

DECRYPTING

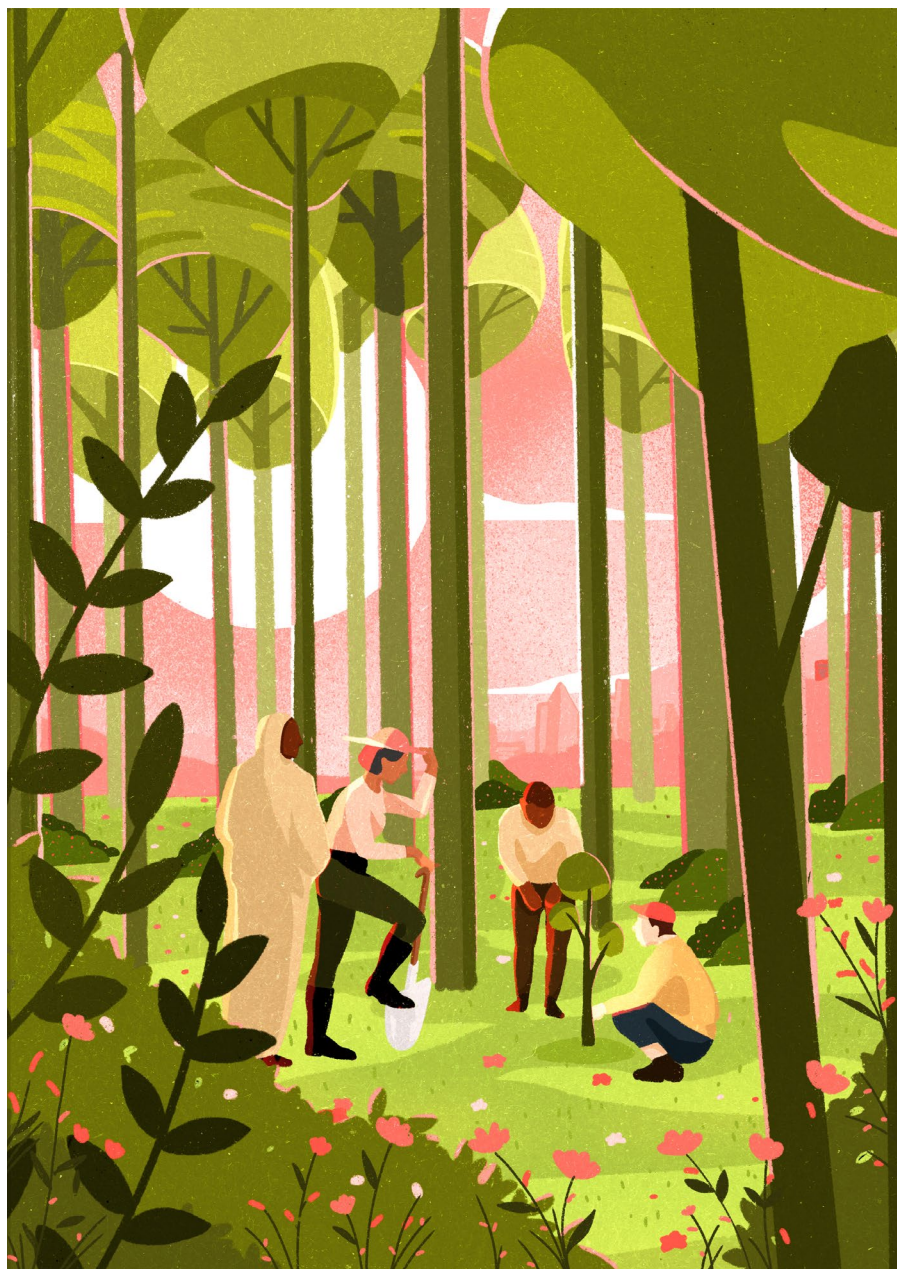
Ecology and Empowerment



LES COLLECTIONS DU F3E



ENJEUX SUR



DECRYPTING

Ecology and Empowerment

A thick, orange, hand-painted brushstroke underline that spans the width of the word "Empowerment".

PREAMBLE

About the F3E

A network dedicated to improving the impact and quality of international solidarity and decentralised cooperation initiatives.

The F3E is a multi-stakeholder network serving the general interest, bringing together NGOs, local authorities and French public health establishments involved in international cooperation. It is also a forum for exchanges open to public authorities, researchers, consultants and European and international partners.

ITS MISSION

To support non-governmental players in improving the impact and quality of their actions. To this end, the F3E develops individual and collective capacity-building activities to help them analyse practices and assess their contribution to change.

To this end, the F3E offers

- Training
- Support and co-funding for support initiatives and studies
- Leading collective research-action projects
- Knowledge production and tools.



THANKS

COORDINATION OF THE BOOK:

Isabelle Moreau, Armelle Barré, F3E
With the support of Elise Idir, Santiago
Hidalgo Sanchez and Vanessa Gautier

COORDINATION SUPPORT:

Vladimir Ugarte - Empodera
Consultores

ILLUSTRATIONS BY:

Fatma Laadhari

GRAPHIC DESIGN:

Nicolas Folliot

ARTICLES WRITTEN BY:

Idriss Yousif Abdalla Abaker
Blanca Bayas
Zoé Bouahom
Elena Brito Herrera
Diego Escobar Diaz
Sergi Escribano
Georgine Kengne Djeutane
Ratna Mathur
Habib Ali Mohammed Mousa
Guillaume Quelin
Manuela Royo Letelier
Jiji Sebastian
Naseem Shaikh
Sembala Sidibe
Alitzel Velasco Burgunder

TRANSLATIONS AND INTERPRETING:

Sabrina Asis
Anne-Marie Cervera
Caroline Fraisse
Marion Guérin
Sarah Mackley
Corinne Taylor

