peasants.

action, we also understood the importance of amplifying these voices to mobilize greater and better resources, particularly in the context of a climate crisis within a structurally unequal region.

The first meetings of our group, connecting thirteen territories, were held virtually. The agenda was built collectively, and the word started circulating. In 2024, the opportunity arose to hug each other, in person; we delved deeper into the need to safeguard our narratives, wisdom, and perspectives on how the crisis and climate justice are experienced in different territories across Latin America and the Caribbean.

It was there, as we recognized ourselves as non-hegemonic voices in today's climate debates, that the dream of this book was born. We set out, as a first step in our reflection, to articulate our positions and acknowledge our vibrant, deeply rooted proposals in the face of the climate crisis.

We know that for women, trans and non-binary people, time for writing is often scarce; even so and despite the fear that at times overwhelmed us (that we might not be able to capture so many experiences in words) with patience and great determination we wove together what we now hold in our hands.

The twelve texts that comprise it are the fruit of an editorial accompaniment process in writing workshops (designed to align with the lunar cycle) and technical consultations with each organization.

To find our own voice and tone, we were guided by narrative practices that included generating questions and engaging in creative writing exercises. We sought to go beyond the theme of resistance, making space to acknowledge and value the relationships we maintain with Mother Earth, Water, Fire, and Air, which we revitalize and re-create in the face of the ongoing polycrisis.

Our book opens with the story of the creation of the Learning Group on Climate Justice and Gender. The text details how feminist popular education methodologies and the commitment to collective care have been the path to building critical wisdom, raises the need for rebellious writing that challenges the hegemonic discourse on the

climate crisis, and proposes a unique meaning of climate justice rooted in the territories.

What is healing if not the recovery of a dignified and harmonious existence? This question is posed by those movements that understand climate justice as a profound healing of the *territorio-cuerpo-tierra*⁴. In Guatemala, the women of the UTUX KOTZ'IJ K'ICHE'⁵ preserve ancestral Mayan wisdom to heal from historical dispossession and racism, creating safe spaces that span generations. In Mexico, the Colectiva P'urhépecha Nana Echeri quietly defies the avocado monoculture through an agro-diverse campesina school and spiritual resistance, healing the land and their bodies violated by heteropatriarchal capitalism.

Climate justice also takes root in urban areas through the pursuit of food sovereignty and agroecological practices. South of San Salvador, where mountains and hills intertwine with valleys, watersheds, rivers, and streams, the Asociación Movimiento de Mujeres de Santo Tomás (MOMUJEST) sows and harvests collectively, reviving ancestral wisdom and making agroecology a commitment to intergenerational care that reconnects women with one another and with the Earth.

The close relationship with water is creatively manifested in two initiatives that rethink climate justice. On the Pacific coast, Afro-Colombian women from the Corporación Caminos de Mujer (CCM) created a powerful rhyme to narrate how—inspired by the Ubuntu philosophy—they heal both their bodies and the mangrove forest, in a context marked by racist and armed violence. In Guatemala, the Colectivo Comunidad Tz'unun Ya' defends Lake Atitlán as a sacred entity against megaprojects, environmental racism, and epistemic violence through art, community organizing, and reviving the

4) *Territorio-cuerpo-tierra* (territory-body-land) is a concept developed by Indigenous and feminist movements in Latin America that understands the body and the land as inseparable territories shaped by interconnected histories of violence, care, and resistance. It highlights that harm inflicted on territories is also experienced through bodies and communities, and that defending land is inseparable from defending life, bodily autonomy, and collective wellbeing.

5) The use of capital letters and apostrophes (') in the name is in accordance with an explicit decision and request by its members.

wisdom that Native Peoples preserve regarding water care.

In this vein, the ancestral wisdom of women belonging to Native and campesina communities endures in the face of wildfires and the climate crisis. In Paraguay, the Grupo de Estudios Ancestrales Áry Ojeasojavo documents how the wisdom of Paĩ Tavyterã women conceives the relationship between fire and forest as a vital balance that enables their community-based care. The Marcha Mundial de las Mujeres Macronorte Perú, composed of campesina women from Tambogrande, is confronting the ravages of the El Niño phenomenon with carob soup, an ancestral technology from the dry forest, now threatened by long-standing extractivism and the growing agroindustry.

Building climate justice requires alliances between rural and urban communities, as demonstrated by the defense of Los Cedros Forest: a socio-environmental victory documented by the Observatorio Minero Ambiental y Social del Norte del Ecuador (Mining, Environmental, and Social Observatory of Northern Ecuador, OMASNE), which combined legal action with the collective strength of the minka, demonstrating the power of multisectoral alliances.

Meanwhile, Aquelarre RD keeps alive the embers of memory and anti-colonial dignity with reflections on the fights of Rubén Darío and Esteban Polanco, reminding us that the defense of territory has historically required painstaking work and an organic connection to community processes.

Tlalij, Yolojtlí uan Nemililistlij, an organization of Nahua and Teenek women from the Huasteca region, denounce how historical dispossession and the climate crisis threaten their territories and ways of life. Through significant rituals and images of fertility, with scents and flavors, they explain their relationship of reciprocity and care with Mother Earth. They also recount how they have had to organize themselves into a network of women, swimming against the tide, to make their solidarity economy flourish and to fight from a place of abundance.

Finally, FAU LAC shares its journey within a continental context of democratic crisis and growing extractivist pressure; disseminating how the feminist fund has accompanied women's and dissident movements in the defense of their territories and socio-environmental justice—work that highlights the political commitment to collective care and the strengthening of the autonomy of the organizations they support.

Through this exercise, we conceive of writing as yet another space for creation and defense of the weave of life; undoubtedly, women, trans and non-binary people in the territories recreate it with a fertile and unstoppable lucidity. We are not objects of study; we are authors in the fullest sense: creators of theory and practice from a profound reflective sensibility.

THE WEAVE OF LEARNING

1

Climate Justice from collective rebellion
and writings by women, trans and non-binary
people⁶

Urgent Action Fund for Latin America and the
Caribbean (FAU LAC)⁷

Regional



Writing implies rebellion because writing requires reflection. And reflection is inadmissible in times of production. It entails a pause, going back to your memories, returning to yourself.

Camila Sosa Villada – The useless journey: Trans / writing

Collective learning through sentipensar⁶: The origin of more than just a book

In 2022, the Urgent Action Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean (FAU LAC), through the Bodies and Territories Program (CyT by its Spanish acronym), observed with concern how the increase in extreme weather events further exacerbated the conflicts and socio-environmental impacts that have historically been present in the territories we support⁹. We also identified an increase in funding allocated to climate responses, as well as greater demand from donors for information on the solutions developed by grassroots organizations in their local communities. These demands presented a challenge for us as an institution, leading us to recognize the need to deepen our reflections and strengthen our support for organizations in the field of climate justice.

Faced with this situation, we needed to broaden our perspective to reinforce our role as a feminist fund that supports and stands alongside movements in the protection and defense of bodies and territories. This meant strengthening our efforts to mobilize flexible resources, made available to movements, from a perspective of climate justice and gender developed in collaboration with the organizations.

6) Chapter on the experience and wisdom built collectively in the Learning Group on Climate Justice and Gender coordinated by the Bodies and Territories Program.

7) Written by **Marina Praça**, Bodies and Territories Program, with contributions from the FAU LAC team.

8) Sentipensar is a Latin American concept that forms part of the intellectual heritage of fishing communities in Colombia and describes the inseparable relationship between feeling and thinking. It suggests that knowledge emerges through the integration of emotion, reflection, lived experience, and collective relationships.

9) In the CyT Program since 2016, FAU LAC has provided Body and Territory Grants (CyT Grants, previously known as Strategic Grants), to strengthen the resistance processes and the strategies of organizations led by women and gender and sexual dissidents which comprehensively promote the protection of the territories and the defense of socio-environmental and climate justice.

From the very beginning, we have held the deep conviction that women, trans and non-binary people who defend their territories and ways of life in harmony with nature are, through their actions, building socio-environmental and climate justice. For this reason, our commitment as a fund consisted precisely of engaging in dialogue and reflection with those who experience climate change in their bodies and face its impacts on a daily basis; listening to and learning from their perspectives and commitments. It was from this shared *sentipensar* that, in 2023, we created the Learning Group on Climate Justice and Gender, a space that became fertile ground for the production of collective wisdom.

Inspired by the methodological approaches of feminist popular education, we began the process with virtual meetings held between June and December 2023. This journey was joined by members from thirteen organizations¹⁰ who connected, every first Thursday of the month, from regions across Mexico, Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay, Guatemala, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic.

In May 2024, roads, rivers, and skies became tangible when we gathered at the Climate and Gender Justice Gathering, in Villeta, Colombia [see Box 2 at the end of the chapter]. There, with our bodies, gazes, and embraces, we transformed the space not only into a gathering, but into a living methodology of collective action. It was there, and from within the organizations themselves, that the idea for this book emerged—a collectively authored publication. Drawing on our reflections on justice, we seek, in practice, to move and act differently. Thus, for the first time, FAU LAC embarked on a process of co-creation that sought to break down hierarchical

10) The organizations which participated in the process and wrote this book are Aquelarre RD, Dominican Republic; Asociación Movimiento de Mujeres de Santo Tomás (MOMUJEST), El Salvador; Colectivo UTUX KOTZ'I'J K'ICHE', Guatemala; Marcha Mundial de las Mujeres Macronorte Perú; Grupo de Estudios Ancestrales Áry Ojeasojavo, Paraguay; Colectiva Nana Echeri, Mexico; Corporación Caminos de Mujer, Colombia; Tlalij AC, Mexico; Colectivo Tz'unun Ya', Guatemala; Observatorio Minero Ambiental y Social del Norte de Ecuador (OMASNE). Together with 3 other organizations which belong to the group but unfortunately will not be participating in the book: Asoquimbo, Colombia; Asociación de Mujeres Campesinas y Populares de Caaguazú (Amucap), Paraguay; and Contiacap, Bolivia.

dynamics in order to build together—based on each person’s autonomy and through the sharing of power.



Art by Pilar Emitxin (@emitxin)¹¹

We believe it is both necessary and valuable for the experiences embodied in the *cuerpos-territorios*¹² of each organization to be recorded on paper—documented by each group in its own way, yet brought together in a publication that reflects the collective we have built. What once seemed like a distant dream has now become a reality as we are able to read this valuable material.

¹¹ The illustrations in this chapter were created by the artist Pilar Emitxin (@emitxin), and the content is the result of discussions held by the Learning Group on Climate Justice and Gender. Pilar joined us for all the virtual sessions and the in-person meeting. She has done a wonderful job of compiling and creating the visuals.

¹² *Cuerpos-territorios* (body-territories) refers to the understanding that bodies and territories are inseparable and are shaped by shared histories of violence, care, and resistance. The concept, rooted in Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and feminist movements in Latin America, affirms that protecting land and defending bodily autonomy are interconnected struggles.

The Learning Group: methodology and the construction of collective wisdom

In April 2023, the CyT team began organizing the Collective Learning Group with three objectives: to foster reflection alongside organizations based on their wisdom and actions; to identify the role and impacts of companies, governments, and other actors in the climate crisis; and to construct a critical analysis of the climate crisis from the perspectives of women, trans and non-binary people. We invited collectives that had received support from FAU LAC and were leading processes to defend their territories, who could contribute from the diversity of countries, cultures, practices, and worldviews.

Once again, feminist popular education served as the foundation for building a participatory and collective process. We mobilized bodies, *sentipensares*, and experiences, incorporating feminist, anti-patriarchal and anti-colonial dimensions into the work of popular education. To this we added the perspective of Collective Care, an ethical and political commitment of FAU LAC that made room for pauses, breathing space, laughter, tears, and a welcoming atmosphere.

Building identity, a sense of collective belonging, and relationships of trust was essential, especially in a virtual environment. To achieve this, we paid attention to every detail: we ensured adequate time to create genuine bonds and give attention to each person. Maintaining a consistent rhythm was key, with monthly meetings at fixed times and activities designed to foster familiarity and trust. Some sessions were opened and guided by the fire and energy of the ancestral healers from the Colectivo UTUX KOTZ'ÍJ K'ICHE' of Guatemala. In addition to the energetic opening, we included breaks to move and reconnect with the body. Each participant enriched the process with their wisdom, ancestral strength, and joy. While FAU LAC took on the role of facilitator, at various points we rotated the moderation.

Through the **circle of ideas**—an approach inspired by Paulo Freire’s circles of culture—we explored key concepts related to climate and gender justice. This methodology allowed us to examine realities and power imbalances, as well as to reflect on the pillars of the climate debate and initiate conversations by passing the floor around. **The graphic systematization** served as a synthesis of our own political and theoretical developments, a useful resource both for those who participated in these processes and for other external dialogues and meetings, transforming the graphic into a language for social struggles. Over the course of several months, we mapped conflicts and relevant actors, exchanged virtual gifts such as poems and images, and created spaces for emotional support when difficult situations arose in a particular region. In this way, we built ourselves as a group.

As part of the process, we conducted a comparative analysis of how multilateral organizations—such as the United Nations (UN), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Conferences of the Parties to the UN on Climate Change (COP)—guide the debate and define «climate change» and other related concepts [see Box 1 at the end of the chapter].

At the last virtual meeting, during the evaluation, the participants commented: «I hadn’t imagined how feminist popular education could be built in a virtual setting, and the FAU LAC has done it in a very beautiful way. I find it valuable how they have politicized the healing exercises, integrating them into the methodology rather than as isolated breaks, which has allowed us to internalize the process. I also appreciate delving deeper into the analysis and constructing concepts from our own perspectives. Before, we depended on what an expert said; here we create together, and that is special.»

Collective wisdom: From Change to the Climate Crisis

We feel deep sadness, helplessness, and anger when we think about the future, and how the forced acceleration of life within a capitalist, patriarchal system that exploits nature and life affects us. We are on constant alert, tired of the cycles that have repeated since colonial times. We feel suffocated, unable to breathe. At the same time, there is hope in coming together and



seeing the earth that continues to flourish. Life and community sustain us. People struggling and the experiences that weave together.

Learning Group on Climate Justice and Gender

Valuable reflections emerged from our conversations, first captured in a beautiful graphic record and then in the booklet *Climate and Gender Justice*. In that compilation, we showed only a part of the process; this book delves deeply into key elements in a vivid way, in the chapters written by each organization.¹³

Our starting point was the conviction that «we are part of and live with, not off of, nature.» We realized that «climate change is the result of ecocide, extraction, and the appropriation of the commons. It is Nature manifesting itself: it is her cry to wake us up.» Throughout the process, we moved away from the concept of «climate change» and began to speak of a **climate and civilizational crisis**. The word

¹³ All the reflections in this text originated from the participants of the Learning Group and were initially compiled in the booklet as a collective voice drawn from each group's organizational experience. See the reference at the end of the chapter for access to the booklet.

«change» erases the real impacts of extractivism and megaprojects, as if it were a natural phenomenon without causes or those responsible. In the Group, we affirm that this is **«the terminal crisis of the civilizational paradigm of Western capitalist modernity: an unsustainable model of production and consumption that threatens life.»** This crisis is already affecting health, ecosystems, biodiversity, and ancestral ways of life, putting the very existence of the planet at risk.

We also reflected on the advance of extractive megaprojects—mining, agri-industry, hydroelectric dams, hydrocarbons, agribusiness, and illegal logging—and their effects, such as the privatization of territories, racism, displacement, and the precariousness of community life. We discussed how community weaving has been fracturing and breaking down; the disruption of natural cycles and flows: deforestation, pollution, and drastic temperature changes that cause pests, droughts, and floods. We also denounced the criminalization of territorial defenders and its impacts on their physical, emotional, and mental health.

Environmental racism, a perspective extensively explored by Black and Quilombola organizations in Brazil, was central to understanding how colonial enrichment—both past and present—is based on land theft and extractivism, and occurs at the expense of the exploitation of racialized bodies, generating socio-environmental and climate imbalances that disproportionately impact these bodies. We understood how this system, rooted in historical structures of oppression, is capable of sacrificing these bodies for the wealth of a few.

Despite the pain and destruction we saw around us, a glimmer of hope began to emerge in our reflections. We felt that, «unlike change, crises can be resolved, and we had to look to the responses of local areas and communities and the possibilities for breaking free from that crisis.»

Climate Justice is built from the territories

When we talk about climate justice, we do it from the perspective of the body-earth-territory unity. From our territories, we see land as the complement of life, where we say

"I am you; you are me."

Learning Group on Climate Justice and Gender

We engaged in an in-depth discussion about what we understood by justice and territorial justice, in order to acknowledge the diverse definitions and perspectives on Climate Justice among the group members. The participants affirmed: «For there to be justice, there must be fulfillment, personal and collective development, peace, and harmony. Justice is an action and a decision to maintain the balance of the territory and restore it when it is already out of balance.» We recognized a **dual dimension of justice**: on the one hand, the legal system, and on the other, a foundation of our own values and principles that help us heal the territory.

In this regard, the Group conceived of the territory «as the space we share and inhabit in its entirety: space, spirit, time, body, the visible and invisible world. Here we live and build our lives, generation after generation. We are connected to water, air, and earth, and to other communities.» In contrast, extractivism, corporations, and the State conceive of the territory as a "void", which facilitates its transformation into *sacrifice zones*, subjected to development projects that cause environmental degradation, dispossession, and violence.

We deeply understood that socio-environmental and climate justice is built from the territories, placing life, care, nature, women, trans and non-binary people at the center. It is grounded in autonomy, prevention, and collective co-responsibility. Examples of this include the promotion of campesina family farming with guarantees and investment, the fight for clean water and healthy soil, and the weaving of methodological and wisdom-based alliances among peoples. The struggle is for territories free of mining concessions, monocultures, and imposed false climate solutions. It is about

«restoring the territories’ autonomy to build and administer justice; if we all decide, we are all jointly responsible. We will do our own justice.»

Our experiences shape the dream of permanence

Finally, each organization has contributed to this collectively authored and collaborative book its life experiences and fights, as well as its concrete ways of achieving territorial and climate justice in the present, to nurture the possibility of a **future dream of permanence**. We dream of continuing to live on and alongside the earth; of continuing to harvest healthy food; of maintaining our sacred relationship with rivers, lagoons, and seas filled with clean, life-giving water; of continuing to protect life alongside the mangroves; of continuing to learn from fire as an ally and not as an enemy. We wish to continue healing through the memory of ancestral wisdom.

We agree on the need and urgency to build a life that is increasingly happy and fulfilling; where we have time and space for spiritual connection with sacred spaces. We dream and sow our seed to continue organizing among sisters and brothers in feminist networks that produce, care for, and sustain life.

Hegemonic wisdom. For whom? The importance of naming things from the perspective of the people.

Standardized and abstract conceptualizations erase the differences in how climate change affects people and who is responsible. That is why we challenge the institutional concepts and so-called scientific truths of the UN, UNDP, and the COPs, which are produced by hegemonic science that serves patriarchal capitalism and violates the dignity of peoples. We assert that hegemonic science denies the epistemologies of peoples; we seek an integrative approach to territorial wisdom. Until 2023, the discourse on climate change did not consider the perspective of race. Neither racism, nor sexism, nor patriarchy have been mentioned in the last three COPs. It is important to name the governments and companies responsible!

The Live Hug: Climate and Gender Justice Gathering in Villeta, Colombia, 2024.