AVEC LE SOUTIEN DE



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREAMBLE	2
THANKS	4
TABLE OF CONTENTS	6
INTRODUCTION	8

ECOLOGY AND ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE	13
The experience of Ixil University in Guatemala	
ELENA BRITO HERRERA - EL ANAY	

ECOFEMINISM AND PEOPLE POWER	27
Examining intersecting proposals in Barcelona, Spain	
BLANCA BAYAS FERNÁNDEZ	

HORIZONTALITY, DIGNITY, HUMANITY	39
Promoting dignity and fighting racism by developing a host farmer network	
HABIB ALI MOHAMMED MOUSA, SEMBALA SIDIBE, ALITZEL VELASCO BURGUNDER, IDRIS YOUSIF ABDALLA ABAKER	

EMPOWERING WOMEN	55
A collective contribution to social and ecological justice in the mining sector in sub-Saharan Africa	
GEORGINE KENGNE DJEUTANE	

CLIMATE INEQUALITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	67
Let's take collective action!	
ZOÉ BOUAHOM AND GUILLAUME QUELIN	

WATER STRUGGLES IN CHILE

The experience of the Movement to Protect Access to Water, Land, and the Environment (Modatima)

81

MANUELA ROYO LETELIER

FOOD COMMONS

Driving the ecological transition of urban food systems through social control, local governance, and ecofeminism

93

SERGI ESCRIBANO

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN FARMERS

Lessons from drought-prone districts in Maharashtra, India

103

NASEEM SHAIKH, JIJI SEBASTIAN ET RATNA MATHUR

A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF DIFFERENCE

Towards a new model of human development based on the diversity of Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples, Colombia

119

DIEGO ESCOBAR DIAZ

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION, SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SOLIDARITY SECTOR

133

THE CONTRIBUTORS

140

INTRODUCTION

“ *That’s why we’ve posited ‘care’, the philosophy of ‘care’ as a phenomenology of politics. What does this mean? It means giving visibility to everything that politics wants to make invisible, and which is increasingly unacceptable. So, we bring all these points of vulnerability to light, and from there we can overthrow power, in a way. And we make sure that what’s at stake here is not domination, but ‘taking care’. Why ‘taking care’? Because it’s from this ‘taking care’ that we reconstitute, that we restore our capacity to act, our empowerment.*¹ ”

CYNTHIA FLEURY

This book started with an encounter.

A meeting between Isabelle, Vanessa and Vladimir, the people chosen by F3E and Empodera Consultores to lead this joint adventure. Armelle replaced Vanessa, who left for other opportunities. Elise and Santiago also joined the team, in particular to prepare the big meeting in Paris.

To finally converge on a common horizon, it was essential to share our stories, allow our sensitivities to express themselves and address our differences. This horizon consisted of three major projects:

- Exploring the relationship between ecology and empowerment in as diverse a way as possible, in order to transcend any simplification of reality, avoid any ethnocentrism, and encourage connections between stakeholders in the field, the academic world and international solidarity. This complex approach would shed new light on the issue.
- Building a community, i.e. a group of people determined to cultivate a common interest and build a space of trust where the words of each and every person contribute to enriching the collective language. The aim was for each voice to find its place or “for everyone’s language to be expressed”.
- Setting up a flexible and educational working method, capable of adapting to the constraints of everyone’s timetables, whether based in Cameroon, Chile, Colombia, Spain, France, Guatemala or India. This method was designed to encourage

1 Cynthia Fleury, Director of the Chair of Philosophy at the Hopital Saint Anne in Paris, (France Culture, “La grande table”, 29/07/2022)
In: <https://www.temoins.com/un-ete-avec-cynthia-fleury/> (in french)

exchange and allow us to abandon our usual ways of thinking in order to welcome approaches that we might not necessarily have thought of or anticipated.

The first project showed us that it was impossible to tackle the ecological issue without considering people's capacity to act and interact in their areas, within their organisations and on an individual and collective level. With this in mind, we outlined our own ecosystem for work and cooperation. The first represented issues related to empowerment and individual and collective emancipation. The second, ecological governance and the management of common goods. The third addressed interdependencies, the decolonisation of knowledge and the construction of new narratives. These three components, or major challenges, enabled us to approach the issues in the form of a dialogue of knowledge, in which all types of knowledge were valued, without any presumption of hierarchy between them.

The second project involved forming a small international community made up of Alitzel, Blanca, Diego, Elena, Georgine, Guillaume, Habib, Idriss, Jiji, Manuela, Naseem, Ratna, Sembala, Sergi and Zoé. These protagonists and witnesses came from seven different countries and their mission was to support the dialogue of knowledge. We formed a community of practice and knowledge united by the challenge of mutual enrichment. We initiated an exchange built on the power of active listening, and on paying particular attention to maintaining a good relational ecology, *cuidados* or care. With this in mind, during our online meetings, we took care to leave room for silence, music, eye contact and a range of collective intelligence dynamics that encourage collaboration at a distance. In this exercise, we benefited from the support of a superb team of interpreters made up of Anne-Marie, Caroline, Corinne, Marion, Sabrina and Sarah, who were able to decipher our linguistic wanderings between French, Spanish and English.

Finally, we drew up a methodological itinerary in five main stages, covering the period from March to November 2023. These stages took the form of web-workshops, based on the challenges we had collectively set ourselves. In March, we identified what we wanted to avoid in this adventure, in particular meetings of experts, ego games, the compartmentalisation of knowledge, ethnocentrism and the use of boring presentations. In April, we got to know each other better by sharing our respective experiences and concerns. In May, we discussed the first written texts and pinpointed the relationships that were beginning to form between them. At the fourth web-workshop, in June, we organised cross-commentaries on the texts. Finally, in September, we were able to systematically structure the texts that had

INTRODUCTION

been commented on, summarise what we had learned and prepare for the final stage of our adventure: the meeting planned for November in Paris.