In May 2024, amidst the mountains of Cundinamarca, we gathered in person to weave together what we had begun online. We delved deeper into care, networks of resistance, and the debate on green capitalism: the commodification of nature and false climate solutions. The organizations and FAU LAC facilitated conversations, meditations, massages, parties, film screenings, and the exchange of practices and gifts; healing and energy balance flowed into our hearts. The Colectivo UTUX KOTZ'IJ K'ICHE', with everyone's support, shared its ancestral knowledge and practices. Each day we opened and closed the energies of the space, creating an environment of safety, protection, and care. The Gathering was a living methodology for strengthening bonds and reflections. Collective hope was evident in every gesture, laugh, and embrace, celebrating our shared life-struggle. From that fertile experience, this book was born: a dream woven collectively.



Art by Pilar Emitxin (@emitxin)

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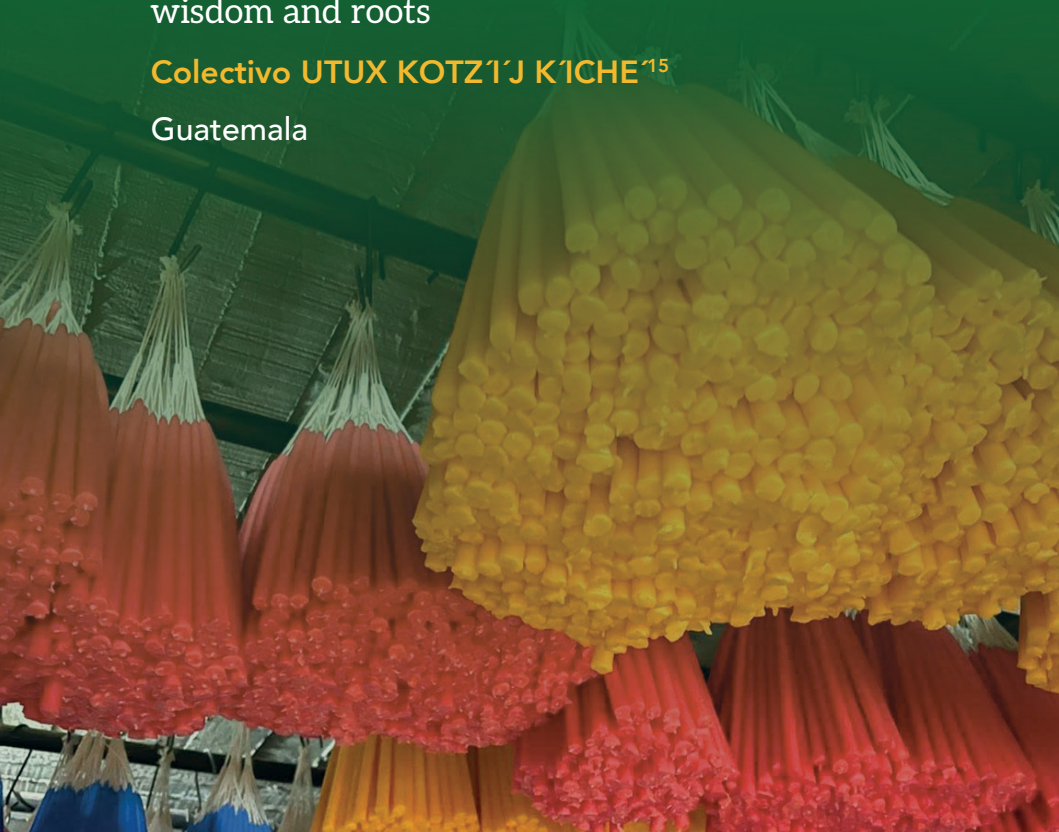
CLIMATE JUSTICE AS HEALING THE CUERPO-TERRITORIO¹⁴

2

Heal-walk and defend the territory from our
wisdom and roots

Colectivo UTUX KOTZ'ÍJ K'ICHE'¹⁵

Guatemala



We are the strength of speech; in our territory we have the value of speech. We are the teachings of the grandmothers who guided us when we were young, 25 years ago, we are the recovery of Kiche's grandparents from healing, from the defense of the territory, the rivers, the water sources.

Who are we? Writing exercise of the workshop Harvesting Words.

We write from the green heart of K'iche' territory in Guatemala, the sacred land of corn, surrounded by mountains, hills, and ravines that protect us, guide us, and speak to us through the sacred air and through movement. From a communal space that breathes history, resistance, and memory. **Here, we women weave life from the wisdom inherited from our grandmothers and grandfathers** who have passed on to the other dimension of life, and we continue to honor their journey through the Mayan worldview.

We name ourselves with tenderness; we are women members of UTUX KOTZ'I'J K'ICHE', hailing from different communities, committed to continuing to weave collective change together for the benefit of our communities and for justice for the territory; we are guardians of the territory and memory. Our bodies, the rivers, the forests, the seeds, have been scarred by multiple forms of violence: that of patriarchy, of racism, of dispossession. They have sought to silence us, but **we have learned that organizing and raising our voices are another way to resist** and to take a stand against the injustices that affect us as a network.

14) Cuerpo-Territorio is a term used in the context of Latin American social movements to explain the deep relationship between body and territory. The term suggests that the body is our primary territory and that, in turn, it is part of the territory we inhabit.

15) This chapter was possible thanks to the legacy of our grandmothers, spiritual guides and wise women who have marked the path with their words, their struggles and their collective vision. We honor our ancestors: **Grandmother Candelaria Tipaz** (R.I.P.), **Grandmother Rufina Laynes** (R.I.P.) and Josefa Álvarez (R.I.P.), women although no longer with us physically, they have left us the mandate guiding this process and whom we continue to listen to with our hearts wide open. Women who have sustained the path: **María Lucas** who gave us the Pixab (advice), wise word that guides us. **Sebastiana Par**, founder of this space, who plants hope. **Victoria Reynoso**, part of the technical team, pillar in accompaniment and daily actions.

Our bodies and territories have been ravaged by historical violence; we have witnessed arson, indiscriminate deforestation sanctioned by the state, river pollution, selective justice, and the constant threat to our ways of life. **Every attack against Mother Earth is also an attack against us, because our bodies are territory, and the territory lives within our bodies.**



Art from Pilar Emitxin (@emitxin)

But in the face of this pain, our communities have not responded with silence, but through organization, ancestral wisdom, and collective advocacy, holding **ceremonies, dialogues, spaces for healing, and processes of remembrance**. These actions are part of the path taught to us by the sacred fire, which is clothed in colors, aromas, dance, plants, and tenderness.

From our spiritual connection with sacred spaces, we dialogue with the cosmos, with the universe, and with all the beings who accompany us in this dimension and the next; each ceremony is a form of resistance, of words woven in a circle. Guided by our grandmothers and grandfathers, we have learned to listen to one another—to youth, to women, to children—through the *Pixab*¹⁶,

16) *Pixab* is a Maya concept referring to the ancestral counsel, teachings, and ethical guidance passed down by elders through dialogue and lived experience. It encompasses collective wisdom that orients relationships among people, communities, the natural world, and the spiritual realm.

that **defending the territory is also healing the wounds of the body, of history, and of the soul.**

Climate Justice from our communities

For us, **climate justice is a daily, spiritual, and deeply political experience**, because defending Mother Earth is defending life, because we are one with her: «When the earth is well, we are well, and vice versa.»

Fighting for climate justice means ensuring that future generations can grow up with the hope of planting and harvesting without fear, that our medicinal plants do not disappear, and that water continues to flow free from any megaprojects. Because **climate change is not natural**; it is the consequence of a capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal system that has commodified life, bodies, and territories.

From our communities, the defense of life is comprehensive, encompassing the earth, the air, the water, the mountains, the rivers, the people, and the animals, grounded in a cosmogonic philosophy that teaches us that we are all interconnected.

From UTUX KOTZ'ÍJ K'ICHE', these struggles are neither isolated nor insignificant; they are struggles woven from a deep love of life, from collective care, and from ancestral wisdom; we want this story to show that **strategies are not found in big manuals**, but in spirituality, in the burning fire, in connection with the earth, in the care of girls and grandmothers, in the collective word. We vividly remember a ceremony we held after an arson fire that destroyed part of our community forest.

Women, men, youth, and children from different communities gathered; we offered our words to the *nawal*¹⁷ of the day and planted new seedlings as an offering and a commitment. That day

17) Nawal is a Maya concept referring to the sacred spiritual energy associated with people, places, and each day in the Maya calendar. In ceremonial practice, the nawal of the day is understood to guide reflection, relationships, and actions, connecting participants with the natural and spiritual worlds.

was not merely a response to destruction; it was a profound act of healing. It was a moment when we felt the community embraced us, when we knew our wounded bodies could heal in step with the Earth.



Photo: UTUX KOTZ'I'J K'ICHE' archive

We need those who read this story to listen to us with open hearts, to acknowledge our ways of fighting, to respect our pace, to not impose their agendas on us, and to not turn our spirituality into a spectacle. **We need our voices to be neither romanticized nor ignored, but rather taken into account as living wisdom.** We need sincere alliances, support that does not colonize, and safe spaces where we can continue to defend life without being criminalized, persecuted and intimidated.

The Climate Justice we envision, rooted in our experiences and struggles, includes:

- Full recognition of Native Peoples as guardians of the territories.
- Spirituality as a guiding principle of life, not criminalization.
- The active participation of women as political subjects.
- The right to make decisions about our bodies and territories without facing criminalization.
- The creation of safe, healing spaces sustained by alliances between peoples and generations.

Words that sustain us: voices of our sisters



Photo: UTUX KOTZ'I'J K'ICHE' archive.

We dream of a land free from pollution, where our children can sow without fear.

We are certain that the climate justice we dream of begins in our communities, is nourished by ancestral wisdom, and is built on memory, dignity, and spirituality. We do not ask for pity; we demand respect. We do not want to be seen as victims, but as weavers of the future.



Photo: UTUX KOTZ'I'J K'ICHE' archive

Our hearts have been filled with the words of other women and shared dreams.

CLIMATE JUSTICE AS HEALING THE CUERPO-TERRITORIO¹⁸

3

Campesina¹⁹ disobedience and spiritual resistance in Climate Justice: women and gender expansive purhépechas as guardians of the territory

Colectiva Purhépecha Nana Echeri²⁰

Mexico



We write from our ancestors, from the roots that sustain us in these lands, from the p'urhépecha territory we inhabit, from the oral history of our grandmothers and grandfathers, from our dissenting bodies, from isti, from echeri, from tarhiata, from ch'piri, from our language juchri wantakua. We write from many of our stories, from experience, from tenderness, from re-appropriating the planting spaces, from collectivity because care and defense of this parakpeni we live in is necessary and important.

From where do we write?

Writing exercise from the Harvesting Words workshop.

Living through the climate crisis: agro-industrial extractivism in Purhépecha territory

The ancestral Purhépecha territory, located in western Mexico, has historically been rich in biocultural diversity and has maintained a deep spiritual connection to the land. However, for some time now it has been undergoing profound changes due to the expansion of the capitalist model of extractivism and industrial agriculture that imposed monocultures on our region. Its devastating effects are felt today in the pain of the cuerpo-territorio that we inhabit and that inhabits us, as well as in the evidence of the climate crisis in our home.

A clear example of this wave of destruction is avocado production²¹, whose agricultural frontier has expanded to meet high demand in the Global North, while in our territories this entails the disappearance of forests through clearing and burning, the excessive use of

18) Cuerpo-Territorio is a term used in the context of Latin American social movements to explain the deep relationship between body and territory. The term suggests that the body is our primary territory and that, in turn, it is part of the territory we inhabit.

19) Campesina refers to a rural woman or community whose life, work, and identity are rooted in the land. The term encompasses relationships to territory, food production, and collective ways of life.

20) Collective writing by **Italia Maya Granados, Anayuli Torres Molina, Ana Dey's Gutiérrez Pablo, Ale Apolonio Alejo, Tania Avalos Plascencia and Tamara Ortiz Ávila.**

21) According to Le Cour and Frissar (2024), the avocado industry in Michoacán is environmentally destructive, as its expansion—largely illegal and violent—has led to a crisis of deforestation and degradation of natural resources, with the complicity of the authorities.

agrochemicals that accelerate and ensure tree growth, and the use of harmful technologies such as anti-hail cannons that affect rainfall, as well as the excessive extraction of water for irrigation.

Monoculture farms first appeared in our territories in the 1970s. At first, they leased land in the larger municipalities and hired local labor. Later, starting in the 1980s, they began leasing land from Native communities; today they occupy vast tracts for greenhouses growing berries, tomatoes, large potato and broccoli crops, alongside huge packing houses in the region. What was once a cornfield is now being replaced by these products and avocado orchards.

We have tried to understand who these companies are, but they go by many names; they transform and multiply in their transnational greed. Under the guise of misleading notions of development and progress, they have been industrializing agriculture to serve the export market. Furthermore, together with the state, they promised economic prosperity and benefits that have yet to be reflected in local life, while the environmental costs, the exploitation of the land and of people's bodies, and the unequal distribution of their profits, are evident. Even so, agricultural day labor remains one of the few subsistence alternatives we have in the region.

Today we perceive drastic and accelerated climate changes; we view the dry hills and the polluted river differently. We have lost many sacred plants that provided health; the quelites and other edible plants that once filled our tables have ceased to grow. Everything is different; we are experiencing accelerated changes in the land that in turn impact the body and spirit, as our connection to the earth weakens and our loss of wisdom and way of life tied to agricultural cycles is disrupted along with thunderstorms, excessive rain, or droughts. **We are experiencing a structural, racist, and capitalist climate injustice.**

Defying monoculture: the diversity of life and the commitment to joy

Capitalism does not advance solely through its dynamics of exploitation; it requires other systems of oppression to establish itself as a mechanism of local life, reinforcing the idea that we have no choice but to surrender our labor and land to monoculture in order to survive. This internalization of exploitation within the community, the family, and the body, becomes everyday violence that affects women and gender expansive people in distinct ways. Agro-industrial extractivism is heteropatriarchal; it causes this climate-related, physical, and economic violence against us.

This industry, in addition to plundering natural resources, is engaging in a form of soul-extracting. It has merged with the death economy of drug trafficking, and in their shared drive for exploitation and greed, they have reinforced one another; the demanding workdays and the precariousness of their conditions in many ways drive people toward the use of harmful substances, in addition to causing many health conditions associated with agrochemicals: kidney damage, unknown cancers, and even impacts on women's reproductive health.



Diverse corn and flowers, agricultural diversity school.

Photo: Nana Echeri archive.

That is why reorganizing the struggle against extractivism is complicated; in our territory, it advances like a *thousand-headed hydra* that regenerates itself like a monster.²² Faced with denied spaces and deep silences, we decided to come together, speak to one another, care for one another, and reflect together on how the pain of our bodies felt, alongside the pain experienced by the earth. That is why we began this journey together to resist; we cultivated and cared for the weave that sustains us and sustains hope in the face of so much destruction.

Before coming together as a collective, as gender expansive people we have faced discrimination and exclusion in our communities, which has limited our access to the land and, with it, opportunities for participation and the care of life itself, since we rarely had free access to the land. In the face of these experiences, women and sexual dissidents organized and mobilized to demand and exercise our right to a dignified life, inhabiting the land and defending it as we would our own bodies.

We began meeting more than five years ago; the pandemic allowed us to explore beyond community boundaries, the possibility of coming together with other gender-nonconforming individuals; women who did not conform to the norm, the sociocultural obligation to marry, to become a mother without regard for our own decision; those of us seeking access to the land and the care of the commons; those of us who rebelled against the imposition of roles and tasks assigned to women. And many of us who, **from a position of dissent, inhabit the territory with our bodies and disruptive force, affirming ourselves as non-binary and gender expansive people within Native communities.** What is recognized outside as the LGBTIQ+ community and what we refer to as «those of us who are like this, those who are like us.»²³

22) In its “Little School,” the EZLN (2015) taught that the capitalist system is a hydra, a mythological creature with multiple heads; if you cut off one, two more grow back, regenerating and adapting.

23) We could also revisit the concept of “plural bodies or existences” advocated by defenders and healers such as Chahim A’jam Vásquez Lea from Guatemala. Other references to the lived experiences of Native LGBTIQ+ people in rural areas can be found in the powerful Maricas Bolivia project. See also (La Vía Campesina, 2021) and (Aguilar, 2025).

As we recognized how far monoculture had advanced in our communities, we realized that this capitalist extractivism rejects all diversity: it renders us invisible, harms us, and exploits our disobedience. So we began our assemblies, organized from our own perspective and sensibility, in defense of the cuerpo-territorio and the territorio-tierra.²⁴ Together, we forged our own path toward social and climate justice. Through our ceremonies, rituals, and shared energies, we gathered the strength to name what was already in our hearts—and what became the heart of our resistance: joy and diversity.

Through a process of spiritual reflection, prayers, offerings, petitions, and certain ancestral ways of calling upon the water, of asking the Earth for forgiveness, and of initiating agricultural practices rooted in care, we were also able to recognize the diverse energy of the gender-bending rebellion of women and the sexual defiance of gender expansive identities.



Kurhikuaeri K'uinchentskua. Igniting fire ceremony, initial and thunderstorm cycle. Photo: Nana Echeri archive.

24) Territorio-tierra (territory-land) refers to the understanding that land and territory are inseparable. It recognizes land not only as a physical space but also as the foundation of collective identity, memory, culture, and relationships that sustain life.

Our path was not to confront the monster by seeking to cut off its head. Unlike other movements, we did not engage in public protests or visible resistance using political strategies such as marches, blockades, and pressure campaigns—resistance forms that we respect, honor, and stand with throughout Abya Yala—struggles that we know have cost many lives, for which we are grateful and whose strength we invoke. For us, it was not possible; our own people would not have followed this path. The way in which systems of oppression have combined to form that terrible monster made it a doomed task from the start.

That is why we chose a path to build blind spots where the capitalist hydra could not see us: small cracks, tiny places on individually inherited lands that are beginning to be collectivized through care. Places discarded as “unproductive” by the system. There we go slowly and with great care, very calmly so as not to be seen, doing work to heal the earth, restore life to it, open small pockets of diversity and disobedience to monoculture, from the tenderness and joy of reconnecting with the earth, of dancing upon it with its spiritual guardians and with our ancestors, while we scatter the seeds.

Juchar Tsipekua:²⁵ An agro-diverse school for cuerpo-territorial healing

Recognizing ourselves as women and gender expansive people fighting for Mother Earth, and identifying together our journey and experiences within the plural *cuerpos-territorios* we inhabit, allowed us to once again feel and dream of a collective path. We come from many communities; as women and gender expansive people, we did not have access to the land. We had been treated in ways that did not allow us to work in agriculture in our own ways. Much of the fieldwork is marked by imposed gender roles that do not suit us. From this arose our decision to re-learn and re-connect with the land through disobedience and joy.

25) “Our Joy” in the Purhépecha language.



Ditches to avoid loss of soil and to distribute humidity. Agro-Diverse Campesina School. Collective land. Photo: Nana Echeri archive.

And so, we opened our agro-diverse campesina school for P'urhépecha Native women and gender expansive people. It is not a school like the ones we know, which are based on intellectual wisdom, or where we are expected to learn only from books: this one is built by walking, with the heart, with the hands, and with all the diverse bodies that work to remake ourselves campesinas and guardians of the territory. It is a space where we share what we learned from our grandparents about planting; we recovered the seeds and farming techniques, and we adapted them without a gendered division of labor. Here, everyone can do everything, using our strength, with care and joy, because it has become a safe place.

We also seek alternatives to avoid exploitation, to avoid demanding too much from the land, but rather to listen to it and feel its weariness, and to gently restore it, heal it and, in turn, heal ourselves. In the action workshops where we plant together, we recognize one another and share how we feel day by day. The earth, like a loving universe, welcomes us just as we are, and we offer our work to it as an offering to ease the pain together. This has allowed us to invite more women, girls, adolescents, and other gender expansive people, and in this way we are building a different way to connect with the earth.

Restoring the earth means lovingly giving back what was taken from it. We, who have come together to figure out how to stop living in violence, believe and feel that the earth has also been systematically violated, just as we have been. And if we take care of ourselves, we also care for the earth; we defend it from monoculture and heal it with compost, ditches, and a diversity of plants and trees that are home to birds, insects, butterflies, bees, and to certain guardian beings who protect us.



A work day in the LGBTQ+ diverse vegetable garden. Collective land 2025. Photo: Nana Echeri archive.

We have experimented with alternatives for soil restoration, rethinking what is commonly recognized as traditional agriculture and its patriarchal legacy; we prefer to protect the soil and the life within it. We diversify our crops, planting a little of everything; we experiment with healing plants, natural fertilizers, ditches and flowers, living microorganisms, fungi, and pollinators—with everything that embodies this life full of colors and diversity, just as we are. We are asking questions, relearning, and reading the spiritual and natural signs of Mother Earth.

We heed our dreams and other forms of wisdom connected to nature

to guide us through the agricultural cycle. Things are changing, on the one hand, due to the severe impacts of the climate crisis and the effects of monoculture farming on our land. But they are also changing because we dare to find other ways to cultivate ourselves, to connect with and care for plants and animals, with beings and spirits, with this possibility of healing ourselves alongside Mother Earth and that is the heart of the agro-diverse school, whose primary task today is to harvest hope. We, the women and organized dissidents, are the seed, the resistance, the belief that diversity—that which is not the same and uniform—is life, spirit, and joy. In the face of the injustice caused by agricultural extractivism, we believe that climate justice means living in coexistence and connection with the earth and its diversity, and therefore it also requires justice for plurality and gender-based disobedience. That is why we are fighting with all our joy and strength to reclaim our place as guardians of this plane and these paths of the universe, where we contribute our dreams for a better world for our ancestors, for children, for the living beings, and for the spiritual beings that populate this cosmos.

We are your children, asking your permission to plow gently, to return the water to you, to tend the little plant, and to harvest. From our diverse perspectives and hearts, we defend and care for, **because there is no defense of the territory nor climate justice without deep healing**; that is why we sow, walk, dance, and sing to grow once more alongside the cornfield, to find ourselves again in other times, and to remember the seed that we were and that will bloom.



Sowing native and diverse corn, beans and peas. Collective land 2024.

Photo: Nana Echeri archives

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PUTTING DOWN ROOTS IN THE CITY

4

Sustaining roots: food sovereignty and collective agroecology among women of Santo Tomás

Asociación Movimiento de Mujeres de Santo Tomás (MOMUJEST)²⁶

El Salvador



We write with the hands that know the earth, with the memory of our grandmothers whispering among the rue leaves. We write because every seed we plant carries the echo of the voices that came before us and the promise of those yet to come. In every garden that blooms, in every drop of water we defend, we are weaving an invisible thread between the women who were, the women we are, and the women who will be.

This story is not just ours; it belongs to all those who rise each day to defend what they love. It is for the *cipotillas*²⁷ who play today among the cornstalks and who tomorrow will be the guardians of these territories. It is for the sisters who doubt whether it is worth continuing to fight.



A march in commemoration of women maquila²⁸ workers' day.

Photo: MOMUJEST archives

We write from this small country, El Salvador, which fits in an embrace but has a big heart. We write from the villages where every woman knows the secret to making the earth bring forth life, where

26) Asociación de Mujeres de Santo Tomás, written by **Joshi Leban**, with contributions of **Adela Bonilla**, **Ana López**, **Carmen Mira**, **Deysi Pérez**, **Ivania Sánchez**, **Margarita Peñate**, **Maritza Ascencio**, **Sandra Quintanilla**, **Sonia Sánchez**, **Vilma Valladares**, **Xenia Noyola**.

27) A Salvadoran term of affection for girls, conveying care, familiarity, and a sense of belonging within the community.

28) Maquila refers to export-oriented manufacturing operations where goods are assembled for international markets. Across Central America, women maquila workers have organized to demand fair wages, safe working conditions, and respect for their labor rights.

every grandmother keeps recipes for resilience that are passed down by word of mouth.

Here, where coffee grows amid the mist and the rain falls with fury, we have learned that resistance is not just about saying no. It is about planting when they want to destroy, organizing when they want to divide us, and continuing to sing when they want to silence us. For us, **food sovereignty is the seed we plant to harvest climate justice**: when we grow our own food, we don't depend on systems that harm the earth; when we save native seeds, we protect varieties that already know how to withstand droughts and heavy rains; when we farm without chemicals, we care for the soil so it can continue to give life.

For us, **caring for the territory is caring for ourselves**. What happens to the earth happens to us. When we defend water, it is because we are water too. When we organize among women, it is because we know that together we are stronger. And when we speak about what is happening with the climate, we do so from the perspective of what we experience in our bodies, in our homes, in our crops.

The roots of our history: the land that embraces us

Santo Tomás is a territory located in the southern part of San Salvador, a mountainous area rich in biodiversity and with abundant water basins. Its forests, rivers, and fertile soil have sustained generations. Here, people grow vegetables, fruits, beans, corn, greens, mamey, breadfruit, and ancient trees such as the pito, izote flower, and ayote. It is one of the last green lungs of the San Salvador metropolitan area and supplies water to several of its municipalities.

In this territory, community organizing has also flourished. The Santo Tomás Women's Movement (MOMUJEST) emerged from the leadership of a group of women who, faced with the urgent need to be heard, decided to speak out and bring our needs to the decision-making spaces of the municipality and public institutions. It wasn't easy. But since then, those voices have not stopped resonating.



Seed bartering to celebrate the Day of Earth.
Photo MOMUJEST archives

If we were a plant, we would be the rue: a remedy that heals, cleanses, and protects our space, our energies, our bodies, and our spirits. It is strong, yet delicate. It is wise. That is how we feel. Right now, what we need most is to heal. And to do it together. Each of us is like a different plant: a cactus that blooms right where it stands, bamboo with deep, flexible roots, a pito tree where thoughts gather, a palm tree that won't be blown over by the wind, a corn stalk—united like kernels on an ear; a pacaya plant that sprouts where no one expects it.

When the wounds reopened: climate and territorial threats

This land has not only been a place of cultivation and life, but also a setting for struggles against climate injustices. The people of Santo Tomás have historically defended these natural resources against multiple threats that are intensifying with climate change. Given its ecological richness, the municipality has been classified by geologists as a high-risk environmental zone; deforestation, urban development projects, and the effects of climate change have increased that risk.

In the past, the construction of the airport and the highway to Comalapa split the municipality in two. Ancient trees were cut down, hectares of soil were removed, and the balance of the ecosystem was disrupted. That intervention further increased the territory's

vulnerability to extreme weather events. Today, the expansion plan stretching from San Jacinto to Cuyultitán cuts through areas prone to landslides, mudslides, and flooding. **Every step of this so-called progress puts at risk what sustains us and makes us more vulnerable to climate crises.**



Commemoration of the Rural Woman's Day.
Photo MOMUJEST archives

The Perfect Storm, or When Everything Is Shaken

Up In 2015, the fight to defend our land led us to a profound reflection. They wanted to build 400 houses on forty blocks of forest with strong water recharge. We organized to stop it together with our sisters from Ameyalli, in an intergenerational experience that became a moment we cherish: when we decided to take direct action against the economic and political powers that were threatening the aquifers.

That was when we began to ask ourselves: What happens to women when water is scarce? How does deforestation affect us? We realized that we are the ones who suffer most when the territory is damaged: we are the ones who walk farther for water, the ones who watch the crops that feed our families wither away, the ones who feel the consequences of destruction in our bodies.

This understanding prepared us for what came next. The pandemic confirmed everything we had learned: it became another pivotal moment that revealed three realities with greater clarity. First, food insecurity. Second, the burden of care. And third, the urgent need to revive our ancestral practices—those that allow us to live communally and that align today with agroecological practices. The pandemic made evident what we already knew: that the dominant economic system makes us vulnerable, especially women. Planting and growing our own food became an urgent necessity, but it was also an opportunity: we reclaimed ancestral wisdom, that wisdom of our grandmothers that had been silenced. Plants became our allies once again, not only to feed us, but also to heal us.

The moment of fire: from reflection to practice

In 2016, we launched an analog forestry initiative (forest care), revived a nursery at the space we share at the Center for Economic and Social Development (CDES), and organized training focused on planting agroecological gardens in the homes of those of us who are part of MOMUJEST. This process wasn't limited to technical aspects: it was accompanied by reflections on feminist economics, and that's where we encountered climate justice.

We realized that the activities we'd been carrying out since 2015—defending water, protecting forests, questioning how threats to our territory affect us as women—were already climate justice in practice. For us, **climate justice** is something we experience every day, **something concrete that we do with our hands: planting in our gardens, defending water, saving the seeds our grandmothers left us.** When we care for the land through agroecology, we are responding as women to what is happening with the climate.

We recognize that women are the most affected by climate change, but we are also the ones who best understand the solutions. Our ancestral wisdom of soil management, seeds, and medicinal plants are technologies that have worked for generations. We also understand that we need to create economic alternatives that do not depend on the systems causing the crisis. Every garden we



Commemoration of the Rural Woman's Day.
Photo MOMUJEST archives

plant, every seed we save, every medicinal plant we cultivate is an act of resistance and a step toward building alternatives that truly care for life. Our agroecological practices have thus become concrete tools: fertilization and crop care, water harvesting systems, soil conservation in the face of monoculture — all of it grounded in recognizing the value of the care work we women do.

The fruits of resistance: what we have sown

We defend the environment through concrete action, directly confronting the powers and systems that violate the territory. We know that, all too often, those who claim to uphold justice are also the ones who violate rights. Our experience stems from a profound clarity: **we people are part of the Web of Life**, and that understanding allows us to defend and care for it. We know our territory—its nine cantones²⁹—inside and out and in all its diversity; and because we know it, we also know how to protect it. That is why our organization has become a leader in the defense and protection of the commons.

29) Rural districts.

The transformations we have reaped

We have learned that we cannot do this alone. That our struggles span generations and require the support of our fellow women. Identifying strategic alliances and building support networks is essential. We have come to understand that we can resist from a position of comprehensive feminist protection, without putting ourselves or our sisters at risk.

The **intergenerational approach** has been key: grandmothers teach us about seeds, we implement agroecological techniques, and young women contribute new wisdom about caring for the cuerpo-territorio. This **transfer of wisdom** is, in fact, in itself a **practice of climate justice**. It is precisely this diversity within our movement that strengthens us: women of different ages, experiences, and wisdom, all contributing from their unique perspectives to the construction of alternatives. This diverse richness allows us to develop more comprehensive responses.

Caring has become the most important thing for us. Caring for the land, caring for the water, caring for the plants, caring for our sisters—it's all part of the same thing. **When we care for the land, we care for ourselves, because we are part of it.** This healing process we've gone through, both individually and as a group, has made us stronger in the face of crises and wiser in how we respond.

Along this journey, we have learned to take ownership of and acknowledge the work we have built. It has been a healing process, both personal and collective. Today, we are more self-aware, more empowered women, capable of channeling our emotions and transforming pain into strength. We have developed resilience as well as the clarity to recognize risks. We no longer fight through sacrifice or self-exposure, but with awareness and strategy.

These internal achievements have materialized in concrete spaces: we reclaimed the CDES and ensured that the lease fulfilled its

purpose: to be a shelter, a support, a shared home. Despite being located in an urban area, the CDES is alive, filled with greenery, and brings together a diversity of people and activities. Similarly, we also succeeded in having a space in the municipality which provides psychological and emotional care to women survivors of violence, named after Betty, a defender of women's and girls' rights who was murdered and who is today a symbol of our struggle.

The tomorrow we are weaving: our dreams on earth

We dream of a future where there are no permits authorizing the destruction of our territory. We long to see the trees and rivers reborn, and a conscious community capable of defending what remains and joining in the reconstruction. Like the jaraguá tree, we want to sprout again and again. May our sisters be able to sustain themselves with basic foods by planting, cultivating, and harvesting with justice, care, and a connection to earth.

We believe that change is still possible, **but to achieve it, we need people to know their territory**, take ownership of it, and understand what Santo Tomás is and what it holds. We want to strengthen our cultural attachment, our roots, and our pride in who we are and what we have done, as diverse women who find or create spaces where we can be included.



Inaugural Altar of the Raíces Festival at the Food Sovereignty Roundtable,
2023 Photo MOMUJEST archives

We hope that those who read this story will also recognize our history and our transformations, both individual and collective, and that they will see us as their ancestors, just as MOMUJEST recognizes theirs. Because we know that we have already paved the way: toward equality, toward cultural change, and toward the transformation of laws in favor of women and the land we inhabit.

Climate justice also beats within this dream: the kind that reminds us that **the crisis does not affect everyone equally** and that those of us who are hardest hit are often the least heard. That is why our struggle is not only with the territory, but also with ourselves, seeking equity, dignity, and inclusion in every step we take alongside the land.

To those who are in this struggle for climate and socio-environmental justice, we say: **do not give up**. Keep going with courage and strength. Do not take a step back, not even to gather momentum. Because defending natural resources is defending life.

We know that every mountain has its own name and every river has a story to tell. That is why we stand firm and will continue to defend life against those who insist on telling us that our hills are worth more dead than alive.

Let's keep moving forward, sisters. With our feet on the ground and our eyes on the horizon. Because this fight is our legacy and our gift to the future.

GUARDIANS WHO CONVERSE WITH WATER

5

I am because we are
in this *juntanza*³⁰
we are no longer victims
we are the guardians of the mangrove territory³¹.

Corporación Caminos de Mujer (CCM)³²

Colombia





In search of calm
showing reality
and on any good day
we began organizing.

We women, we all fit here
youngsters, black and elders
Afro-Colombian, Palenqueras
and Raizales and others
who endure our same sorrows.

We want to be heard
and our words be respected
healing and resisting
are our way of persisting.

30) Juntanza is a term rooted in the experiences of Black communities in Colombia that expresses gathering, dialogue, and collective coordination. Today, it is widely used across feminist and social movements to describe coming together as a practice of care, solidarity, shared learning, and collective action.

31) The original text is a poetic form composed of stanzas of four or fewer lines, mostly octosyllabic, with various rhyme schemes, although rhyming in the even-numbered lines is the norm. It stems from the oral tradition of Afro-Colombian communities.

32) Created by Caminos de Mujer. Written by **María Dominga Landázuri, Leído Yaela Valencia, Aura Dalia Castillo, Carmen Gloria Pereira and Angélica Perlaza.** Edited and directed by **Luz Mary Rosero Garcés**, with the support of and guidance from **Martha Rosales.** The photos were contributed by **Aura Grueso.** Rhyme adapted by **Luz Adela Biojo Estacio.**

We are 150 now
but 40 of those are young
we respect our rights
and that's what we work for.

We are already empowered
with a very clear vision
to build a dignified life
will always be our chant.

We defend our body
united in the territory
we hold hands
and thus, together we heal.

From the Pearl of the Pacific

From the Pearl of the Pacific
we raise our voices
and in 2007
this togetherness was born.

It's called Caminos de Mujer
and it's our corporation
we seek support
because we're going for growth.

We are all in Tumaco
we are at the river, the ocean and the jungle
all the way to the mangroves
and from there we raise our voices.

Beautiful Pearl of the Pacific
with unrivaled beauty
living under your wing
is truly amazing.

How beautiful our town is!
How lovely the region is!
Even though the armed conflict
has planted violence and fear.

It's a port on the Pacific
with a humid tropical climate
very rich in rivers
rivers like Mira and Chagüi,
but there are many others,
that we don't mention here.

Our town is on the Pacific
it's rich and biodiverse
in its sea and in its soil it harbors
countless species of the universe.

Fishing and agriculture
ensure our provision
plantain, cacao and coconut
are products from the region.

We protect our territory
like our maternal home
we have everything here
beaches, rivers, mangroves, jungle and waterfalls.



Photo: Corporación Caminos de Mujer archives



Photo: Corporación Caminos de Mujer archives

From COVID-19 to the mangroves: Climate Justice from us

The COVID-19 pandemic
forced people into isolation
it didn't respect social classes
and it did collapse the world.

Those were tough times;
sometimes we would like to forget
but it also brought good things
worthwhile remembering.

When the health system
was in jeopardy
we came onto the scene
with wisdom and tradition.

With ancestral wisdom
we faced this disease
and with medicinal plants
and their magnificent properties.

Nature recovers
and teaches us a great lesson

let's preserve our rooftops
and also, our home vegetable gardens.

Our togetherness frames
resistance, justice, care and adventures
we defend life
with dedication and temperance.

With strength and determination
inherited from our elders
we faced the COVID Pandemic
my ladies.

That the town would disappear
and Nariño would be exterminated because of us
we were irrational,
and foolish and reckless
That's what people said!

Many bodies we buried
our rituals we didn't forget
with plants we healed
and as a community here we are!

Today we tell you
let's take care of Nature
and may this be at all times
since Climate Justice
is also justice for our body.

Climate crisis
extends inequalities
children and elders are the most affected
as well as those
who are ill.

Every day we are more convinced
that climate justice we deserve

a contingency plan
we lack in this town.

Since the rain is intense
our living conditions are worsened by erosion
this forest and mangrove logging
doesn't improve without raising awareness.

Our actions: defense, healing and memory

Territory, family and environment
people must pay attention,
this organizational strategy
is essential for life.

The mangrove ecosystem
we must protect
talking with people
on appropriate practices and care.

Love for the territory seduces us
and as protection strategies
we give talks
offer instruction and raise awareness.



Photo: Corporación Caminos de Mujer archives

Reforestation of mangroves
is the ancestor's call
with sustainable practices
we will have habitable territories.

Here we do not rest
we mindfully take care
of the natural resources,
and responsible use, we do encourage.

We have mobilized
here and elsewhere
demanding our biodiversity
public policy on care.

With unity and acting together
we have cleaning up days
in neighborhoods, sea, beaches and rivers
we raise awareness in the hamlets.

In work sessions we participate
always with logical arguments
to protect the mangrove territory
from pollution with toxic components.

We were born from brave women
on rugs or mats
the ancestral wisdom
shall be our head board.

Connecting with the grandmothers
we can heal
interweaving the roots
and then, shall we be happy.

Our physical and mental health
is fortified by identity
the cultural values
and traditional practices are all there.

Using wisdom
in the present memory of the territory
the future looks bright
and is promising.

Safeguarding our history turned into nature

As women from Tumaco
we grew up under ancestral wisdom
rivers, beaches and mangroves
have witnessed what we have lived.

With traditional wisdom
as cohesive forces
anchored in our entrails
as conducting levers.

Knowing history
without fear of being mistaken
myths and legends
are legendary components.

Our essence and memory
mark the difference
with medicinal plants
we contribute to science.

Grills, parapets and rooftops
are icons for us
a natural space
we've built from cultural heritage.

Wisdom of the plants
is in our blood
and with this we make ends meet
and many illnesses we cure.

The juntanza that holds us

We are *cujapa*³³ women
some born on the shores
others in low tide
and others in the mangrove.

Harmony with nature
with ancestry in our elders
there they sought out their *palanzán*³⁴
working in no hurry.

Here we have healers
midwives or alleviators
preventive medicine
is also in the home's vegetable garden.

Children, youngsters, women and the elderly
with our hands we cure
of evil eye, dread, bug and *malaire*³⁵
in a blink of an eye, we heal.

Thanks to ancestral wisdom
of traditional medicine
for diarrhea, parasites and *desocadura*³⁶
we also have a cure.