This book reflects this collective adventure: the dialogues we have been able to unravel, the laughter we have shared and the complicity we are sure will endure.

Disclaimer

This book has been written by several contributors, and the writing style of each author has been respected in order to show that diversity.

The authors were also invited to contribute to each other's articles, in order to continue the dialogue between their respective experiences.

The recommendations are the result of the joint work of the contributors and the participants in a working day dedicated to the theme of 'Ecology and empowerment' organised by F3E at the end of 2023, as well as the F3E team.



ALITZEL - A4



BLANCA



DIEGO



ELENA



GEORGINE - WOMIM



GUILLAUME - GRET



HABIB - A4



IDRISS - A4



JITI - SSP



MANUELA - MODATIMA



NASEEM - SSP



RATNA



SEMBALA - A4



SERGI



ZOÉ - GRET

“ *Ixil University values the life of the communities, their experience, struggles, wisdom and practices in the care* ”



ELENA BRITO HERRERA - EL ANAY

COMMUNITY FACILITATOR
IXIL UNIVERSITY - GUATEMALA

01

ECOLOGY AND ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE

THE EXPERIENCE OF IXIL UNIVERSITY IN GUATEMALA



I would like to thank you for having invited me to participate in this gathering of thoughts and experiences on ecology, the environment, regions, natural assets, and our cultural practices.

I would like to present the experience of the communities of the Ixil people in which I have participated as a student and facilitator at Ixil University and as a member of the group of women who day by day uphold life, mother nature, our daughters and sons.

I give thanks to my Mayan ancestors, grandmothers and grandfathers who bequeathed their history, culture, teachings for a dignified and good life, or *tiichajil tenam* in the Mayan Ixil language.

Description of the Ixil region and people

The Ixil region consists of the municipalities of Chajul, Cotzal and Nebaj, in the north of the *Departamento* of Quiché, Guatemala. It is located on one of the mountain ranges called Sierra de los Cuchumatanes.

It is a region that is very rich in mountains, forests and rivers, water sources, with a wide diversity of food crops, forestry and medicinal plants. It has many different climates: cold, warm, temperate. It is said that there are seven microclimates in the Ixil region. This is reflected in its immense biological diversity.

The Ixil region is made up of three *ejidos*¹ registered in the Second Property Registry located in the city of Quetzaltenango in the late 1800s and early 1900s: Nebaj with 1437 *caballerías*², registered in 1903, Cotzal with 379 *caballerías* registered in 1907 and Chajul with 1,186 *caballerías* registered in 1900.

According to the National Institute of Statistics, in 2018 the Ixil People were made up of 165,694 inhabitants, distributed as follows. Nebaj: 77,377, Chajul: 52,019 and Cotzal: 36,298 inhabitants, 90% being Mayan Ixil and 10% Mayan K'iche', Q'anjob'al and Mestizo populations. There are estimates of a population of more than 180,000 inhabitants including a growing number of migrants working in the United States.

1 In Guatemala, an *ejido* is a collective property assigned to a group of farmers for agricultural work.

2 The *caballería* was an area measurement used in the Spanish Empire between the 15th and 18th centuries, measuring 100 feet by 200 feet (approximately 30 × 61 m, or about 1,858 m²).

ECOLOGY AND ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE

The communities of the Ixil people have a very strong Mayan culture that respects mother earth. They practice Mayan ceremonies at the change of the Mayan year, in the holy corn sowing and harvesting seasons, in their sacred places and ceremonial centres. Their spiritual guides teach families, girls and boys to talk to mother nature, the mountains and forests to give them a life.

The majority of the Mayan Ixil population lives in conditions of poverty and even extreme poverty and is subjected to high levels of child malnutrition. The forced labour and slavery brought by the Spanish invasion 500 years ago has only changed in form. Contempt, racism and discrimination against indigenous peoples are alive and well.

Due to exploitation on farms and by corporations, the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples and other major injustices, civil war broke out in 1960, six years after the US government cut short the democratic revolution that began in 1944.

The Peace Accords

During the civil war, the Guatemalan State, through the army, committed more than 660 massacres, mainly in the Mayan Indigenous Communities. In the communities of the Ixil people, the army committed more than 114 massacres, burned down houses and crops, bombarded mountains, forests and rivers, and constantly persecuted the population.

In 1996, the Peace Accords were signed and the civil war ended. The state undertook to respect human rights, provide reparations to victims, promote justice, strengthen state institutions, respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and made other commitments to build democracy based on social justice.

The first laws recognising the Indigenous Communities and Authorities, National Languages, improvements in the education system and justice were enacted.

On 10 May 2013, a Guatemalan court of justice passed sentence against General Efraín Ríos Mont for genocide against the Ixil people in 1981, 1982 and 1983. Ten days later, pressure exerted by the rich forced the justice system to overturn the conviction. Despite that, in the history of Guatemala, it is written that the Guatemalan state committed genocide against the Ixil and other Indigenous Peoples.

In 2015, the Constitutional Court ordered the government to carry out prior and informed consultation with the Ixil Ancestral Authorities of Cotzal and Nebaj even

though it had authorised the construction of high-voltage electricity transmission towers and the construction of a hydroelectric plant in the Ixil region without even having informed these ancestral authorities.

That year also saw strong mobilisation against corruption. The president and vice-president in office were sent to prison, and the main families wielding economic power publicly acknowledged that they had committed corruption. All this was the result of the work of the Public Prosecutor's Office and the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad de Guatemala – CICIG).

In recent years, the Maya Q'eqch'i, Copones, Xinkas, Chuarrancho and other indigenous communities, demanding the application of national and international laws, have achieved recognition of their rights over their regions and forms of ancestral authorities to counter the invasion of mining, hydroelectric, palm oil and other mega-projects.