In the same direction we row
history made nature we care for

33) Cujapa is a popular term from Colombia's Pacific coast referring to a woman recognized for her expertise, wisdom, or skill in a particular craft or practice, especially a traditional midwife, matriarch, or healer.

34) Palanzán refers to a traditional preparation of green plantain that is boiled, left overnight, and eaten the next day after being roasted or fried.

35) Within traditional healing practices in Colombia and across the Andean region, *malaire*, *mal aire*, or *mal viento* refers to an illness that arises when a person comes into contact with harmful spiritual or environmental forces that disturb the body's balance. According to these traditions, spirits are forms of energy carried by the air or wind that can attach themselves to a person's body anywhere, especially in the hours before dawn.

36) Desocadura refers to the breaking, dislocation, or movement of a bone out of its normal position.

and the illnesses we tackle
and our realities we transform.

In contact with what is natural
be it the beach, the forest or the mangrove
it refreshes our mind
and offers spiritual cleansing.

Global challenges
we prepare to address
we build partnerships
either locally or nationally.

We say it ourselves,
but you also say it
I am because we are
based on Ubuntu philosophy.

To achieve climate justice
we all need to know
it's technical, it's scientific
it's social, spiritual and cultural.

As if the bombo drum plays
or the marimba plays
we say all of us together
and in unison.

Today we are strengthened
as an organization we mobilize
and cultural activities
we also have.

We are resilient
in adversity
we don't buy into war
it's masquerades, we don't tolerate.

Cultural convenings
make us interact
we acquire wisdom
building sisterhood ties.

We share our story
raise our voice
recognize differences
there's collective transforming power.

Our togetherness transcended
the Tonga of women was born
as an organization it has consolidated
and in the Southern Pacific it settled.

It's a free space
full of sorority
we laugh, weep, take care
and our experience we tell.

The pain is left behind
we are together we shall plan
a path of life
built from the sisterhood.

The girl's hands
we always hold
with activities and workshops
we educate them.

We are consolidated
truly empowered
amidst the conflict
our voice we have raised.

Political disputes
make us reflect
we don't lose our way
we don't let them manipulate us.

Presence of women building life
in the territory we are essential
we recognize our rights
we don't permit our annihilation.

We shattered paradigms
threw the keys away
opened doors
and took to the streets.



Photo: Corporación Caminos de Mujer archive.

Intergenerational learnings

We learn permanently
sustained on reality
with historic cumulative culture
residing in the community.

Oral tradition
transmitting wisdom
here we learn from the elders
and boldness from the young ones.

The elders teach us
their traditional practices
to properly cultivate the land
and use medicinal plants.

The young are also
full of wisdom
they motivate us to
pursue other forms of recognition.

Respect and solidarity
our music of the souls
collective learning
contributes a distinctive value.

From resistance we were born
love for life brought us together
the autonomy as a black woman
built our identity.

We are art, we are culture
we are past, we are present
we are women, we are strong
we are history, we are memory.

From the territory
together we say
we don't just resist
we also build.

We are really strong
we lead the way
we are brave
and we reconsider fate.

Let's move forward!

The weight of adversity
is sometimes overwhelming
but we don't let it hold us down
we get up again! We move forward!

Love and commitment
sustain us for the territory
the quest for a sustainable future
keeps us busy for our people.

Despite our difficulties
every shared effort counts
there's no room for reproaches
and this is how our sisterhood is nourished.

Let's move forward!
with vigor and determination
we have started our journey
down this long lane.

It's tough to begin
we will make it
now we are here
to continue and resist.

May our experiences
be read and heard
may they cross seas, jungles and trails
may they reach the people
may the women know
that together we resist.

We want to serve as a reference
for future and present organizations
giving visibility to our territory
and the beauty of our people.

Let's fight for life with love
for land and justice
for forgiveness and reconciliation
with strength and determination.

May the government hear us
being empathic with our beings
that the social organizations read us
and as allies they see us.

Respect our ancestral wisdom
understanding diversity
learn about our culture
and the principles of identity.

Our cultural expressions
are ancestral legacies
the sound of our *cununo*³⁷, the songs of the marimba
the tireless roar of the *bombo*³⁸.



Photo: Corporación Caminos de Mujer archives

They cry recognition
of their cultural wealth
inheritance of the ancestors
territorial resistance.

Our future is collective
happy, full of drums
all of us raising our voices
here, there's no room for silence.

A future where the history
of black women is told correctly
their experience valued
and seen as a transforming force.

Our way of seeing life
is mobilized by tradition

37) A hand-played drum of African origin that is central to the traditional music of Colombia's Pacific coast.

38) A large bass drum used in the traditional music of Colombia's Pacific coast to provide its rhythmic foundation.

may our struggles
and determination be recognized.

Read our experiences
not only as a testament to resistance
but as a proposal for
a dignified life and community.

May they cross rivers, seas, jungles and trails
and arrive at the towns
may many women know
that all together we resist.

We dream of
a territory in peace
where life is at the center
as well as respect for others.

Where girls and women
live without fear,
walk freely
and feel safe.

Development
shaped by communities
that doesn't destroy nature
but does empower societies.

We want relevant schools
teaching from our roots
educating people
so they are happy in the territory.

We don't stop our dreams
we are looking for a dignified life
decent health care centers
where people receive attention and are cared for.

Let's keep on going!

GUARDIANS WHO CONVERSE WITH WATER

6

Defending *Qatee'Ya'* our Mother Lake, looking at
Climate Justice from the material and spiritual
care of Atitlán Lake

Colectivo Comunidad Tz'unun Ya'³⁹

Guatemala



We write from the Ruk' uux from the soul, the spirit, the sacred, from the political to reveal the power relations, the words that describe what we do to contribute to care, defense and revitalization of our mother Lake Qatee'Ya'. Where do we write from?

An exercise from the writing workshop Harvesting Words

San Pedro La Laguna, located on the shores of Lake Atitlán, the ancestral territory of the Tz'utujil Maya people, has a rich history and a deep connection to its natural surroundings. It has long been part of the ancestral territory of the Tz'utujil Maya people, as confirmed by archaeological evidence showing the presence of communities between 600 B.C. and 250 A.D. San Pedro La Laguna has belonged to the Tz'utujil Maya people; following the Spanish conquest, it was reduced to an Indian village founded between 1542 and 1550 by Fray Pedro de Betanzos. It was initially known as San Pedro and later as San Pedro de Tzununá; in 16th-century Native manuscripts, it is mentioned under the place name Tz'ununya' or Canona, which means "sparrow" or "hummingbird of the Lake." By 1643, Regent Antonio Lara, who advocated for the translation of names into Spanish, shortened its name to San Pedro La Laguna.

Blame-shifting narratives

In October 2009, the largest cyanobacterial bloom occurred in Lake Atitlán due to the accumulation of a significant amount of pollutants: solid waste, wastewater, and agricultural and natural runoff. This led to the development of plans to build a mega-collector modeled after a similar project in Lake Tahoe, located in the United States, according to the Friends of Lake Atitlán Business Association (AALA by its Spanish acronym). The goal was to collect and transport wastewater from all the towns around the Atitlán basin via an extremely expensive sewer system, with funding coming primarily from the treatment and sale of this water to the agro-industry in the southern part of the country.

Business groups began to construct narratives around this project,

39) Written by **Nancy Graciela González Cortez**, coordinator of the Colectivo Tz'unun Ya'.

arguing that only they possessed the scientific and technological capacity to manage the mega-collection system project. They claimed that we, the Native Peoples, lacked the science and technology necessary to address environmental problems and that we—the Native Peoples living around the lake—were the ones causing the pollution. Similarly, they claimed that “overpopulation” was the cause of the problem and that the mega-collector was the only solution. However, the true objective has been to privatize water and sanitation services and to extract water from the lake for private use in the production of byproducts such as the operation of three hydroelectric plants, methane gas, and the sale of nutrient-rich treated water (fertilizer) to the agro-industry in the Bocacosta and southern coast regions of the country (monoculture-agro-industry). The private sector would be the sole beneficiary of these projects, while the Native communities that have historically lived around the lake would bear the costs through a Public-Private Partnership (PPP).

Our organized response

This opposition to the mega-collection system challenged us to organize in defense of our land, our water, and life itself, and that is how we began to seek solutions to the multifaceted problem of Lake contamination. This is how the Tz’unun Ya’ Collective came into being; since 2016, we have been developing sanitation proposals based on the principles of human rights, the rights of Native Peoples, and the rights of nature. We have contributed to municipal public policies such as Municipal Agreement 111-2016, which bans the use of plastic bags, straws, and styrofoam, helping with its implementation and aiming to strengthen the legal framework and regulate single-use PET plastic. We are also drafting a proposal for municipal regulations to reclaim the beach area, declare it for public use, and safeguard sandbars due to their biological and ecosystemic importance for Lake Atitlán.

One of our biggest fights is dealing with solid waste. Despite our municipality’s efforts to implement local regulations, microplastic particles are currently found in the waters of Lake Atitlán; it is



Self-care workshop, August 2024. Colectivo Tz'unun Ya' archives

precisely this consumption-based lifestyle that has thrown our environment out of balance. Furthermore, the lake's pollution is exacerbated by the climate crisis as water temperatures rise, which reduces dissolved oxygen and promotes cyanobacterial blooms, alters water cycles, and intensifies droughts and floods that carry more sediment and pathogens, as was the case with the recent storms Stan in 2005 and Agatha in 2010 in the country.

Water as the unifying and organizing force of our fight

The symbolic representation of water has played an essential role in our spirituality; we have established an ontology of nature that contrasts with the Western view, which often separates culture and Nature. It was water that brought the community together; we began visiting schools, alerting families to the true intentions behind the mega-collector. A community assembly was held, and we collected over 5,000 signatures from the community rejecting the plans to privatize water and sanitation services. We engaged in dialogue with the Pastors' Association, which culminated in a joint worship service attended by eight churches and over a thousand members. We received the backing and political support of Catholic Action for the filing of a constitutional appeal for protection against

the President, Vice President of the Republic, the Authority for the Sustainable Management of the Lake Atitlán, and the Friends of the Lake Association, for having violated the right to consultation of the Native Peoples who have historically inhabited the Lake Atitlán. Water enabled us to bring together different perspectives and languages around common causes related to water.

Environmental racism and territorial pressure

In our struggle to defend our territory, we realized that the megacollection system proposal was rooted in power dynamics and inequality, as it silenced the voices of local communities while also shielding those primarily responsible for the pollution. Throughout our struggle, it has become clear that the pollution of the lake is not an isolated environmental problem, but rather a **structural manifestation of the unequal distribution of environmental risks** established by an exclusionary system—by **environmental racism**. We have shown that it is Native women who are particularly affected by these inequalities, and that our voices and wisdom are often excluded from decision-making.

We succeeded in dismantling the official narrative on pollution—that the communities, community activities, and the women who wash in the lake were the main culprits of the pollution. By highlighting women's contributions to caring for the lake—including the monthly cleanup days held for its conservation and revitalization—and through these small actions, **we demand environmental and climate justice that respects our autonomy and self-determination over our territories**, and that values our cultural proposals for addressing the lake's pollution and the climate crisis.

We are fighting for the government to promote public policies aimed at reducing pollution, primarily from single-use plastics, but we also demand that large corporations take responsibility for the pollution in our territories, even though it is often frustrating not to be able to solve a problem that we did not create. These demands aim to reshape public policies to include diverse perspectives and local wisdom, recognizing the deep connections between socio-

environmental, gender, and colonial inequalities, as **it is we, the Native Peoples, who bear the brunt of pollution and the climate crisis.**

It has been crucial to challenge proposals devised from positions of power, such as the mega-collection system that threatened community water management systems, and the narratives constructed by Western hegemony regarding the transition of polluting industries, as these will only serve to replicate the extraction models that have generated inequality. Once again, it will be us, the peoples, women, and Nature, who will pay the costs of this transition, and we will end up perpetuating models of inequality.

From protest to the physical and spiritual care of the lake

In 2022, we staged a performance titled *The Garbage Procession*, which sought to recreate the pilgrimage carried out by the brotherhoods on Holy Wednesday known as *The Bringing of the Fruit to the South Coast*. The various brotherhoods of men and women carry the fruit in a long procession through the town's streets; for many scholars, this practice has its roots in the *Wayeb* celebration of the Mayan calendar.



The Garbage Procession, Chamber of Industry of Guatemala, October 2022. Colectivo Tz'unun Ya' archives

Later, some of these fruits are displayed in arches along the town's streets as a gesture of gratitude for agricultural fertility. On that occasion, however, the plastic collected from the beaches was used, and its purpose was not one of gratitude but of protest and raising awareness to highlight and denounce the covert and lethal violence that is destroying the lake. Representatives from the various women's groups in San Pedro La Laguna who periodically organize cleanup days and have defended the waters against any extractive projects, were involved in that artistic performance. That political and artistic action in front of the Guatemalan Chamber of Industry building, whose ninth floor is the seat of de facto power par excellence, was a way to challenge the logic of the plastics industry, which has sought to erase its socio-environmental responsibility in the Atitlán basin by shifting it onto the communities under the pretext that everything depends on responsible consumption habits, claiming that it is the communities themselves that are destroying the environment. In fact, the plastics industry attempted to derail the initiative seeking to reduce plastic use and ban styrofoam in the municipality through legal actions in the Constitutional Court.



Massive cleanup day, San Pedro La Laguna, July 2024.
Photo: Daniel Nuñez

Our own ontological perspective

From our worldview, water is a Sacred Being that gives life; that is why we call it our Grandmother Water, Mother Lake—Qatee'Ya' is a living entity that moves, breathes, and possesses *k'u'x* (heart-essence-spirit). This ontological perspective elevates the Lake from a mere resource to a living entity that can also fall ill and suffer.

Life on the lake is intertwined with our forms of community organization, with the symbolic realm, with ancestral and local wisdom, and with the mechanisms of socio-productive relationships; for us, our survival and continued existence depend on the vitality of Grandmother Lake, which is why we protect her from any initiative that might harm her.

That is why we organize cleanup events, propose public policies and regulatory frameworks, and file complaints with the country's highest courts to help revitalize Qatee'Ya', but this is not enough. We also need major petrochemical industries and oil-producing countries—as the primary drivers of the climate crisis—to acknowledge and honor their climate debt in all its dimensions and to rethink the economic model that not only excludes the most vulnerable but also destroys our common home.

Epistemological violence

While it is true that the sciences are extremely important for developing solutions, it is also important to note that they have not always been impartial, as they have typically legitimized power and the *status quo*.

In fact, when they promoted the mega-collector initiative, some research centers became tools for silencing the wisdom and opposition of communities. By denying that Native Peoples still have their own systems for water use and understanding its cycle, they denied that wisdom is also generated outside the university—in Native communities, in resistance movements, and in other

communities—where epistemic processes continue to unfold. For us, the women Guardians of Lake San Pedro La Laguna have understood and come to know the suffering of Grandmother Lake, which makes them aware of and knowledgeable about the illness she suffers from—it makes them scientists.

But from the spheres of public power, epistemological violence was exercised by replicating the discourses of economic power and its think tanks that denied this wisdom. In response, it was necessary to seek allies to share technical information with us, to engage in dialogue among ourselves, to educate ourselves, to organize, and to seek community alliances but above all, to value the Native wisdom system and to revive ancestral care practices alongside other wisdom provided by the sciences. The revitalization of nature and the lake requires academia and its multi- and interdisciplinary wisdom. This stance became an act of defiance against the supremacy of Western science, challenging the status quo and proposing a richer and more complex perspective.

It is also important to note that, **in response to environmental racism and the ecological crisis caused by pollution**, proposals such as the circular economy have emerged. This model, which is gaining traction, is based on the principle of placing the sole responsibility for waste management on the end consumer. However, this “alternative” model **does not truly renounce unsustainable growth**; rather, it seeks to keep markets alive and even absolves large corporations and producing countries of their historical responsibilities. To address the plastics crisis, we must start at the source, **significantly reducing global production of toxic plastics** that cause so much harm to bodies of water, such as Lake Atitlán. We are the Native communities, most of whom are exposed to pollution, toxicity, waste, and plastics that are part of a system of institutional oppression; it seems that in our communities, we are denied the right to a healthy environment.



Filing of an appeal for constitutional protection before the Constitutional Court against the Mega collector, September 2019.

Tz'unun Ya' Collective Archives.

Qa k'uux'—our essence is one with the Lake

This entire process of defending our territory, water, and life led us to establish a strategic course of action to address the events unfolding in our territory. From the perspective of climate justice, we can say that we began with a call to action and positioned ourselves epistemologically and ontologically from our essence—wisdom that is fundamental to maintaining balance in relation to the Lake.

We have placed the impacts of single-use plastic on human life and our environment at the center of the discussion; we have initiated training processes with women; we have demonstrated that by seeking endogenous solutions we can curb the pollution of Lake Atitlán, as well as the proposal to restore the beach area and protect the sandbars.

We write and fight from our very essence -qa k'uux'- our life and essence are one with the Lake. To leave a legacy and be remembered for our resistance, since water is one with our life and existence, we hope this will be a transgenerational process so that future generations may also defend water, territory, and life.

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COMMUNITY-BASED WISDOM

7

Women protecting life amid the fire: Paĩ Tavyterã
wisdom and community forest conservation

Grupo de Estudios Ancestrales Áry Ojeasojavo⁴⁰

Paraguay



We are the sacred tree, the tree of the word, whose bark provides the right terms to the Paĩ Tavyterã. We are always sprouting anew, in a constant process of creativity and innovation in the face of wildfires and the climate crisis. We are deeply rooted, but we need care.

What if we were a plant?

Exercise of the writing workshop "Harvesting Words"

Nora asks a question: «Which plants are the first to grow after a fire?» Before her, the children of her community wander through the fields, recalling the great fire they experienced.

A native of Yvy Pyte, a community of the Guaraní Paĩ Tavyterã⁴¹ people, Nora Rosati has a deep understanding of the land she walks on and the wisdom held by the forest. That is why, as they walk among the shoots sprouting anew from the ashes, she shares with the youngest children the wisdom she herself learned as a child from her grandparents, who taught her to read the land, the forest, and the cycles of life after the fire.

Yvy Pyte is located in a region of Paraguay where two major ecosystems converge: the Cerrado, a fire-prone forest (ijehegui okái) characterized by vegetation adapted to fire, and the Atlantic Forest, known for its biodiversity and humidity. Between these two lies an intermediate zone of transitional forests, where the characteristics of both ecosystems blend, creating a unique and diverse landscape that sustains the life and ancestral wisdom of the Paĩ Tavyterã peoples.

The Paĩ Tavyterã are an ancient people who have inhabited these lands for at least 5,000 years, located in the northwestern part of

40) Written by **Sofía Espíndola Oviedo**, read and commented by **Christian Kent Sienra**. **Nora Rosati Fernández** and **Candida Solano Valiente** provided orientation and shared their wisdom as leaders of the Paĩ Tavyterã peoples.

41) According to León Cardogan (1962, as cited in Melià et al., 2008), the Guaraní people gladly accept the word Paĩ, since it is the title used by the gods and inhabitants of paradise when addressing each other. He also states that the name that best suits them is Tavyterã, which means "inhabitants of the city in the center (of the earth)," an expression reflecting their own cosmovision and their connection to the territory.

the region eastern Paraguay, near the border with Brazil. In fact, in times past, before the current political borders divided these two countries, the Paĩ Tavyterã territory—the Paĩ Retã—spanned both Paraguay and Brazil. Today, on the Brazilian side, lives the sister Kaiowá people, with whom they share ancestral roots and extensive kinship ties.

Impacts of deforestation and dispossession

In his study **We Never Cease to Be Paĩ**, C. Tusing argues that currently, less than 6 percent of the ancestral territory remains in the hands of the Paĩ Tavyterã people. Among the causes of this reduction are the processes of deforestation that began in the last century. First came the expansion of the yerba mate industry, then the establishment of large cattle ranches, and more recently, the expansion of the extractivist model focused on soybean production and livestock farming. In these processes, transnational corporations, primarily Brazilian, have played a central role, as they drove the exploitation of the forest, extensive cattle ranching, and agribusiness in the region.

These changes have had a profound impact on the land. As Nora's grandmothers taught her, the roots of trees (yvyrarapo) are great tendons (yvy rajygue) that hold the earth together: they protect it, nourish it, and keep it alive. When those trees are cut down and the forest razed, waterways shift, the earth weakens, erodes, and gradually loses its strength.

Today, the last remaining forests in this region survive because they are in the hands of Native Peoples. It is the members of these communities who, through their practices, their wisdom, and their respectful connection to the land, have managed to protect what remains of the native forest and continue to fight for its conservation. Where communities continue to inhabit and care for the land—with women and elders playing a prominent role in passing down wisdom—life persists: the trees remain standing, the rivers continue to flow, and natural cycles find room to renew themselves.



Amambay mountain range, habitat of the Paĩ Tavyterã people. Photo: Juan Carlos Meza. Grupo de Estudios Ancestrales Áry Ojeasojava Archives

Despite the efforts and community work of local communities, Native forests are being affected by invasive alien species that pose a serious environmental threat. One of the most common is *brachiaria*, a grass native to Africa that was introduced into the country by the livestock industry. These plants spread easily, dry out quickly, and become the primary source of fuel during droughts, especially when combined with strong winds or the intense cold of the frost periods between July and August.

Native resilience in the face of fire and climate change

In the past, fire had its own rhythm. The Cerrado is an ecosystem accustomed to burning from time to time; fires are part of its natural cycle of renewal, and species have learned to adapt to these cycles. In fact, the straw used to build houses (kapi'i) and the fruits of some wild plants such as *guavira* or *kuruguãĩ* are linked to fire cycles. But with changes to the landscape—deforestation, the introduction of invasive alien species, and the fragmentation of the forest—fire ceased to be a balancing element and became a constant threat. Today, fires occur with greater frequency, intensity, and magnitude, because the natural barriers that once slowed their advance no longer exist: the large trees, the forest's humidity, and the continuity of the vegetation with the grasslands that served as natural fences to protect life.

Thus, Yvy Pyte and other communities of the Paĩ Tavyterã people, together with the Paĩ Retã Joaju and Paĩ Jopotyra community associations, have begun working to strengthen their resilience. **From the revitalization of traditional wisdom to the creation of collective prevention strategies, caring for the forest has become a shared commitment.** Trails are cleared, vulnerable areas are identified, new wisdom is acquired, discussions take place (ñemongeta porã) in assemblies, and teachings are passed down across generations.

In a calm but firm voice, Nora explains how Native women are disproportionately affected by the effects of climate change, and in many cases they are not heard or taken into account: «In our communities, we have gradually paved the way for our voices to be heard and for us to participate in decision-making and advocacy.» The presence of Native women is crucial when considering the struggle against the climate crisis, for as Nora explains, caregiving roles are closely tied to nature: «We have cared for the forest for years and know how fire behaves (tata reko).»

In this vein, Cándida Solano, a leader of the Paĩ Tavyterã community in Ita Guasu, emphasizes the value of ancestral wisdom in protecting the territory. «From our worldview, fire is essential for growing Jakaira corn, which was domesticated by our people,» she explains. In her



Pioneer liana emerging after the fire, initiating forest regeneration. Photo: William Costa. Grupo de Estudios Ancestrales Áry Ojeasojavo Archives.

community, there have been no serious forest fires for over fifteen years, thanks to the mindful use of fire and community organization, such as the formation of fire brigades and agreements reached in assemblies (aty guasu). «Fire moves. It moves slowly, advancing at a steady pace. If it isn't stopped in time, it grows. That is why we act collectively, to save the forest, to protect our tekoha, our way of life,» says Cándida.

Drawing from their own experiences, both women reaffirm this reality and the need for a spirituality that brings balance. «We have songs and dances that we have practiced for thousands of years. They are part of how we maintain balance and ensure that plants flourish with joy.»

Dialogue on Climate Justice and Gender

In spaces where they participate on equal terms, Nora and Cándida, like many women of the Paĩ Tavyterã people, make fundamental contributions and have their own perspective on the land, water, forests, and the environment, which offers us keys to **understanding climate and gender justice as interconnected fights**. This means paying attention to how the effects of the climate crisis impact people differently, unequally, and disproportionately, so that addressing these injustices becomes part of the quest for equity.

Nora and her sisters can attest firsthand to the ways in which they have defended and cared for their territories, even though they have historically been excluded from the centers of power where environmental decisions are made. Despite this, the women emphasize the importance of working collectively. Thanks to their wisdom, their deep connection and respectful bond with the land, and their role as caregivers who weave lives and relationships within communities, **they play a central role in the protection and restoration of ecosystems**.

Furthermore, those who inhabit the territory carry in their living memory the changes that have occurred. Cándida recalls her childhood when the forest was lush, dense, and full of life: «With the arrival of cattle ranches, the forest began to shrink; it is withering away, it is coming to an end. Today, when we look at our surroundings,

we see how much has changed.» This loss is reflected not only in the landscape but also in the community's collective memory.

Regeneration is also a common thread in the voices of Nora and Cándida. It is intertwined with natural cycles and the spirituality that brings balance, as mentioned earlier: «There are species that, if fires recur year after year, stop being born,» Cándida affirms. This awareness of the forest's delicate web reaffirms the value of every community action. Just as Nora mentions the collective effort to maintain trails and identify vulnerable areas, Cándida emphasizes that, although they lack advanced technology, their community possesses something essential: experience, shared wisdom, and bodies ready to act. «We fight with what we have: backpacks with water, shovels, buckets. We carefully wet the ground, we look out for one another. It is delicate and profound work, which not only prevents physical damage but also preserves the life of our community and of the Earth itself.»

The conversation and the experience shared by Cándida Solano and Nora Rosati are a **living example of climate justice** because they place at the center a historically marginalized community that also offers solutions based on ancestral wisdom, sustainable practices, and collective organization in the face of the threats and effects of the climate crisis.

It is based on this understanding that, together with her allies from the organization Grupo de Estudios Ancestrales Áry Ojeasojava, she is working to bring climate and gender justice to the forefront of the debate, and to highlight **how Native women are working to protect, conserve, and regenerate forests in the face of wildfires** and other threats arising from the emergency caused by the climate crisis in their territories.

«Which plants are the first to grow after a fire?» asks Nora. The children, with attentive gazes and vivid memories, are the ones who answer. «The vines,» says a girl, «are the ones that sprout first.» Nora adds: «so that other plants can take root, climb, and bloom.»

Native women intertwine and weave together the returning forest, the life that persists, and the future that sprouts from the ashes. They make fire an ally, managing it with ancestral wisdom as part of a

place-based agriculture, in constant dialogue with the environment and its cycles. These practices gain strength in times of uncertainty and are sustained by respect, listening, and deep collaboration with the Earth.

The experiences shared by Nora and Cándida are part of a network of wisdom passed down from generation to generation, stemming from a historical, communal, and collective flow. This wisdom is guided by those who know the language of the trees—yvyrã ñemongetaha—who maintain a respectful and balanced perspective between the Paĩ Tavyterã and the forests, where deep dialogue with the forest is a way of life.

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COMMUNITY-BASED WISDOM

8

Without carob forests, we won't have Yupisin, the food that sustains life

Marcha Mundial de Mujeres Macronorte Perú⁴²

Perú



We are like a palm tree that shows that no matter how strong the winds, hurricanes, or hard times may be, it is always there, even if it bends. It is resilient but also flexible; we are entering a process of transformation. We are wild because we are in countless spaces. What if we were a plant?

Writing workshop exercise Harvesting Words.

The Marcha de Mujeres Macronorte Perú is a network of autonomous organizations of community and grassroots feminists, active in the Tambogrande district since 2001. It operates through the historic Tambogrande District Women's Association (ADIMTA), made up of fierce women and defenders of the body-earth territory, whose experiences of struggle and resistance have deeply shaped the social struggles of the region.



Sisters of ADIMTA, Cresencia Nole is to the left. Photo: Marcha Mundial de Mujeres Macronorte Perú archives

Through the testimonies of sisters Cresencia Nole Navarro, president of ADIMTA, and Estela Arroyo Inga, a leader with extensive experience and a member of the association, we will delve into the issues and challenges of climate justice in this territory.

El Niño and changes to the territory

The El Niño phenomenon, in its various forms, is part of the climate of northern Peru, with cycles that alternate with periods of drought.

42) Written by Rosa Rivero Reyes, who was responsible for the text and interviews, in collaboration with Cresencia Nole Navarro, president of ADIMTA, and Estela Arroyo Inga, a member of ADIMTA. We would like to thank our colleagues Lourdes Contreras and Ruth Reyes for encouraging the writing of this text.

El Niño brings torrential rains, extreme flooding, heatwaves, epidemics, pests and diseases. Today, its frequency, magnitude and intensity are being altered by the effects of the climate crisis.

In the collective memory of the women and peoples of Tambogrande (Piura, Peru), the 1998 El Niño remains present, marking a turning point due to the damage and losses that affected the lives of the communities, who always held onto hope. Now that the crisis has passed, El Niño has left them with water, pastures, and forests—essential resources for their recovery. Today, the issue is no longer just El Niño, but rather an environmental, social, and political transformation that has rendered the responses women and communities provided in the past insufficient. The district faces the recurrence of El Niño alongside droughts, in a context of extractivism and violence suffered for defending life. Forty-five minutes from Piura, we cross the dense carob forest, composed of carob trees and other species adapted to water scarcity, such as faiques, palo santo, overo, and wildlife. We head down a paved road that connects several hamlets in the Apóstol Juan Bautista de Locuto Peasant Community. After crossing the bridge over the Piura River, we enter the productive San Lorenzo Valley, where the lush greenery of irrigated mango and lemon groves welcomes us. We walk through the bustle of people to meet with our sisters from ADIMTA.



Crops alongside the Piura River Photo: Marcha Mundial de Mujeres
Macronorte Perú archives

Building Climate, Territorial, and Gender Justice: women's resistance in Tambogrande

Cresencia Nole explains that El Niño is a constant presence in Tambogrande: «It's part of our hot climate,» she notes. «That's why the government declares a state of emergency almost every year, whether because of El Niño or droughts. This is how we spend our lives and work on the plots in the San Lorenzo Valley, between good years and bad years due to the climate, but also because of government policies that often prove so unfair to our lives.» Our sister shares that the 1998 El Niño was a massive disaster. The region was severely affected by torrential rains, isolation, floods, and epidemics. «Our home still has cracks, and our family's finances were severely impacted, what we planted was lost. We ended up deeply in debt just to survive under extreme conditions. As always, governments arrive too late, after the disaster has already struck, and with little capacity to provide assistance to the thousands of affected people,» Cresencia tells us. Thanks to our organization, the relationships of mutual support among the communities, and women's leadership, we managed to organize communal kitchens and soup kitchens. Sharing in times of scarcity, as our grandparents taught us: Yupisin, a food made from carob pods, was never missing from our table. We also provided healthcare: «We really have no hope in government support; there is no ongoing prevention, reconstruction programs are rife with corruption, and almost always, aid doesn't reach those who need it,» Cresencia states. After the critical phase of El Niño, we used the water for subsequent farming seasons and pasture for the livestock. But on the farms, we had a lot of work to do to restore them; there, men and women worked as equals, although at home only we women continued the work. We took advantage of the fact that El Niño had brought us together at meetings to organize community kitchens, and in this way, **we women began to organize ourselves to defend our rights** and protect ourselves from gender-based violence: «Imagine that many of us didn't even have ID cards to access aid; few of us could read or write; we lived under our husbands' control, and they often wouldn't let us participate,» Cresencia shares with us in confidence.

Are we going to spend our whole lives fighting off mining companies?

We hadn't even fully recovered from the devastation of the 1998 El Niño when we heard that the government had granted a mining concession to the Canadian company Manhattan. Immediately, we began the fight against the mining project, organizing ourselves into the Defense Committees and the San Lorenzo and Tambogrande Valley Defense Front.

The organization became a vital space for struggle and learning. Men and women educated ourselves to defend family farming and life. The struggle intensified due to the murder of engineer Godofredo García Baca, the *terruqueo*⁴³, and the criminalization of protest; many of our leaders found themselves embroiled in lengthy legal battles with the mining company. **We women marched on the front lines, defending agriculture, water, and the forests even at the cost of our own lives.** It was during this process that we managed to organize ADIMTA. Thus, with our autonomous organization, we have actively participated in struggles and resistance for 24 years.

Cresencia notes that, despite the government's scant support for family farming, they have weathered good and bad years: **«Through farming, we have survived for several generations.** Mining would destroy everything that makes life possible; we didn't buy into the fairy tale that mining and agriculture can coexist. Having lived through the massive El Niño phenomenon, it was impossible to think that an open-pit mine right next to our home would be any better. We didn't buy into the development fairy tale that the men in suits and ties brought us.»

Our protests were intense and ongoing. In July 2002, we held a public referendum in which more than 90% of the population voted

43) In Peru, "terruqueo" is a smear campaign carried out by those in power that involves linking community-organized individuals to terrorism; it is used to criminalize social transformation projects.

against mining and in favor of Agro⁴⁴. Those years were a time of great joy for us and our communities. We continued marching to ensure the government complied with the binding mandate of the Referendum, and thus we succeeded in eradicating mining from our district—or so we thought at the time. However, today we are caught up in a new extractivist scenario of mining conflict with El Algarrobo project by the Buenaventura company and with agribusiness. We wonder if we will spend our lives fighting off mining companies. There are deeper issues that must change; we must prioritize food sovereignty and family farming, so that life is placed at the center. We are tired of being seen as cheap labor for agribusiness, of fighting over water during droughts; of our territories being threatened by dispossession, of disasters being exploited to seize the plots of indebted people who did not recover from El Niño.

When will women and people be the top priority? Mining and agribusiness make us vulnerable, impoverish us, and violate our lives in the face of the climate crisis. Cresencia's voice is clear and firm:

For me, achieving climate justice means putting an end to all forms of extractivism. There is no other solution: it is the struggle of life against death. We continue to fight in an organized manner for food sovereignty, promoting solidarity economy initiatives.

"We remain in the streets to defend our territorio-cuerpo-tierra and to amend Peru's Constitution so that we do not become permanently marginalized, dependent on social programs and government subsidies. We stand together in this struggle and to share our experiences through our organization."

44) We defend and fight for food sovereignty and family farming. For many years now, the protests in Tambogrande have been raising the slogan "Agriculture Yes, Mining No!"—a slogan that reflects the debates at the heart of our struggles and resistance against extractivism, since both agribusiness and mining strip away and plunder our resources, exploiting our bodies and our lives.



Carob Tree. Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Yupisin: the food that sustains life

The dry carob forests grow on sandy soil, withstanding temperatures that reach over 36°C. Their bountiful carob trees provide shade, and their pods feed the animals and people who live in harmony with nature. In the midst of these forests in the Apóstol Juan Bautista de Locuto Peasant Community lives Sister Estela Arroyo Inga, a community member, leader of the Ecobosque enterprise, and partner of ADIMTA. This initiative emerged during the post-El Niño recovery of 1998, making use of the forest's resources. It revives technologies from their grandparents and integrates current technological changes; however, it is currently threatened by the El Algarrobo mining project.

Estela explains that caring for the dry carob forest is central to life on the left bank of the Piura River. From the grandparents who lived in harmony with the forest, they inherited the preparation of the ancient *Yupisin*, which has high nutritional value. Studies show that consuming it improves people's nutritional status and strengthens the immune system. *Yupisin* is a porridge made from the juice of carob pods, thickened with corn flour. Its consumption is deeply embedded in the community's daily life: «Our families build a storage shed next to our homes using local materials, hermetically sealed to store carob pods for times of scarcity, taking them out little by little for our own consumption and that of our animals; this practice is a millennia-old legacy from our grandparents,» Estela tells us.



ADIMTA members participating.
Photo: Marcha Mundial de Mujeres Macronorte Perú archives

During the 1998 El Niño, «we women organized ourselves to build carob huts and managed to prepare the *Yupisin* during the critical stage, even while in total isolation [when the forest produces foliage but no pods]. The impact on our lives was significant, because despite the food shortage, our nutritional status was not affected,» especially that of the children. Therefore, the protection and recovery of the carob forest is a task undertaken by the Apóstol Juan Bautista de Locuto Peasant Community, which today, through proper management of the dry forest's resources, produces carob syrup, carob flour, **toffees**, and other nutritious products.

The women's organization has been key. Estela shares that they had to stand up to their husbands, who wouldn't let them go out or participate, downplaying their ability to carry out various tasks essential for caring for families, such as the communal kitchen and health care. Firmly, Estela states: «**We women showed men that our organization plays a fundamental role in life.**» They relied on a network of community agents—midwives, bone-setters, herbalists, and health promoters—to respond to emergencies in the context of a massive disaster where official services were absent. «Unfortunately, our strategies and efforts are not considered health policy, nor do they support our knowledge. Traditional midwives have been repressed by health services; today they have almost

disappeared [...] we have the pending task of bringing them back, as they are part of our way of life and our response to the climate crisis,» she affirms.

Mining companies—first Manhattan and then Buenaventura—are exerting pressure on our territorio-cuerpo-tierra defying the agreements of the Community that rejects the project. To impose it, they have sown division, conflict, and welfare dependency. «Accepting it would mean the destruction of the dry carob forest that constitutes our living space,» they warn. «We, together with our Community, the Defense Front, the Peasant Patrols, and ADIMTA, remain steadfast in our struggle [...] it is the only forceful way to defend our lives for present and future generations,» for as Estela rightly puts it: «without dry forests, we will have no *Yupisin*,» which is necessary to confront the multiple climate crises.

It will not be possible to achieve climate justice as long as systems of oppression continue to threaten our lives, turning adaptation and resilience into processes that exacerbate poverty and into mere public compensation policies.



Photo: Marcha Mundial de Mujeres Macronorte Perú archives

Through the testimonies of Cresencia and Estela, it becomes clear that **the struggles and resistance of women and indigenous peoples to preserve their ways of life are not a recent phenomenon,**

but rather have roots stretching back thousands of years. Their grandparents faced episodes of El Niño and droughts, developing forms of organization based on reciprocity and solidarity. From these practices **flowed knowledge and technologies that today serve as a source of strength in the territories** in the face of extractivism and multiple crises.

In this process, women have become increasingly aware of their struggles against the systems of capitalist, patriarchal, and colonial oppression that destroy their lives and nature; they strengthen their organizations, take the lead, put their bodies on the line, fight, and resist, sustaining life and sowing the seeds of *Buen Vivir*.⁴⁵

References:

- Conversations with Crescencia Nole Navarro, conducted in June 2025.
- Conversations with Estela Arroyo Inga, conducted in June 2025.



⁴⁵) Buen Vivir is a concept rooted in the worldviews of Indigenous peoples across the Andes that understands well-being as living in balance and reciprocity with the community, the natural world, and the spiritual realm. It emphasizes collective flourishing over individual accumulation.