These and other initial achievements of the Peace Accords are at risk of being undermined because the last two governments in office have weakened the justice system, clearly favouring transnational corporations, and have placed state institutions at the service of powerful corrupt groups, protected by their impunity.

Where we are heading, our region, natural assets

After the civil war from 1960 to 1996, the Indigenous Communities and Peoples of Guatemala began to heal the wounds caused by the army's counter-insurgency policy and to recover the communal social fabric that had been torn apart by massacres and genocide.

Many Indigenous Communities resumed and reinforced the care of their mountains, forests, rivers, flora and fauna, teaching the new generations and their different forms of ancestral authorities.

In the Ixil region, due to its different climates, agriculture now plays a more dominant role with food crops, fruit trees and medicinal plants grown to produce healthy food and ensure good health.

ECOLOGY AND ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE

Women are increasingly involved in different activities as midwives, teachers, community authorities, as students in various schools and universities. Young men and women are involved in activities in their communities and municipalities.

All efforts are targeting what we call *Tiichajil Tenam*, that is, a dignified, just, good life, good food, good health, living in harmony with nature. If we no longer have rivers, mountains and pure oxygen, due to pollution and drought, we cannot have a good life.

Ecology according to the Ixil people: respect for Mother Nature

Based on my own experience, as a student and facilitator at Ixil University, we study ecology, because we study and practise our culture of respect for Mother Nature who gives us life. Without her we cannot live. She gives us oxygen, rivers, water, mountains, life, our thoughts, feelings and wisdom.

Traditionally, we used to ask for permission from nature, from the trees, from our ancestors – men and women – to pass on knowledge for a better life, to take care of nature with its natural assets for the sustainable life of communities and of the mountains, forests, rivers, animals, flowers and birds.

Now the danger threatening mother nature and her natural assets is increasing. **The other culture that considers nature as an economic resource, to do business, to make profit, is entering and affecting the vision of our communities.**

That is why it is very important for young men and women to learn to respect mother nature and the community, to know the region, natural assets, crops and food, and whether they have access to health, education and other public services.

We need to respect Mother Nature, her mountains, forests, rivers, animals, birds and flowers because they give us life, oxygen, firewood and food. For this reason, we give thanks to our ancestors in ceremonies with a commitment to respect and care, because this is how the life of the communities is upheld.

The State has another vision based on the commercialisation of the rivers to produce electricity, destroying the mountains to extract minerals, to generate resources for corporations. This is not the right path. It is not part of our culture. It is the vision of the State.

Some issues affecting life and ecology

The mining and oil industry uses the forces of the earth. If we do not take care of the earth, we are heading towards disaster or the destruction of Guatemala and the Ixil region. Storms Eta, Iota and Julia caused a lot of damage and should be taken as a warning from nature that it cannot be subjected to any more damage caused by corporations and governments.

The forests are being destroyed because of the logging industry instigated by corporations and the governments in power. The government has a forestry institute that gives permission to finish off the forests. It says that more trees need to be planted to replace those that are cut down, but this is disregarded. When trees are planted, they are of a different kind, which disrupts the ecology, the ecosystem and respect for mother earth.

In the Ixil region there are protected areas, but they are taken over by corporations and the State, and the population is not allowed free access to them, which affects the family-based economy and the community's assets.

Corporations and government officials provoke divisions and conflicts in communities trying to care for the region and their natural assets.

Respect for the rights of Indigenous Communities and Peoples to be consulted

Faced with the abusive behaviour of corporations in the Ixil region, in 2011 the ancestral indigenous authorities filed several actions for legal protection in the courts. In 2015, the Constitutional Court ordered the Ministry of Energy and Mines to carry out a free and informed prior consultation with the Ancestral Authorities of Cotzal and Nebaj.

Several years ago, the government of the day had authorised the construction of high-voltage power transmission towers for the Palo Viejo hydroelectric plant of the Italian company ENEL, under the name of TRANSNOVA, in Cotzal, and the Vega I and Vega II hydroelectric plants in Nebaj without having informed or consulted the ancestral authorities of Cotzal and Nebaj.

In 2016, preparatory meetings began between government representatives and the ancestral authorities of Cotzal and Nebaj. But then the government representatives

ECOLOGY AND ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE

did not attend. They changed officials. They did not agree to discuss electricity generation and transport, which would have made it a real consultation and not an imposition or simply a requirement.

After this experience, it is clear that corporations use governments to impose their large hydroelectric and mining projects, destroying mountains, forests, rivers and animal life and violating the rights of communities.

They use various deceptions to bring young unemployed people on board. For example they give them a job for a few months and then offload them. In other cases they give gifts. For example, the Italian company that owns the Palo Viejo hydroelectric plant in Cotzal gave backpacks to the children, but these backpacks only lasted a month, they were rapidly damaged as they were of poor quality.

Ixil University: study and practice of Ixil Mayan thought for a good way of life

In the midst of the reconstruction of the social fabric broken by Guatemalan state repression, corporate threats to our regions and natural resources, abuses by government institutions, and the search for ways of living well, Ixil University was born.

Ixil University was set up in 2011 to implement processes for studying and practising Mayan thought in order to live well, in other words, to restore the social fabric shattered by the State during the civil war and since the invasion, and to imagine a dignified life in the future.

It also aims to follow the experience of dialogue led by our communities and ancestral authorities, talking to municipal and national governments, critiquing the State, its public policies and its laws, and using our proposals and actions to create a new respectful relationship between the State and the indigenous peoples.

Good living, or *t'ichajil tenam* in Ixil Mayan, means the good way of life of the Community and the good way of life of the mountains, forests, rivers, animals, flowers, birds, fresh air, clouds, rains and the sun. This is what we study at Ixil University.