RURAL-URBAN LINKAGES

9

The defense of life is backed by minka: an account of the collective struggle for Justicia Los Cedros

Observatorio Minero Ambiental y Social del Norte del Ecuador (OMASNE)⁴⁶

Ecuador



We write from the feeling in our cuerpos-territorios⁴⁷, the pressure of capital that proclaims dispossession, that brings violence and unease. From life's purity, the mastery of nature, and the commitment to the lives of campesina, Native, and Black communities that drive us to defend the Earth and demand that climate justice means guaranteeing everyone the right to live in dignity and to enjoy balanced and healthy ecosystems. We write to inspire, to incite outrage, to raise awareness, and to call for a great unity-action.

From where do we write? Writing workshop exercise

"Harvesting the Word"

To begin this story, it is necessary to clarify that I am writing from a semi-urban town in northern Ecuador, near the productive lands that sustain food sovereignty, while also defending important remnants of mega-biodiverse ecosystems such as the moors and Andean tropical forests. This account will be a journey through what we consider **climate justice in the context of defending the common goods, which calls us to rebuild our lives from a biocentric perspective.**

In 2017, we got together with a group of young people from Carchi and Imbabura—provinces in Ecuador's Northern Highlands—driven by outrage and active hope. At that time, some of us were students, others professionals in the environmental and social sciences, the arts, and agroecology. We were brought together by the critical situation facing campesina, Native, and Black communities in the face of increasingly aggressive state mining policies.

In the late 2000s, the mining cadastre was reopened, leaving nearly 15% of the national territory under small, medium, and large-scale metal mining concessions (Aguilar, 2018). As a result, socio-environmental conflicts began to escalate rapidly. These concessions encompassed populated areas, water sources, fragile ecosystems, and nature reserves. Between 2014 and 2016, the Ecuadorian

46) Written by **Monseratte Vásquez**, member of OMASNE and the Frente Nacional Antiminero.

47) *Cuerpo-Territorio* is a term used in the context of Latin American social movements to explain the deep relationship between body and territory. The term suggests that the body is our primary territory and that, in turn, it is part of the territory we inhabit.

government carried out forced evictions in Shuar communities in the southern Amazon, where it was paving the way for the exploitation of the first large-scale mine (Salva la Selva). In the midst of strong resistance from the communities, three leaders were murdered, while in other territories campesino leaders were criminalized and entire communities were militarized (INREDH, 2017).

Commitment to the territory from the city

Thus, from the city, the Observatorio Minero Ambiental y Social del Norte del Ecuador (Mining, Environmental, and Social Observatory of Northern Ecuador, OMASNE) was formed, composed mainly of women, largely motivated by a shared responsibility from the city with the campesinas who sustain life. We seek to be a gear in rural-urban unity, in the struggle to defend territories against capitalist mining interests, with a deep commitment to the Earth and Nature, to the territory that sustains us, since Ecuador is one of the 17 megabiodiverse countries on the planet.

As we know, activism is a process that requires education and a critical analysis of reality. In our work alongside campesina communities, we have witnessed firsthand how power relations operate asymmetrically, and with that, the injustice, violence, persecution, dispossession, and criminalization by the state and corporations against them. Their demands are not considered; on the contrary, they are automatically classified by the state as antagonists who must be annihilated. It is then that ravenous capitalism reveals itself as the machinery that commodifies life, exploiting and discarding it. In this sense, the peoples of the Global South are the ones who have incarnated in their cuerpos-territorios the curse of abundance⁴⁸ and are therefore the legitimate agents to give substance and meaning to climate justice.

48) This refers to a concept of the Ecuadorian economist Alberto Acosta developed in the *La Maldición de la Abundancia* (2009) [The Curse of Abundance]. This paradox explains why countries with abundant natural resources fall into dependence and extraction patterns.



Mural by Justicia Los Cedros

Los Cedros Justice Campaign: Creativity and Science in the Service of the People's Struggle

In 2018, OMASNE came together to support a legal action initiated by Los Cedros Scientific Station and brought by the Municipality of Cotacachi, with the aim of preserving Los Cedros Protected Forest. This forest is part of one of the most iconic territories in the struggle against mining extractivism: the Intag Valley. Los Cedros is a 6,400-hectare tropical Andean forest that serves as a habitat for hundreds of species of flora and fauna, many of which are endemic or at risk of extinction. Four major watersheds originate within its depths, serving as a water reserve for ten campesina communities in the surrounding area.

In 2017, more than 60% of its area was granted as a concession to the National Mining Company (ENAMI EP), which operated in partnership with its Canadian ally, Cornerstone. At the heart of the forest lies Los Cedros Scientific Station, which existed before the area was designated as a protected vegetation zone. Founded by Josef DeCoux (+), who dedicated nearly 40 years of his life to promoting scientific research for the conservation of this biological gem. At OMASNE, we committed to supporting the cause by contributing our diverse skills and wisdom, and by creating spaces for discussion in the city. It is important to mention that the 2008 Constitution has been praised as groundbreaking for recognizing Nature as a subject of rights and Ecuador as an intercultural and plurinational state, as well as the right to resistance. These advances

are the result of significant struggles and popular uprisings against the neoliberal policies of the 1980s and 1990s.



Los Cedros Protected Forest. Photo: OMASNE archives

The lawsuit filed in a first instance court was dismissed. The judge argued that applying the right to consultation was inappropriate because there were no communities in the forest, even going so far as to ironically question whether the intention was to «consult the trees and the monkeys.» This ruling was appealed, and the process took a long time. We realized that the circumstances demanded bringing this case to public attention through a communications campaign. Otherwise, the silence would give the judges open license to decide the future of this ecosystem from behind a desk.

The campaign took shape, and we named it Justicia Los Cedros. No one in the group had any training in communications, but our motivation, determination, and shared goal were enough to get it off the ground. Aware that it required broad reach, a large collective effort involving diverse voices was needed to raise public awareness and call for action.

We joined in through **creative strategies** to raise awareness among the urban population about the real threat of metal mining to Ecuador and to an ecosystem as vital as the Los Cedros Forest. It

was essential to translate scientific research into understandable and dynamic language. In this regard, artists played a key role; through drawing, singing⁴⁹, composition, and theater, they created works that raised awareness, provoked outrage, and invited people to question and discuss the country's development model.

It was necessary to challenge the country's mining policy based on the experiences, ways of life, and dreams of the communities in resistance, but also on scientific and socioeconomic studies that made it possible to assess the costs of mining in terms of biodiversity, ecosystem services, and rights violations. Thus, the campaign served as a voice for Native organizations and campesina communities, artists, activists, feminists, students, environmentalists, workers, academics, and scientists.

Justicia Los Cedros also sought to influence the judges so that their decision would guarantee constitutional rights. At the same time, the campaign served as a platform to denounce the impacts of mining: rights violations, socio-environmental conflicts, and persecution in the territories.



Protest of Justicia Los Cedros in front of the Constitutional Court of Ecuador. Photo: OMASNE archives.

49) See video in the references.

To speak of climate justice, no territory can be considered a sacrificial zone, nor can any bodies or lives be regarded as dispensable or less important than others.

Through this campaign, we expose the capitalist trap that presents a false dichotomy between “development” and territorial destruction. Spokespersons for the economic elites repeat the cruel excuse that «progress requires sacrificing a minority to achieve the well-being of the majority.»

The legal battle and a historic victory for Nature

The campaign continued in coordination with Los Cedros Scientific Station, where this great *minka* was organized around people involved in law, biology, geography, scientific research, and campesinas from the area surrounding the forest. **This great minka resembled an ecosystem where all species and elements fulfill essential functions that maintain balance.** By then, in the city of Ibarra, a representative group of people had been mobilized to participate in sit-ins and actions demanding justice for Los Cedros. In 2019, the provincial court partially upheld the lawsuit, recognizing the violation of the communities’ right to environmental consultation in light of the threat the mining project posed to fundamental rights: access to water, a healthy ecosystem, productive land, and food sovereignty.

That same year, both the mining company and the Municipality of Cotacachi appealed the provincial ruling before the Constitutional Court of Ecuador. The legal strategy sought to secure a ruling that would address all the claimed rights, since it had not addressed a central issue such as the violation of the Rights of Nature. Until then, no lawsuit related to the enforceability of these rights had reached the courts.

Climate justice cannot be understood apart from the Rights of Nature, setting aside—as promulgated by the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador—the possibility of ensuring the balance

of ecosystems and the conservation and protection of the most important habitats and biodiversity. **Climate justice will be biocentric or it will not be at all.**

Everyday life and science show us that the Earth as our common home, and as a living body, is in a crisis of no return. In the face of this, it is up to the people to set limits on the capitalist system that commodifies and degrades life. That is precisely the significance of the Rights of Nature.

The new context required the case to broaden its impact, which was made possible by the collaboration between scientists and international organizations committed to Los Cedros (Center for Biological Diversity, 2020). The case transcended Ecuador's borders, becoming highly significant as a precedent for the application of the Rights of Nature in a country whose economy depends on extractivism. Ecuador was left with two paths: to guarantee the Constitution and put life at the center, or to prioritize corporate interests.

After four years of intense legal battle, in December 2021, Ecuador's Constitutional Court made history by ruling in favor of the defense of Los Cedros Protected Forest. It recognized the State's violation of the communities' rights to access clean water, a healthy environment, and environmental consultation, as well as the Rights of Nature. To uphold this right, the Court relied on the precautionary principle, which establishes that in the absence of certainty about the impact an activity may have on the environment, it must be avoided.

This ruling set a legal precedent for the applicability of the Rights of Nature in relation to mining, revealing that the transnational mining project in Ecuador is illegal and illegitimate, since consultation with the communities was not conducted in accordance with the Constitution or as established by international instruments. The ruling also affirmed what Native Peoples and campesinas have historically asserted: the defense of territory and nature is the defense of our bodies, of our very lives. It promotes a biocentric view-action, which allows us to understand humans as just another species in the chain

of life, setting limits on human activities that affect the ecological balance and, consequently, current and future generations; this is why the guarantee of the Rights of Nature enables the exercise of fundamental and basic human rights.

★

This brief account demonstrates that unity is key to achieving major goals. Along the way, we came to understand that social struggle is an endless process of weaving together, and that this is the key to moving toward the reality we want to build and transform. We learned how an active, interdisciplinary struggle enabled us to defeat big capital and set limits on a State that does not govern according to the interests of the majority.

We are aware that this victory must not lead us to fall into triumphalism. There are still thousands of hectares in Ecuador under mining concessions, and violence against the peoples who defend the common goods is growing exponentially, influenced by Ecuador's involvement in drug trafficking networks, the expansion of "illegal" mining, and the emergence of a mineral-state.

That is why we have continued working to contribute to this great struggle and create the conditions to consolidate national unity. In 2022, the National Anti-Mining Front was created as a space to coordinate the various struggles against mining dispossession. One of its key objectives has been to sustain national coordination—outside the logic and agendas of non-governmental organizations—by building popular power from the ground up to declare Ecuador free from metal mining. To date, it has worked in coordination with CONAIE, successfully placing the implications of transnational mining policy at the center of the national debate and stopping the progress of three out of five mining projects.

The current situation in Ecuador is grim. The current president has a conflict of interest with the mining corporations operating in the country (CONAIE, 2024). In June 2025, he announced the reopening of the mining cadastre—which had been closed since 2019 thanks to social struggle—and enacted laws that contemplate the persecution



People's uprising in October 2019, Quito. Photo OMASNE archives

of social leaders, the privatization of Protected Areas, and impunity for the security forces in the face of human rights violations.

We ratify that the unity of the people and working together in minka is key to confronting the capitalist power to which the Ecuadorian state is subservient. Climate justice is demonstrated by the peoples of the Global South every day through the hard struggles they wage, where the driving force and horizon is life, the land, water, seeds, biodiversity... dignity as a common good.



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Notes on anti-colonial memory in Bonao:
responses to the Climate Crisis based on the
struggles of Esteban Polanco and Rubén Darío

Aquelarre RD⁵⁰

Dominican Republic



*We want to write for ourselves and for the community,
driven by the need to tell stories in the first person
and to be the active voice of the transformations we are
bringing about. We want to write for coming generations,
so that our memories are recorded
as archives of struggle and resistance.*

For whom do we want to write? Writing Workshop Harvesting the Words

For us, this is not merely a climate crisis, but a **civilizational crisis**. It is the crisis of an economic model imposed through colonization in the Caribbean and the rest of Abya Yala, where both nature and human labor are reconfigured to serve the accumulation of capital. Today, large corporations from the Global North, together with governments, are commodifying the solutions to the major problems they have created through floating platforms, wind farms, hydroelectric plants, and carbon agriculture.

Faced with this scenario, we insist that concrete solutions to this crisis remain in communities that organise themselves, create alternatives, and build autonomy. A prime example is Bonao, a territory of ancestral anti-colonial struggle. **The ways in which Bonao's defenders act at the micro-political level are examples of living solutions to the capitalist and neocolonialist climate crisis.** Their situated experiences and voices have been key in defending our waters and mountains; they are proof that the answers to the climate crisis lie in the way communities organize the sustainability of the weaving of life.

The following text recounts the struggle of Esteban and Rubén, two territorial defenders who have been part of the history of anti-colonial resistance against extractivism in our territory. We, as anti-racist feminists committed to political action for liberation in this territory, set out to salute **the memory of these struggles** so that they may be preserved for posterity. Although they do not occupy the media spotlight, they are deeply rich and meaningful experiences of community organizing that must be taken into account as starting points and as emancipatory proposals that transform daily life.

50) Written by **Esther N. Girón Flete**.

Bonao, the wellspring of the Caribbean

*There is no town in the Caribbean region
traversed by as many rivers as Bonao.
Esteban Polanco.*

The urban geography of the island of Ayití, shared today by Haiti (west side) and the Dominican Republic (East side), was shaped by gold, with the southern Cibao region on the Dominican Republic side—which today comprises the provinces of La Vega, Bonao, and Cotuí—being the first region designated for gold extraction by the colonial company. The first mining extraction site on the island, and what the West called the New World, was established in this region.



Photo: Alex Angulo and Francisco Martínez Sandoval

Between the Cordillera Central and the Sierra de Yamasá, two of the most important mountain ranges on the island and in the Dominican Republic, lies Bonao, a valley where it rains most of the year. Our town is one of the top water producers in the country; its rivers are the lifeblood that bathes the southern Cibao region and nourishes the nation: Zumbador, Maimón, Juan Adrián, Yuboa, Sonador, Juma, Arroyo Avispa, Tireo, Blanco, Masipedro, and Yuna. These climatic conditions also enable us to contribute a large portion of the rice produced nationwide.

Bonao is considered the Wellspring of the Caribbean; there are over 100 waterfalls, numerous tributaries, rapids, and canyons that make us one of the most visited provinces. One of our political tasks as an anti-racist collective is to ensure that we are not merely recognized as an “ecotourism” destination. Our mountains and rivers hold stories of defense and resistance by the campesinas who have been the guardians of these waters. In July 1992, the government of Joaquín Balaguer issued Decree 199-92, which expelled campesinas from the Yuna and Nizao river basins; the upper reaches of the headwaters were declared zones closed to all human activity, criminalizing their populations as “enemies of nature.” The decree concealed the state’s granting of exploration and exploitation rights for these areas to the multinational corporation Hispaniola, precisely in El Higo, the heart of the Cordillera Central, known as the Mother of Waters.



Photo: Alex Angulo and Francisco Martínez Sandoval

Esteban and *Los Nueve Cercos* [The Nine Fences]: spreading the word to defeat the mining company

Esteban Polanco tells us that the decree was a cover-up: «When we discovered it, we at the campesina Federation began developing a process of discussion with all the communities here in the mountains, and we managed to devise strategies that allowed us to

launch a major campaign.» Bonao already had experience fighting the Falcondo mining company. The broader strategy was called *Los Nueve Cercos* [The Nine Fences], which included community organizing tactics from the local to the national and international levels.

The Federación Campesina Unidos Hacia el Progreso [Campesina Federation United Toward Progress] (FCHP) began with central workshops that were later replicated in 16 mountain communities; the workshops served as a space to listen to the genuine needs of community members. This would later enable the movement to embody and subjectivize itself in the defense of the mountain.



Esteban Polanco, knowledgeable about the mountains and the struggles in Bonao. Photo: Aquelarre Archives

Communication among the communities played an important role. Within *Los Nueve Cercos* [The Nine Fences], the slogans «campesinas are not enemies of nature» and «We are staying to live better» were adopted. A flyer titled «Ten Reasons to Fight and Prevent Mine Exploitation» was produced; this was crucial for initiating a process of political education with people on the ground about what was happening, using simple language. Dozens of campesinos traveled from the mountains to the town of Bonao for several weeks in order to distribute the flyers and explain the dangers posed to Bonao and the country by mining in the heart of the Cordillera Madre de las Aguas.

Committees of campesinas were formed and visited dozens of social, environmental, and religious organizations, as well as universities across the country—especially organizations and communities from La Vega and Cotuí all the way to Samaná—explaining the consequences of poisoning the Yuna River with cyanide used in mining for the large rice and food crops in the Lower Yuna region.

In this way, the Federation regained the credibility that had been undermined by the company through bribes and money; the campesina struggle achieved national and international coordination.



Photo: Alex Angulo and Francisco Martínez Sandoval

Rubén: The Path to Autonomy as an Organized Response to Extractivism

Five years ago, we met Rubén Darío García through a mutual friend. He has a strong character, a restless gaze, and a long history of organizing within left-wing groups. In our early conversations, he told us that the Federation's organizational process — which he, like Esteban, had been part of — was one of the most successful experiences of anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggle and resistance on the island. For the first time in our region, community organization and grassroots strategies developed by campesina men and women defeated the state and financial power of a multinational corporation. This process is of great relevance because this island has long been an epicenter and a laboratory for colonialism and imperialism.

Rubén, in addition to being a founding member of the FCHP, is the founder of Transporte Amarillo [Yellow Transport]—Bonao’s first autonomous intercity transport service—as well as the founder of Ríos de la Cordillera Environmental Foundation and of the Cooperativa de Apicultores Abeja Reina [Queen Bee Beekeepers’ Cooperative]. From our very first conversations, he shared with us his stories of the various environmental movements and structures of failed political parties in which he has been involved, including the FCHP’s struggle and the mobilizations to turn Loma Miranda into a National Park today.

The struggle to have Loma Miranda declared a National Park began in 2012. Many of us were studying at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo at that time; we didn’t call ourselves feminists yet, but we were already defending the land and waters of the territory we inhabit. Many of us were active in leftist groups and organized ourselves into student groups to sustain the Loma Miranda camp. But the left’s analyses lacked the complex perspective needed to understand reality beyond a class-based lens. They needed to understand that human liberation was not possible without the liberation of the land, the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality, and above all, it was necessary to overcome the anthropocentric perspective to establish a relationship of interdependence with the land. This framework was provided to us



Photo: Alex Angulo and Francisco Martínez Sandoval

by decolonial feminism and women from Native peoples whom we met a few years later, as we moved through the movements of Abya Yala.

In 2013, when the Falcondo mining company once again threatened to destroy Loma Miranda, the strategies learned at Loma de Blanco several decades earlier were immediately put into action. Rubén took over the sustainability strategy for the camp set up on the mountainside in Los Algarrobos, along the banks of the Acapulco River. Together with the camp, he set up a nursery and installed a screen-printing press to make T-shirts, which were then sold, with the money collected used to keep the camp running.

Rubén also has a history of militancy in left-wing parties and structures, though his most recent disappointment was with Alianza País. At his home, where we visited him, he still keeps flags from Alianza País's first membership campaign, and he believes he has put them to better use by using them to cover the side walls in some parts of his house. One of the lessons he has learned, he confessed to us, is: «All that time I wasted with those rogues from Alianza País, I could have used it to build more organizational alternatives in my community.»