Ixil University is located in the communities of the Ixil people, studying and putting into practice Ixil Mayan thought for the good living of the communities and their mountains, forests, rivers, animals and crops, all the components of mother nature.

The study and practice of Mayan Ixil thought is in the communities where there are elders, men and women who give us their experience and wisdom, the values of respect of our Mayan Ixil culture.

It provides a university education for men and women whom society and the State claim are illiterate, ignorant, backward and other insults expressing the contempt, racism and discrimination against indigenous peoples, our knowledge and cultural values. **So it's also about training and fighting to restore the dignity of our peoples.**

Ixil University values the life of the communities, their experience, struggles, wisdom and practices in the care of their mountains, forests, rivers, animals, birds, crops and flowers, in growing corn and medicinal plants for healthy and nutritious food. It promotes the creation of gardens by students as part of their study and practice, the preservation of ancestral seeds, respect for elders, women, girls and boys, adoption of the Mayan calendar and the practices of Mayan Ixil spirituality.

It also values other knowledge, techniques, sciences and wisdom of other peoples in other parts of the world that we do not know, other ways of seeing the world.

They are present in the topics and courses that we study and put into practice at the Ixil University for Good Living. The aim is to promote our knowledge and the knowledge of others, by decolonising the vision imposed by the colonial invasion.

In the community centres of Ixil University, about 90 students regularly study, about 40 men and 50 women, of different ages, of different grades of schooling, some have never attended school, college or institutes. In some branches, there are more women than men, more young people than older ones.

The spaces for study and practice are within communities, sometimes in a family home, sometimes in a classroom, sometimes in community halls, sometimes in the open air or under a large tree, the most important thing being that knowledge and practices are applied.

The women, mothers, men and other students of Ixil University share and replicate knowledge with their families, neighbours, friends, groups and associations in the communities so that the children may learn about their roots, the history of their communities and the values of Mayan culture.

In several cases, mothers bring their children to the study and practice classes. They contribute their knowledge, and their daughters or sons who accompany them write down the ideas and knowledge, which is another way whereby girls and

ECOLOGY AND ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE

boys receive knowledge to deal with the different problems that their communities will face in the future.

Some students are as young as 12 and some are older than 60 or even 70. The elders give their experience, wisdom, the history they received from their grandparents from before the invasion, all the suffering during colonisation that is still ongoing and the struggles they have endured.

Young people learn about history, suffering, struggles, what has been lost, what is to be valued. They receive the knowledge and advice that spiritual guides, midwives, grandmothers and grandfathers pass down to the new generations directly, in their own families and communities, living together with their families, neighbours and friends.

When they study the different topics, students start by asking each other what they know about the topic. They visit the elders to ask for their advice, wisdom and experience on the subject. Then they present the knowledge they have received to their classmates, discuss it, come up with new ideas and knowledge, study and practise, and collectively build up their knowledge.

After three years of study and practice, they are recognised as 'technicians in rural community development'. In the 3rd year, each student researches a problem that they choose with the community, and proposes a solution to the problem. The community authorities, facilitators and technicians from other universities assess them.

After three more years of study and practice, learning critically about the institutions of the state, its public policies, its justice system, also with a research topic in the 3rd year, Ixil University awards a master's degree with specialisation.

They study once a week, for half a day, and do two assessments during the year, because they have to work the land, get food, participate in community activities, support the ancestral authorities, and cover various personal and family needs.

Ixil University follows the Mayan calendar in its operations, beginning its activities after the change of Mayan year, which currently takes place in February. Certificates, diplomas and qualifications are then awarded to students who complete their university studies at the end of each Mayan year.

Finally, I would like to share with you that **Ixil University, together with other indigenous universities under construction, is not yet recognised by the State of Guatemala, despite the ratification of international instruments recognising**

the institutions of Indigenous Communities and Peoples, such as ILO Convention 169, the United Nations Declaration and the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The recognition of Indigenous Peoples' own institutions remains a historical debt of the Guatemalan State. **We, the Indigenous Peoples, will continue to build our own educational institutions.**

In the case of the indigenous universities, to counterbalance the negative attitude of the Guatemalan state, the experiences of exchanging knowledge and university educational practices at the national and international level are of vital importance.

This is how we are building Ixil University in communities. It is our experience that we share today, with its positive and negative parts, respecting other experiences in other countries and regions, that seek a good life for communities, societies, peoples, people and mother nature.

That is what I had to say as a student and as a facilitator at Ixil University.

Thank you very much.

ECOLOGY AND ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE

COMMENTARY

A grassroots institution capable of laying the foundations for a new way of thinking, by SSP

This article tells the story of the Ixil community in Guatemala and the challenges they have met with such strength. It is inspiring to read about their vision for the future, and how they honour and preserve their knowledge and wisdom for the young people of the community and for the whole world. At a time of unprecedented climate change and the destruction of natural habitats, it is essential to create new grassroots institutions capable of laying the foundations for a new way of thinking and planning that respects the earth and humanity.

The article provides important insights to help understand how a centre of learning, such as this university, can be created, and how young people can be interested in learning and then protecting and conserving their land and traditions. The University has already brought together people of all ages to share their knowledge and use their skills and expertise to redefine the way economic development is carried out. Elena's testimony makes you want to know more about the link between historical chronology and the loss of traditional knowledge. This would lead to better understanding of how university courses would make knowledge more effective and how it could be documented and shared with new generations.

Since women have been recognised as the custodians of knowledge in communities, the article also makes us want to better understand their role in community governance and how they currently influence the priorities of their households, communities and government. Traditional systems for organising women within communities can be supportive or limiting, so it is important to study their influence on social and family practices. The status of girls, their rights and their current priorities are linked to this question. What access do girls have to traditional knowledge, what is their level of education and how many women study at university (and in what proportion)? The University could play an important role in enabling girls and young women to be better prepared to cope with economic change and the destruction of their ecology.