During the camp days, we're sure we ran into Rubén on more than one occasion, though we didn't recognize each other. Years later, we found ourselves at a perfect moment in our lives. We were burned out by the left and searching for new frameworks that would allow us to better understand our reality. Rubén was tired of what hasn't worked and what the leaders of the national progressive parties keep repeating.

Somehow, meeting Rubén revitalized us; it was a turning point where we no longer felt called to be at the forefront of the marches, but rather **to build autonomous structures** within the community. With the passage of Cyclone David and the adoption of neoliberal policies in the country that affect the countryside and small-scale farmers, our families abandoned their lands and crops to later migrate to the city outskirts. We are returning to the land that has

been taken from us, because we love this island of Ayití, which has been a laboratory of domination for centuries; because it is on this land that the modern colonial project began; and because we see no possibility of other futures outside of it.

That is why, together with Rubén and the *Fundación Ambiental Ríos de la Cordillera* [Ríos de la Cordillera Environmental Foundation], we co-created the Autonomía project, focused on food sovereignty, agroecology, and community sustainability, built by various grassroots organizations, the local environmental movement, farm workers, campesinas, and homemakers from the rural areas of Bonao. One of our fundamental objectives is to promote participatory and solidarity-based strategies for the production, processing, marketing, and consumption of healthy food. To date, we have planted more than 10,000 cacao, coffee, and other crops.

Rubén encourages us to continue working from the ground up: «We need to work to build real power, creating autonomy and strengthening our community bases from the grassroots upwards, just as we did in Loma de Blanco and Loma Miranda.»

Volver a Ser Tierra⁵¹ and essential lessons the Climate Justice movement can learn

In the struggle for dignity and climate justice, it is urgent to examine the marginalization of the wisdom held by those on the front lines facing the destruction and threats of extractivism and neocolonialism.

Historically, the wisdom of defenders has been undervalued and has even faced epistemic violence.

One of the left's greatest mistakes has been abandoning the territories. That is why there must be a common practice to dialogue about the problems that affect us in our neighborhoods and communities, in order to repoliticize daily life, just as the community members of Blanco did with the Nueve Cercos [Nine Fences]

51) Becoming Soil Again

strategy. In the words of Esteban Polanco: «We turned the problem into an issue that people feel deeply.» Community work and the building of masses with critical thinking are urgent because **there is no better political weapon against the civilizational crisis than mobilized consciousness.**

As anti-racist and decolonial feminists, our work for the defense of territory has become our priority. **We declare ourselves defenders of water and life, with a deep awareness of the modern colonial matrix of domination that promotes fragmented struggles.** Now our work is guided by ancestry, reciprocity, collectivity, and creativity. In 2022, in the face of the rise of nationalism and fascism in the country, we set out to transform culture by founding the first Afrofeminist and Queer cultural house in our region. In 2024, we carried out our first creative process, titled *Volver A Ser Tierra* (VAST by its Spanish acronym).

VAST was the first creative process of *La Casa Cultural La Cimarrona*, held between August and September 2024, in which young people of African descent and gender non-conforming folks from the Bonao community participated.

Through the *Volver a Ser Tierra* [Becoming Soil again] workshops, we seek to use art to question the **monoculture** narrative model born in the Capitalocene era, in which human beings were conceived as separate from nature. In this model, nature became an inexhaustible source of wealth to be exploited by human rationality according to their needs. This separation has generated the multidimensional crisis we are experiencing today. With VAST, we also seek to recover the historical memory of the resistances of the Bonao territory, linking it to current struggles as a decolonial political commitment in an era marked by epistemic injustices, where collective wisdom seems to be supplanted by academicism.

The experiences of Esteban and Rubén demonstrate that the path toward building Autonomy is one of the most effective ways to confront the civilizational crisis and to foster the flourishing of other models that enable **a more multi-diverse understanding**

of our relationship with the earth, based on collectivity, interdependence, reciprocity, and relationality. The contributions of these defenders have been key in strengthening our daily political action in defense of the common goods. Through community organizing, they have transformed the way power is conceived—a concept that has traditionally been linear, from institutions and government. Here, power has always been conceived from the communities and their capacity to organize themselves to defend the territory, water, and life.

In Rubén's words, «In order to sustain our political processes and projects in the long term, we need to build community structures for the sustainability and food sovereignty of our movements.» Loma Miranda and Loma de Blanco are good examples of how what seems impossible to many is actually achievable if the conscious grassroots get mobilized.

The path to climate justice begins with recognizing the contributions of the people who are transforming the reality of their communities on a daily basis and sowing utopias that are integrated into everyday practices.

These people are proof that other futures already exist without having to choose between the idea of Western progress and death. There are other ways of being, living, and relating to nature that do not involve the destruction of the territory.

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11

Noh Newilistlij: Never again will we fight from scarcity; we fight from the abundance of our territories!

Tlalij, Yolojtli uan Nemililistlij⁵²

Mexico



We are the ones who transform. We are like corn, like an evolving teocintle⁵³, which leads us to choose what is good, what nourishes us. We are like a molito⁵⁴, like a nutritious meal which enriches the breast milk that nourishes children. What if we were a plant? Exercise from the writing workshop
Harvesting the Words

Our Mother Earth is abundance, life, and dignity

We write from the Huasteca; Our Mother Earth guided our steps until we found one another. We are the ones who transform, while keeping tradition alive in our hands: textile art, traditional medicine, ancestral cuisine, the act of sowing, harvesting, feeding ourselves, cultivating our word.

Our past stories exist; we walk together because our companionship brings us closer to our *noh newilistlij*, that is, to our deepest longing as we call it in Náhuatl. We resist because we feel the changes in the dry weeping of our Mother Earth, in the spring waters that cry out their desperation to us. All of this is a consequence of the environmental crisis; that is why, through our own forms of life, we fight for climate justice.

We exist in Mexico on sacred territory which, in the words of the Nahua communities, we call *Huasteca* or *Huastecapan*, «the sacred on high.» Our **Teenek** sisters know it as T'sabal Teenek, «Land of the Teenek Peoples.» This is where the story of *Huitzitzili* takes place, who lived here when it still rained nine months a year. Every day she roamed the forest, using giant leaves as umbrellas, leaping like a little fawn. Her morning walk took her to the orange grove, which in March and April formed a path of white flowers. In June, the coffee trees bloomed, and the women would transform their flowers into delicious coffee.

52) Tlalij, Yolojtlí uan Nemililistlij A. C. (Tierra, Corazón y Vida) [Land, Heart and Life]. **Saraeth Ramos** made the compilation for this chapter. We got together to talk and write: **Felipa de Jesús Martínez Dolores, María del Carmen Ramos Pérez, María Flora Pazaron Hernández, María Asunción Guzmán, Ma. Valentina Aguilar Guzmán and Hermelinda Vázquez Bautista.**

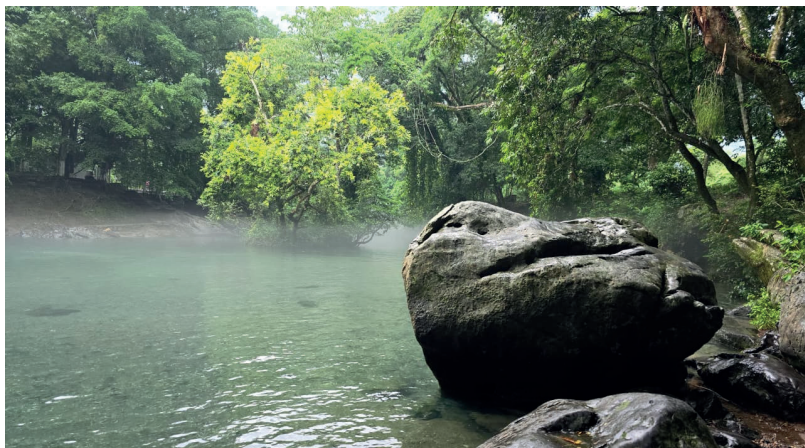
53) An ancestral wild relative of maize or corn that still grows in the wild in some regions.

54) Mole, a traditional dish made from corn and spices.

Huitzitzili continued to play in the large family courtyard and the kitchen, where her aunts, mother, and grandmothers worked on the magical transformation of what had been harvested. There, chickens walked around with their chicks, along with a few ducks, pigs tied to a tree, and the ornamental flowers the women planted so that visitors' energy would be cleansed upon entering.

For years, life went on. The rainy months refreshed nature, with harvests that allowed them to live with dignity and celebrate *Xantolo*, the great Festival of Day of the Dead, where entire families danced with those who are here and those who have passed on. Back then, every family had a guaranteed supply of fresh food: seven varieties of plantains, mushrooms, soybeans, cornfields, beans, pumpkin, *chayote*, and *ejote* [green beans].

Over time, life in *Huitzitzili* and the surrounding territory was forcibly transformed. Actions driven from outside altered the rain cycles, reduced production, and poisoned the plants. Since then, we have been in a constant struggle for survival; abundance was gradually being lost. In the midst of that disaster, **we realized that building harmony and the defense of a worthwhile life are *noh newilistlij*.** It is the only way to live and to bring life to our surroundings.



Huichihuayan Springhead, Huehuetlán, San Luis Potosí, Mexico.
Photo: Saralet Ramos

Dispossession and exploitation from the Spanish invasion to the present day

This dispossession did not begin yesterday. Since the misnamed Conquest, these territories have been used to meet the needs of the urban centers—always for the privileged: first the Spaniards, then the creoles, who, from their estates, exploited the land with an ambition that weakened its fertility. From 1527 to 1900, the forests of Puebla were cut down. Querétaro and El Bajío suffered the same fate, depleting the abundance of Our Mother Earth.

Today, a trace remains as evidence of the looting, the places that in ancient times were named for their connection to water, such as the Lakes of Cempoala—which in Nahuatl evokes some twenty lakes—now reduced to very few. The same happened with San Juan de los Lagos; only the wide bridges remain, recalling the great current and flow of water.

All this 'development' requires new places to obtain water and food for the cities, where most people simply turn on the tap or light the stove without knowing where their water or fuel comes from, or without realizing the harm their waste causes. Moreover, in addition to these small actions that generate pollution, large corporations also consume resources as if they were infinite.

Mohmatlani: the living memory of reciprocity that endures in the planting.

The dispossession continues; our overexploited Mother Earth no longer gives her abundant harvests to those once-fertile lands that no longer even remember what they were. Meanwhile, we have cared for our territories; we continue to bring our offerings and keep treating Our Mother Earth with love. Our crops do not exploit her; they nourish her, keep her alive, with clean water in our rivers. And now that they have destroyed everything with their overexploitation, **they want to deprive us of the little we have left: the life of our forests, the water, our communities.** We have had to respond frontally and make ourselves capable of sustaining life.

Even though, like most Native peoples, we have been displaced from our territories, we have not been displaced from our memory or our traditional ways of life. With Our Mother Earth, we maintain a living connection linked to a calendar of planting, caring, giving thanks, and calling upon the water—as well as countless other activities that we have carried out annually since ancient times.

Those of us who plant, from the moment we plan the sowing, go with humility to see the Guardian of the Dance so that they may accompany the family in the planting. We celebrate an act of reciprocity with the *Mohmatlani*, which from Nahuatl to Spanish translates as «nuestra mano» [our hand].

When we go to the *Mohmatlani*, we all bring seeds of corn, beans, sesame, and others, as well as plants of papaya, plantain, *camote* [sweet potatoes], and others; we place them on the embroidered tablecloth we made for this occasion. We add candles, a copal burner, flowers, and, above all, food: sugarcane rum, water, fruit juices, and fruits that we will eat at the beginning and end of the planting.



Celebration of the beginning of the sowing time, Hermelinda Vázquez and Dalia Rubio, Nahua women representing the Siwakinewej Tonati youth group, from the Red de Mujeres. Photo: Yareli Rivera.

The eldest granny lights the embers for the copal. The smoke rises, and we are purified by it. Meanwhile, the rabelito (small violin), flutes, tamborcito, jarana, and harp begin to play, harmoniously guiding the dancers as they start the celebration with steps that mimic the animals of the subtropical jungle where we live.

The eldest grandpa smokes the offerings we have placed for Our Mother Earth in the four directions, calling out with great faith: *Wait Nanna, Wait Tata, nika ixtoken nuchi Tuknin, nuchi mohkonetsitsi, ni mits maka noh tekittl...* Thus begins the expression of gratitude that guides the celebration. They serve a shot of cane rum: it is first offered to Our Mother Earth, then to the four directions and the sky, and finally to all of us as we proceed to bless the seeds with copal.

Granny opens the *patlache* (or *bolim* in Teenek), a large 40-cm tamale made collectively by the women. It is offered to Mother Earth and then to the people. We all approach with a papatla leaf, similar to a banana leaf, to eat from there. We drink water and smoke the offering. We begin before dawn. Every place where Mother Earth receives the caress of the sowers brings us closer to achieving the sowing. The heart has been seeded, the energy has been harmonized. *Huitzitzili* and the children play to the rhythm of the dances. Suddenly, the heat intensifies, clouds cover us, and small drops caress our bodies and Our Mother Earth: The conception of abundance begins! We all give thanks and leave the plot walking in a line, as if our footsteps were still dancing to the rhythm of the heartbeat of Our Mother Earth.

Climate Justice from above has not been just

This heartbeat that guides our steps is the very one that the capitalist system ignores and threatens. **Our planting ceremony, as described above, is for us an act of climate justice itself.** However, when so-called «climate justice» is spoken of from above, far from being just, it has been an empty promise. We return to words that resonate with us from the World Conference of the Peoples Against Climate Change, held in Cochabamba, Bolivia—far from our territories—but in its declaration, the words connect with our reality:



Soledad Guerrero and Tomasa Cruz Guerrero, mother and daughter from the Teenek people. Photo: Saralet Ramos

Today, our Mother Earth is wounded, and the future of humanity is in danger. Corporations and governments make us discuss climate change as merely a rise in temperature without questioning the cause, which is the capitalist system. We are confronting the terminal crisis of the patriarchal civilizational model based on the subjugation and destruction of human beings and nature [...] Under capitalism, Mother Earth becomes merely a source of raw materials, and human beings become means of production and consumers—people valued for what they have rather than for who they are. (World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, 2010)

Faced with this commodification of life, we had to take action, **strengthening community organization to minimize the gaps that keep us from climate justice**. We were fighting on three fronts: the attempt to expropriate water to send it to Monterrey, the imposition of fracking, and the struggle for our autonomy as Native peoples.

For defending our sister water—one of the most prized “assets”—we are being questioned for not agreeing to send it to where our families go to work. They lie to us, saying it’s for the neighborhoods where our children suffer from shortages. It’s not enough for them to take our underpaid products, to take the strength of our youth and return them old, sick, or dead! Now they want the water! So that when our exhausted bodies return, they will have nothing to drink or eat.

Facing the threat of fracking and its gas pipeline, we shout our outrage! We march and shout No to Fracking! They think they can deceive us by saying that gas is a more sustainable option, but it causes irreversible damage to our water quality, biodiversity, and our health. The use of traditional wells would no longer be viable, as our water would be filled with heavy metals; fracking would continue to wound Our Mother Earth.

In 2018, to remove the gas pipeline, we invoked the *Ley de Justicia Indígena y Comunitaria de San Luis Potosí*⁵⁵. To defend life, it was crucial to ally with sisters from other communities for a *Ley Nacional Indígena*⁵⁶. Although it was authorized in 2024, it is still insufficient. Secondary laws need to be regulated, and the simulation of prior consultations must be combated, especially when they are financed by those with a stake in the projects or carried out without community representation—actions that are part of the national movement for the free determination and autonomy of Native peoples organized within ALDEA.

55) Indigenous and Community Justice Law for the State of San Luis Potosí.

56) National Law on Indigenous Peoples.

Our Unrecognized Work as Women

Women have always been part of revolutionary movements; we are essential to achieving a life of dignity, as our Zapatista sisters say: we build community. Although we are essential, the value of our work in defending life is rarely acknowledged. Women's resistance has had to forge a path not only against capitalist exploitation but also against those who claim to fight alongside us.

At the same time, we have lost public spaces to commercialize our activities, weakening the local economy. Even as mothers, we have been judged for our ways of raising children, of showing love to our daughters and sons. But **we know that without us, no moment of the struggle would have been sustained.** There would be no places to gather, no food, no organization, no calls to action—there would be no community defending and loving our Mother Earth.

It was this exclusion that made us look inward and weave ourselves into a Network of 35 women's groups: artisans, embroiderers, weavers, traditional cooks, medicine women, and rural producers. Although the capitalist system continues to support exploitation, **we have our own ways of life**, which allow us to remain united and sustain spaces for reflection. The social and solidary economy is a great framework for fostering ways of relating to one another: we share supplies, hold collective sales, and participate in bartering; we know that having our own means of livelihood is a cornerstone of our farming.

This inward focus has strengthened us and our productive systems; we have positioned our work rooted in tradition and **vindicated the wisdom of our grandmothers.** We have gone beyond our region, and we teach our language, demonstrating that this is the first act of resistance we undertake as grandmothers, mothers, aunts, and sisters. We claim our voice and position ourselves where we are seen and can make demands. Because now we fight for our territory, for the health of our bodies, for *noh newilistlij*—**we will never again fight from a place of scarcity; we resist from the abundance of our territories!**

And that’s how we formed alliances and took to the streets. Now we see women in positions of power and authority organizing actions such as the inter-community march on March 8 (8M). We gathered and called for the march without government involvement, relying solely on community leadership. We marched in one community, and women from five other communities joined us. We came together—children, youth, grandmas, and women—all of us needing to be seen, knowing we had each other’s backs. As we walked the streets, we saw those who couldn’t come out to march leaning out of their windows. The young women participated with messages urging us not to tolerate the situations they’ve experienced in their daily lives.

We generate stable economies, bring money to our communities, drive vehicles, navigate, and travel singing. We have fun. We meet other women to learn from their experiences; we reclaim our forms of self-care: we use our herbs, back rubs, walks, rest breaks, hugs, and care for one another. We grant justice to ourselves.



First 8M action summoned by women who are authorities in the Native communities of Tampemocho, La Laja, Tanchachin, Camarones and La Morena, Municipality of Aquismón. Young Teneek women with their banners after working together and getting organized for the march.
Photo: Nydia Morales.

Today, young women are marching for their rights; together, we are taking our place in decision-making; today, we are walking for economic autonomy and celebrating our political participation.

Today, we see the rewards in the young people who are organizing in their communities and influencing community regulations. We see girls whose *newilistlij* is **to be important in their communities because today they learned that it is important to be a woman—to be a Native woman.**

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12

Roots and hope: more than a decade walking with the movements for the defense of the territory, and for Socio-Environmental and Climate Justice

Urgent Action Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean (FAU LAC)⁵⁷

Regional



*We are wet earth, soaked by the rain that nourishes us and plants
 hope. We are food cooked on the campfire,
 with ingredients we harvest with our own hands.
 We are passion fruit /cálala/ chinola/ granadilla/ parchita/ curuba tacso—a
 fruit with many names, a symbol of our diversity and of the
 different territories we inhabit.
 We are leaves, that turn green with life and that wither as time goes by.
 We are a blanket of herbs that accompanies, soothes, and enables.
 We are a coconut palm, planted from ancestral wisdom.
 We are mycelium, taking and spreading roots,
 creating and strengthening connections.
 We are a spiral weave, uniting from our
 individualities for a collective feminist commitment
 by us, all of us, and our territories.*

Collective sentipensamiento⁵⁸ by FAU LAC

In Latin America and the Caribbean, colonization and extractivism have been historical processes of physical, spiritual, and biocultural dispossession, which have particularly affected racialized communities. This dispossession has permanently sought to make invisible and erase stories, identities, practices, and wisdom deeply rooted in these territories. However, despite these attempts, they still persist.