As far as the University itself is concerned, future generations around the world need to learn how the custodians of traditional knowledge have conserved and managed their environment and ways of life in harmony with nature. The way in

which knowledge is documented must be easily accessible and available in the public domain. Better understanding of the learning process that empowers students, teachers and the community is needed.

Knowledge is valued for its content, its form and the way it is used. The article mentions the way in which the University transmits knowledge, and this piques our curiosity about institutional partnerships and platforms that pass on knowledge to communities in villages and towns. Similarly, we are keen to find ways of having the University recognised by the government. It would be a learning experience for other countries facing similar challenges.

On a broader level, it would also be important to understand the potential for sharing the knowledge of the Ixil community with other communities in Guatemala and with institutions in other countries, as well as the vision of this exchange for future generations.

“ *Alternative forms of community organisation and mobilisation have emerged from street struggles and popular awareness of what we need to live with dignity.* ”



BLANCA BAYAS FERNÁNDEZ

ODG – OBSERVATORIO DE LA DEUDA EN LA GLOBALIZACIÓN
SPAIN

1 Observatory of debt in globalisation

02

ECOFEMINISM AND PEOPLE POWER

**EXAMINING INTERSECTING
PROPOSALS IN BARCELONA,
SPAIN**



My contribution focuses on how grassroots awareness-raising, organisation, and mobilisation intersect with the principles and ideas of ecofeminism². Each of the latter's diverse strands – upholds the reproduction of all life, in a dignified manner, with well-being and sufficiency, as part of a balanced, resilient ecosystem. Moreover, it opposes biocidal models³ and structures hostile to this social and ecological reproduction.

The ecofeminism to which we refer at the Observatorio de la Deuda en la Globalización (ODG) adopts an approach considered to be constructivist and materialist. **It combines the ideas of feminist economics and ecological economics. The former emphasises how the current social and economic model (heteropatriarchal capitalism) relies on the time and contributions made by most women to the care sector, and has a negative impact on their well-being.** Ecological economics denounces the way in which this same model applies a similar extractivist logic to natural resources, which are exploited for the benefit of capital without taking into account the limits of their natural regeneration and sustainability.

Collective rights and sovereignty: reproductive commons

What is the link between our ecofeminist approach and grassroots awareness-raising, organisation and mobilisation?

Ecofeminism strives to ensure the basic requirements for people to lead dignified lives, which is not the case in the current system. These include material and immaterial needs, such as access to energy, water, food, housing, health, education, and care, while taking into account the regeneration of all ecosystems (ecological dimension). We refer here to collective rights because they must be accessible to the entire population, in a fair and equitable manner, in sufficient quantity (basic cover), while collective responsibility must be taken for their implementation. At the moment, the aforementioned fundamental needs of various social groups are not being met. These include women, migrants and racialised groups, indigenous

2 Ecofeminism includes schools of thought, policy proposals and social movements, and highlights the fundamental link between the domination, exploitation and degradation of the earth and non-human nature, and the oppression of women and dissident identities, as well as other social groups (indigenous peoples, racialized people, LGBTQ+, among others). Adapted from the full definition: <https://odg.cat/es/ecofeminismos/>

3 A concept derived from chemical science, the term 'biocide' designates a product intended to destroy, deter, render harmless, hinder the action of another organism or otherwise exert a controlling effect on it.

ECOFEMINISM AND PEOPLE POWER

peoples, people with dissident identities, and of course people who fall into more than one of these identity categories, making them even more vulnerable due to the very organisation itself, and to the advantage of the system.

We champion peoples' rights to make decisions over these resources, going beyond an anthropocentric vision and the needs of humans alone, by integrating the rights of other living beings and ecosystems as a whole. This is why we support the idea of sovereignty that underpins these struggles, understood as peoples' right to define their own, sustainable production, reproduction, distribution, and consumption policies and strategies⁴.

In the case of our ecofeminist approach, we extend this idea of sovereignty to all the aforementioned material and immaterial dimensions necessary for life: energy, water, housing, health, education, and care. We emphasize that these are reproductive goods and services, which have a purpose of use and an ecological perspective, rather than production targets for the benefit of the market economy. Relocation, local access, appropriate extraction and generation of these resources are fundamental to ensure sovereignty and an ecological and feminist – ecofeminist – proposal in line with the principles we have described.

Sovereignty is the alternative to neo-colonial extractivist models, as practised by transnational capital companies from the Global North that exploit the resources of countries in the South. It is also an alternative to the extreme dependency of the urban dimension on the rural dimension, among other things. In other words, it breaks with the logic of unjust global chains, as in the case of care work: women migrating from the South to the North to take on very insecure jobs looking after other people, leaving other even poorer women in their home countries to care for their families. Energy chains offer a further example, which involve extracting energy in the Global South for export and transport through mega-projects that not only displace communities but leave them in a situation of energy poverty at source. Consequently, these resources are once again concentrated in the countries of the North, where access to energy is no more guaranteed for the whole population.

Awareness-raising, organisation and mobilisation of people are inherent prerequisites for the right and power to make decisions (sovereignty). In turn, they imply a democratic process based on social and popular foundations, where the most vulnerable groups have their say and make decisions. Recovering the memory

⁴ Adapted from Via Campesina's definition of food sovereignty.

of communities' uses and customs of the reproductive commons is essential to achieving sovereignty and popular empowerment.

Decommodifying everything, to counter fake solutions

The current economic model is based on the privatisation and commodification of common goods for the benefit of a few. There is therefore a concentration of resources to the detriment of a model that guarantees the coverage of rights (accumulation by dispossession⁵). Common goods are often channelled through the public dimension towards private commercial objectives in what are known as 'public-private partnerships'⁶.

Capitalism has redesigned its approach by offering 'fake solutions', which are neither ecological (greenwashing) nor feminist (purplewashing) nor democratic nor empowering for the population. Fake solutions consist of measures and policies that simply reform capitalism, such as supporting the massive construction of renewable energy infrastructure by the same energy oligopolies – responsible for the same extractivist and polluting model that led to the current ecological crisis – instead of supporting renewable energies on the basis of planning, degrowth, redistribution, and public and community options.

Public-community: bottom-up options

Given that markets and the private-mercantile alternative do not cover social needs and will not reverse the current crises (rather they serve to exacerbate them), we champion public-community options that exist in the struggles for different collective rights and sovereignties. Here, we are referring to options for participation and decision-making based on the organisation of communities and neighbourhoods, as well as public guarantees and management.

Focusing on proposals implemented in Catalonia – drawing on other experiences from the South and the Global North – that can also be extrapolated to other

⁵ Concept invented by David Harvey.

⁶ Formulas allowing the private sector to build and manage traditionally public goods or services (such as hospitals, schools, roads, railways, water, sanitation and energy), with public guarantees. For full definition, see: <https://odg.cat/es/colaboraciones-concesiones-publico-privadas-cpp/>

ECOFEMINISM AND PEOPLE POWER

places, the principles and proposals for public policies and community promotion put forward by social movements in this area are⁷:

Energy sovereignty

An energy model that respects the natural, social, and cultural environment, underpinned by decision-making that is local, resilient and democratic, and that leaves untransparent and inaccessible approaches well in its wake. This means:

- guaranteeing the production and supply of energy through public companies in which local residents are effectively involved. Democratisation and knowledge of energy rights;
- recognising, facilitating and promoting the formation of local energy communities (LECs); facilitating spaces for LECs and for self-sufficiency, such as solar panels;
- promoting analysis and transparency, and participating in supra-municipal or joint organisations. Municipal observatories and supra-municipal organisations.

Food sovereignty

A relocated food system that takes into account its own limitations and needs, and recognises its links with and dependence on an invisible and subordinate rural world. The challenge is to construct a co-responsible and conscious system by:

- humanising supply chains, developing agro-ecological and feminist communities. Local food distribution and trade, markets and a basic level of income for farmers;
- facilitating forums for training, dialogue, and promotion of local food. Distribution and consumer cooperatives;
- enhancing and promoting agro-ecology and self-sufficiency. Community gardens, cooperative supermarkets, markets, social and school canteens;
- promoting access to land for all, especially women. Advocating land redistribution that gives property deeds to women, who continue to be excluded, and who in some regions, have no right to land at all.

⁷ See the full proposals inspired by: <https://odg.cat/es/publicacion/propuestas-ecofeministas-para-repensar-las-ciudades/>

Access to water and governance

Rethinking the model of water accessibility and governance by adopting a comprehensive, locality-based approach that recognises the social and ecological value of water. Recognising, managing and guaranteeing water as a human right and an essential common good in order to:

- promote universal access and governance of water, in harmony with the land and aquatic ecosystems;
- promote information, participation and joint governance of water;
- champion direct public management, controlled and supervised by the people themselves, with social pricing.

Housing and mobility from an ecofeminist perspective

Enhancing and strengthening the right to housing, promoting transformative projects linked to neighbourhoods/villages involving local residents to:

- move to local solidarity⁸, accessing the necessary facilities at neighbourhood/village level, to turn towards sustainable mobility; in the case of cities, enacting the '15-minutes on foot' principle, so that people's needs are met within this walking radius;
- uphold the right to decent housing for everyone living in rural and urban areas, including setting up public housing and co-operatives to assign use;
- build truly resilient and sustainable communities, making use of roofing, planting, and climate shelters.

The collective right to care

It is about the right of every person to be and to feel free to care and to be cared for, throughout their lives and in the context of reciprocal relationships. It is about empowering us to decide how much, how and from whom we wish to receive care; including the right to say no to care⁹, by:

- setting up local, public care networks and public-community care systems;

⁸ Extract from Col-lectiu Punt 6's 'towns in solidarity' proposal.

⁹ Definition of the XXX collective.

ECOFEMINISM AND PEOPLE POWER

- promoting key strategic services for social workers and care spaces for carers, and introducing a minimum wage;
- implementing a shock plan for care workers and pressing for further legislation to guarantee equal rights across all workers.

Healthcare and social services

These are indicators of **social well-being associated with residents' living and working conditions, linked to different spheres of urban governance**: from urban planning to housing, food, healthcare, air quality, access to water, transport, and waste management, to name but a few. To achieve this well-being, the following measures need to be put in place:

- de-commercialised healthcare: make basic medical services public⁹ and/or bring them (back) under local control, including dentistry, psychology;
- promotion of community healthcare and public well-being;
- the concept of caring and compassionate living: collaborative architecture for housing and care facilities, communities for the elderly.

Community education

This refers to schools, their playgrounds, streets and parks, family and neighbourhood associations, canteens, leisure centres and extra-curricular activities.

The aim is to:

- champion public childcare services. Free and/or affordable rates;
- make every neighbourhood a learning community and raise awareness about after-school care;
- use space for collective education: bring 'play' into spaces/places, rewild and soften playgrounds, which can be made available to the public outside school hours.

Final thoughts

Alternative forms of community organisation and mobilisation have emerged from street struggles and popular awareness of what we need to live with dignity. **These are options built from an ecofeminist perspective, contrary to the interests and profits of the market economy.** Such proposals prioritise the reproductive

dimension through socially necessary jobs, which are precisely the most ecological and least polluting. Here, we are referring to care services, health, education, as well as jobs linked to resources such as energy, food, and water, which should be subject to better planning and regulation, **so that they are based on sensible use rather than extractivism**. These jobs can also include a feminist perspective if the reproductive and care work that underpins each of these activities is valued and redistributed within the population.