Today, socio-environmental conflicts are intensifying, and human rights defenders face multiple overlapping crises, worsened by the severe crisis of the democracy model that instrumentalizes and dismantles the states in favor of big capital in various countries across the region, and by the disproportionate impacts of the climate crisis. Likewise, there has been a rapid emergence of hegemonic narratives and technical positions on the climate crisis, promoted by corporate interests in the Global North. These narratives

57) Written by **Maite Smet**, Bodies and Territories Program, with the contributions and insights from the FAU LAC team.

58) Sentipensamiento (feeling-thinking) refers to a way of knowing that integrates emotion, reason, lived experience, and collective practice. It challenges the separation of feeling from thinking and affirms knowledge as relational, embodied, and rooted in community.

influence climate finance without addressing the needs or demands of local communities, and promote false solutions⁵⁹ that hide the responsibility of those who are accelerating the climate crisis.

Social and feminist movements in Latin America and the Caribbean—particularly Native, Afro-descendant, campesina and coastal communities—are powerful agents for the transformation of systems of injustice, inequality, and dispossession. The Urgent Action Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean (FAU LAC) recognizes the fundamental and rooted role that these movements have played and continue to play in the defense and protection of life and territories. They not only articulate struggles of denunciation or resistance against dispossession, but also build collective, comprehensive, and community-based proposals to dignify life and focus on other possible presents and futures in response to the climate crisis. These proposals are based on collective care, the *Buen Vivir*⁶⁰, as well as the protection and defense of ecosystems.

In light of this situation, diverse organizations and funds—both regional and global—are working to support movements and human rights defenders, seeking to secure resources and support that contribute to the sustainability of their struggles. The FAU LAC is a regional feminist fund that contributes to the strengthening of movements led by women, trans and non-binary people, through agile and appropriate support in contexts of risk and opportunity, focused on protection, comprehensive security and collective care.

59) False climate solutions are deceptive proposals that, through environmental discourse and false innovation, perpetuate overconsumption, fossil fuel dependence, and the hoarding of wealth — all in the absence of transparency, participation, and real democracy. They often promote concepts such as the green economy, carbon offsetting, synthetic fuels, and nature-based solutions. (Latin American and Caribbean Platform for Climate Justice & Global Campaign for Climate Justice, 2023).

60) *Buen Vivir* is a concept rooted in the worldviews of Indigenous peoples across the Andes that understands well-being as living in balance and reciprocity with the community, the natural world, and the spiritual realm. It emphasizes collective flourishing over individual accumulation.

This chapter aims to share the journey taken by FAU LAC in accompanying movements that protect and defend territories and fight for socio-environmental and climate justice. Along the way, FAU LAC has been guided by attentive listening, dialogue and learning, as well as by the building of networks that strengthen collective action.

Diverse wisdom has been generated and consolidated in order to provide support that accompanies political action, social mobilization, advocacy, organizational strengthening, and the sustainability of movements throughout the region.

At the same time, this journey has prompted FAU LAC to critically reflect on its role as a feminist fund and its practices. It recognizes its political responsibility to contribute to transforming the financing system for socio-environmental and climate justice, by placing the realities, wisdom, and territorial proposals—particularly those of women, trans and non-binary communities—at the center. This chapter also seeks to share how FAU LAC understands and carries out its feminist work, supporting those who defend territories and strive for a dignified life within them.

Defending the territory: a priority placed at the center from the very beginning

In the face of escalating threats and attacks against women territorial defenders, and in direct response to requests for Rapid Response Grants (61), in 2013 FAU LAC created the Mujeres, Territorio y Medio Ambiente [Women, Territory, and Environment] Initiative — a collaborative space for coordination, advocacy, and the co-creation of knowledge with feminist and territorial organizations.

As a result of these partnerships, key publications⁶¹ were produced with a feminist, decolonial, and comprehensive approach, which today form a fundamental basis for the fund's work and critical

61) See References.

reflection as it supports movements for socio-environmental and climate justice in the region.

An important milestone of this Initiative was the collective elaboration of the Regional Report “Modalidades de criminalización a defensoras del territorio y limitaciones a la efectiva participación de mujeres defensoras de derechos ambientales, los territorios y la naturaleza en las Américas”⁶² published in 2015 and updated in 2016 in collaboration with 12 women’s and feminist organizations and funds⁶³. This report, presented to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), at its first thematic hearing and subsequently cited, set a key precedent in the recognition of the specific forms of violence faced by women defenders of the territory.

As a result of this collaborative effort, various key regional platforms were pushed forward to collectively reflect on the role of care in the defense of territories. This first step marked the beginning of the recognition and appreciation of protection, comprehensive security, and collective care as an essential political and community strategy for the sustainability of life and the continuity of social movements.

Within this framework, in 2019 the FAU LAC launched *CUIDANDERAS*⁶⁴, a web series that tells the stories of Latin American women defenders committed to caring for their territories, healing their bodies, and resisting extractivist and racist models in Bolivia,⁶⁵ Colombia, and Ecuador.

62) Forms of criminalization of Women Defenders of the Territory and limitations on the effective participation of Women Defenders of Environmental Rights, Territories, and Nature in the Americas

63) FAU LAC, the Fondo de Mujeres del Sur (FMS) , Alquimia Fund, la Unión Latinoamericana de Mujeres (Red ULAM), the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID), Asociadas por lo Justo (JASS), Iniciativa Mesoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Humanos, the organizations Acción Ecológica of Ecuador, Madres de Ituzaingó of Argentina, Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones de Mujeres Trabajadoras Rurales - CONAMURI- of Paraguay, and Mujeres Defensoras del Río Pilmaiken of Chile.

64) A word that combines “cuidadoras” (caregivers) and “curanderas” (ancestral healers).

65) The chapter “Cuidanderas: Hermanas del Altiplano” (Cuidanderas: Sisters of the Altiplano)” received the Berta Cáceres Award at the 5th Edition of the Dona’m Cine International Feminist Short Film.

The Initiative was consolidated as the *Women and Territories Program* in 2016, in a context marked by the assassination of Lenca Native defender Berta Cáceres. This event, which shook social and feminist movements across the region, reaffirmed the urgency of creating a strategic program to support the defense and protection of territories, centered on the voices and struggles of women, trans and non-binary people. The program emerged as a complement to long-term environmental and climate financing sources, offering **agile, adaptable, and immediate resources** to reinforce fundamental strategies and specific ongoing actions for the defense and protection of territory, strengthening the leadership and visibility of women, trans and non-binary people in these struggles.

In its first year, the program took a small but significant step: it awarded six grants in five countries, and year after year, the program grew not only in terms of reach but also in depth. In 2020, in response to the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic (FAU LAC, 2021), the number of grants increased significantly to more than twenty, a practice that has continued annually to the present day. Through the program, we have reached thirteen countries in Latin America and, since 2024, the Caribbean as well⁶⁶, recognizing the specific impacts of the climate crisis on the island region. The program's evolution has been guided by a regional analysis, prioritizing territories in highly volatile socio-democratic contexts, marked by an increasing extractivist pressure, a constant intensification of environmental and climate impacts, and the proliferation of false climate solutions.

Between 2016 and 2024, 170 *Bodies and Territories Grants*⁶⁷ (formerly known as Strategic Grants) were awarded to organizations led by women and/or trans and non-binary people from diverse peoples and communities: Native, Afro-descendant, Black, Raizal, fishing, Quilombola, riverine, campesina, urban, mining, rural,

⁶⁶) Countries in Latin America: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and El Salvador. Countries in the Caribbean: Haiti, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic.

⁶⁷) At the same time, between 2010 and 2024, we have awarded more than 540 Rapid Response Grants focused on "Environmental Justice/defense of territories, common goods, and nature."

environmentalist, feminist, journalist, artisan, among others. These grants have helped strengthen the political work of these organizations through processes of documentation and participatory analysis, community communication, and advocacy; experiences of intersectional resistance in the territories; organizational and community training on environmental and territorial rights and climate justice; territorial and food sovereignty, including the revival of languages, ancestral wisdom and practices; and the building of networks of care and solidarity to ensure a dignified presence in the territories.

The commitment to Collective Care in the defense of territory, socio-environmental justice, and climate justice

For FAU LAC, collective care in the protection and defense of territories constitutes a political and strategic commitment in the face of environmental and climate crises. This approach is fundamental to the sustainability of activist movements, as well as to the processes of healing and regeneration of ecosystems. However, this dimension remains widely neglected in environmental and climate financing, although it represents an urgent need for defenders and their collective struggles.

Within the framework of the *Bodies and Territories Grants*, organizations are invited to allocate a portion of the funding to collective care initiatives, such as spiritual protection actions, relaxation retreats, recreational activities, digital care initiatives, self-care and collective care sessions, the development and implementation of protection guidelines, and ancestral healing ceremonies in collaboration with the territories, all of which promote the comprehensive well-being of their members.”

Collective care initiatives are defined by and for the organizations themselves and make possible—especially in contexts of exhaustion, precariousness, and violence—to sow and cultivate the importance of protection, comprehensive security, and care as transverse elements for the sustainability of personal and collective life, as well as the connection to the earth and life-sustaining networks.

FAU LAC also organizes and facilitates spaces to support organizations and collectives, with the aim of creating moments of pause and rest, as well as opportunities for exchanging reflections, strategies, and possibilities from movements related to protection, comprehensive security, and collective care. The first *AcuerpaFAU*, held in 2023, brought together thirteen organizations of women, trans and non-binary people that defend the territory in the face of mining, agricultural, and infrastructure megaprojects in the Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico.

During this gathering, there was a sharing of strategies for resistance and collective organization in the face of the multiple crises being confronted, and care and healing were prioritized in response to violence and human rights violations in the region.

FAU LAC prioritizes collective care as a fundamental strategy for sustainable activism in the defense and protection of territory and the struggle for socio-environmental and climate justice.

Listening and Reflecting to Act with Political Coherence

Through the Bodies and Territories Program, FAU LAC promotes processes of reflection for strengthening its work according to the realities of movements facing socio-environmental and climate crises.

In 2023, by listening to the various narratives around the crisis and climate justice—and recognizing the urgency of mobilizing more resources for movements defending their territories—FAU LAC facilitated the Learning Group on Climate Justice and Gender⁶⁸. This space brought together thirteen organizations led by women, trans and non-binary people with the aim of listening to those who inhabit the territories, and learning from and with them. Through this collective work, the group went further into the importance of safeguarding territorial narratives, wisdom, and perspectives on how climate justice is experienced in different parts of Latin America and the Caribbean, recognizing them as non-hegemonic voices in current climate debates. From this process and stance, **the collective of participating organizations proposed writing and publishing this book as a living and rooted response to the climate crisis.**

The proposal was conceived as a collaboratively authored book, in which FAU LAC was just one organization among many in the process. This required questioning and transforming its role, taking a step back to prioritize the autonomy, leadership, and power of territorial organizations and collectives, while ensuring the co-creation and co-facilitation of the process. This decision fostered a more horizontal dynamic, coordinated by a group with representatives from three participating organizations⁶⁹, and grounded in consensus-based decision-making, mutual learning, and the recognition of situated wisdom. At the same time, it involved adopting a slower pace—different from the usual institutional rhythm—but one that allowed

68) For more information about the Climate and Gender Justice Learning Group, we invite you to read the chapter 1: "Climate Justice from collective rebellion and writings by women, trans and non-binary people"

69) The coordination group included participants from FAU LAC, Marcha Mundial de Mujeres Macronorte from Peru and Tlalij AC from Mexico.

for the emergence of new outcomes and collectively guided the process's development.

Through this process, FAU LAC significantly strengthened its stance and political understanding—both institutionally and collectively—regarding the climate crisis, which has become a transversal area in its impact and resource mobilization strategies. The fund recognizes that the climate crisis disproportionately affects the various territories of Latin America and the Caribbean. Therefore, it reaffirms the importance of centering and strengthening collective and community-based proposals for the *Buen Vivir* of all, added to the care and protection of our ecosystems, as an urgent and necessary response to these impacts.

This understanding and commitment inspired a specific cycle of the Bodies and Territories Grants in 2025, titled «*Raíces Vivas contra la Crisis Climática – Re-existencias y respuestas desde los territorios*⁷⁰», this call for proposals targeted organizations defending their territories against false climate solutions and environmental disasters exacerbated by the impacts of the climate crisis. These organizations were identified and invited to participate through referrals from FAU LAC's networks and allied contacts working for socio-environmental and climate justice. Through this approach, the aim was to break with the logic of competition for access to funds and, instead, reach communities more directly and organizations led by women, trans and non-binary people who face higher risks in defending and protecting their territories, and who, from their own contexts, are fostering living solutions and setting precedents in the region addressing the climate crisis.

Another significant step taken by the Bodies and Territories Program has been the acknowledgment and intentional commitment to the intersectional struggles that link environmental, climate, social, and gender justice—which are essential for imagining, building, and strengthening possible present and future realities in the face

70) Living Roots Against the Climate Crisis – Re-existences and Responses from the Territories

of environmental collapse and climate crises. In 2024, FAU LAC decided to rename the program Bodies and Territories, with the aim of making visible and ensuring the safe participation of trans and non-binary communities. By 2025, FAU LAC launched a specific cycle of Bodies and Territories Grants for organizations led by trans and non-binary people engaged in territorial defense—who are also part of Native and Afro-descendant peoples as well as campesina, fishing, and riverside communities—with a commitment to continue prioritizing resources for these communities in the years to come.

This journey has led FAU LAC to recognize, question, and transform its practices and positioning as a fund, grounded in a committed feminism and collective responsibility. Its role goes beyond transparently raising and distributing resources: **the fund seeks to actively influence the transformation of the environmental and climate financing system, currently shaped by capitalist, extractivist, and colonial logics.** The fund actively participates in spaces for coordination and political impact, such as the [Urgent Action Sister Funds \(UAFs\) Consortium](#), [GAGGA \(Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action\)](#), and [CLIMA](#), to promote fair, accessible, dignified, and transformative financing that recognizes, values, and supports territorial and environmental struggles led by women, trans and non-binary people. **Transforming financing also means transforming power.**

Through its feminist work, FAU LAC has steadfastly stood alongside movements and communities in their territories as they resist, recognizing their wisdom, supporting their struggles, and committing to a transformation centered on collective care. Based on this commitment, it reaffirms its intention to continue mobilizing adequate and flexible resources to strengthen political processes of collective, community, and territorial transformation that situate alternative present and possible futures in the face of the climate crisis.

Finally, the fund seeks to establish itself as a close political ally that acts through critical listening, amplifies the voices and experiences

of the territories, and facilitates processes without imposition. Likewise, it remains committed to building networks and strategic alliances with those who share the urgency of transforming the financing system and placing struggles for socio-environmental, climate, gender, and territorial justice at the center, thereby sowing the seeds that will take root and sustain the future.

From our feminist perspective:

... we offer close, respectful, and supportive accompaniment. We do so from a situated standpoint, providing support through active listening and trust. ...we respect the autonomy of movements, recognizing that each process has its own rhythm, context, and wisdom.

... we facilitate access to flexible and agile resources to support the initiatives and decisions of movements. They know what they need, how, and when.

... we place collective care, safety, and comprehensive protection at the center, not only as strategies of resistance, but as fundamental conditions for sustaining life and activism in deeply patriarchal, colonialist, and extractivist contexts.

... we honor and highlight ancestral wisdom and living proposals that build more fair worlds, with care for the earth and communities at the center.

... we prioritize and promote diverse and intergenerational leadership, because we believe in the power of weaving together what already exists, what has been, and what may come.

... we approach this with a holistic and comprehensive perspective, recognizing that being a person who defends the territory is not the only role played by women, trans and non-binary people, but it is one that carries enormous risks, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Collective *Sentipensamiento* of FAU LAC

Glossary:

Throughout this book, we retain certain concepts in their original language to preserve the histories, worldviews, and political traditions they embody. This glossary offers brief definitions to support readers while honoring the richness of these terms.

Buen Vivir is a concept rooted in the worldviews of Indigenous peoples across the Andes that understands well-being as living in balance and reciprocity with the community, the natural world, and the spiritual realm. It emphasizes collective flourishing over individual accumulation.

Campesinas refers to rural women whose lives and work are closely connected to the land. Beyond agricultural production, the term conveys relationships to territory, community, and ways of life.

Cimarronas refers to Black women who resisted enslavement and colonial rule by escaping, organizing autonomous communities, and sustaining collective forms of freedom. Today, the term is also embraced by Afro-descendant feminist movements as a political identity that honors this legacy of resistance, autonomy, and community leadership.

Cipotillas is a Salvadoran term of affection for girls, conveying care, familiarity, and a sense of belonging within the community.

Cuerpo-territorio (*body-territory*) is a concept used by Latin American social movements to express the inseparable relationship between body and territory. It understands the body as the first territory and as part of the broader territory that sustains life.

Cuerpos-territorios (*body-territories*) refers to the understanding that bodies and territories are inseparable and are shaped by shared histories of violence, care, and resistance. Rooted in Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and feminist movements in Latin

America, the concept affirms that protecting land and defending bodily autonomy are interconnected struggles.

Cuidanderas is a neologism that combines *cuidadoras* (caregivers) and *curanderas* (ancestral healers), expressing the inseparable relationship between caregiving and healing.

Cujapa is a popular term from Colombia's Pacific coast referring to a woman recognized for her expertise, wisdom, or skill in a particular craft or practice, especially a traditional midwife, matriarch, or healer.

Desocadura refers to the breaking, dislocation, or movement of a bone out of its normal position.

Juntanza is a term rooted in the experiences of Black communities in Colombia that expresses gathering, dialogue, and collective coordination. Today, it is widely used across feminist and social movements to describe coming together as a practice of care, solidarity, shared learning, and collective action.

Nawal is a Maya concept referring to the sacred spiritual energy associated with people, places, and each day in the Maya calendar. In ceremonial practice, the *nawal* of the day is understood to guide reflection, relationships, and actions, connecting participants with the natural and spiritual worlds.

Malaire, *mal aire*, or *mal viento* refers to an illness that arises when a person comes into contact with harmful spiritual or environmental forces that disturb the body's balance, within traditional healing practices in Colombia and across the Andean region. According to these traditions, spirits are forms of energy carried by the air or wind that can attach themselves to a person's body anywhere, especially in the hours before dawn.

Palanzán refers to a traditional preparation of green plantain that is boiled, left overnight, and eaten the next day after being roasted or fried.

Pixab' is a Maya concept referring to the ancestral counsel, teachings, and ethical guidance passed down by elders through dialogue and lived experience. It encompasses collective wisdom that orients relationships among people, communities, the natural world, and the spiritual realm.

Sentipensar is a Latin American concept that forms part of the intellectual heritage of fishing communities in Colombia and describes the inseparable relationship between feeling and thinking. It suggests that knowledge emerges through the integration of emotion, reflection, lived experience, and collective relationships.

Territorio-cuerpo-tierra (*territory-body-land*) is a concept developed by Indigenous and feminist movements in Latin America that understands the body and the land as inseparable territories shaped by interconnected histories of violence, care, and resistance. It highlights that harm inflicted on territories is also experienced through bodies and communities, and that defending land is inseparable from defending life, bodily autonomy, and collective well-being

Territorio-tierra (*territory-land*) refers to the understanding that land and territory are inseparable. It recognizes land not only as a physical space but also as the foundation of collective identity, memory, culture, and relationships that sustain life.

Terruqueo is a term used in Peru to describe the practice of falsely linking individuals, organizations, or social movements to terrorism in order to discredit, stigmatize, or criminalize their organizing and political participation.

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