There are a wide array of alternative proposals that break with the capitalist model's mindset of exploitation and dispossession of nature and people, in line with collective rights and sovereignty referred to herein. It is important to identify, strengthen, champion and/or show solidarity with such community alternatives, that can be scaled up and/or reproduced, that reflect the reality of each people, and can inspire us. Such experience and knowledge can be (re)produced in different contexts, in their diversity but also in their similarity, and are only possible thanks to popular organisation and empowerment.

ECOFEMINISM AND PEOPLE POWER

COMMENTARY

The intersection between ecofeminist proposals and people power, by A4

This article covers the areas in which civil society must take action to improve living conditions for everyone and to develop social justice. Each of the areas listed is essential (education, health, care services, housing, access to water, food and energy sovereignty, equality and the fight against sexism and racism), but can never be treated in isolation from the others. Indeed, while it is vital to take action to ensure a proper education for all, this cannot be achieved without access to decent housing and a proper healthcare system, and vice versa, and so on. Hence our firm belief that we each have so much to learn from what is being done elsewhere. Each group can act with one cause or another at its heart, but it cannot function independently of the others. We need links, connections, and contacts to inspire, support and help each other.

A4 had the chance to meet the Top Manta cooperative, which originated in Barcelona and now exists in other cities such as Zaragoza, and also sells its products online. Its activity focuses on the design and manufacture of clothing by people in insecure social and administrative situations, known as '*manteros*'. Rather than selling items illegally on the street, where they risk being prosecuted by the police, these people are given the opportunity to work in a cooperative, a contract, a salary, and a chance to regularise their situation, thereby gaining access to decent housing, health insurance and a dignified life in its entirety.

In the same way, at A4, we share a desire both to bring about change from the bottom up, on an equal footing, and to unite all battles. Although we play a less active part in the feminist fight, we firmly believe that it is an integral part of the struggles we uphold.

So, we are a self-managed collective, we operate horizontally and take decisions by consensus, precisely in line with what Blanca emphasised: the importance of change coming about through collective, united action, based on the needs and experiences of each individual.

In addition, our aim is to create a network of welcoming and supportive places and people to help offer training and work in the agricultural and craft sectors. It is a social struggle, for the dignity of every individual, for access to a stable situation,

decent housing, healthcare and decent work. Because we are exploited in jobs that we did not choose, and we strive to enjoy the same rights as people with French nationality. Our fight is also ecological: because agribusiness is monopolising land, developing single-crop farming and destroying the soil, we seek to ensure continuation for the farmers who will be retiring soon (half the farmers in France will be retiring in the next ten years), and to develop food sovereignty.

“ Those who cross the sea know
the land ”



HABIB ALI MOHAMMED MOUSA, SEMBALA SIDIBE,
ALITZEL VELASCO BURGUNDER, IDRISSE YOUSIF ABDALLA ABAKER
ASSOCIATION A4 - ASSOCIATION D'ACCUEIL EN AGRICULTURE ET ARTISANAT (A4)

03

HORIZONTALITY, DIGNITY, HUMANITY

**PROMOTING DIGNITY
AND FIGHTING RACISM
BY DEVELOPING A HOST FARMER
NETWORK**



Association A4

Association d'Accueil en Agriculture et Artisanat (A4)¹ was set up in France in 2021, and was officially created in 2022.

Creation

It all started with a few friends in the Paris suburbs, during the first Covid lockdown (spring 2020), talking about returning to the land. We had migrated to Europe, have problems obtaining a legal status in France, work where we can, in the city, in high-pressure jobs where we are exploited. We are regarded as cheap labour, because we have no rights. We are here not just for ourselves, but also to help our families back home. We also have difficulty finding stable accommodation. We want to a dignified life and fulfilling work. Some of us would like to settle down and do what we did in our country, i.e. working the land, or practising crafts (welding, carpentry, etc.). Others of us would like to return to our country, having acquired skills here that could be useful over there to feed our families (e.g. cheese-making.). But as long as our rights are not recognised, we can only expect to live in precarious conditions, day by day.

At the same time, we were in contact with activists interested in the state of small-scale farming in France. In the next ten years, half of all farmers will be retiring. Agribusiness is expanding, urban sprawl continues unabated and farmers are disappearing. Some of us have worked on large farms. There too, we were cheap labour, doing repetitive tasks without learning anything, in living conditions that could be described as slavery².

Then we were invited to the Notre-Dame-des-Landes ZAD (in western France) to talk about our experience of working in agribusiness. This event was an opportunity to meet other people who wanted to return to the land and who were also having problems with obtaining legal status in France. So, the A4 project was launched.

1 Our website: <http://www.a4asso.org>

2 A survey showing the conditions of posted workers in the south of France: <https://www.blast-info.fr/articles/2023/podcast-travailleurs-detaches-les-dessous-dune-exploitation-o6BNJYpdR20aFkBVZGFeKA>

HORIZONTALITY, DIGNITY, HUMANITY

Objectives

The aim of A4 is to bring together people from the towns and the countryside, people looking for work with those looking to employ them. The idea is to create a network of welcoming places that offer training, internships, exchanges, work or even help with setting up in agriculture or a craft activity³, to help people regularise or stabilise their situation.

So, we meet farmers and craftspeople to help build this network and exchange know-how and skills. The aim is to find both the right working conditions and training that interest us so that we can understand the challenges and issues facing farmers and craftspeople today, and look for common solutions.

Our aim is to ensure that people are well looked after. To this end, we have drawn up a hosting protocol and set up a working group to act as a link between the location and the hosted person. Another working group is also looking for a place to acquire so that we can have our own activities and welcome people who want to join us. Other working groups investigate legal issues, look for possible funding, think about ways of looking after each other, create a directory and map out the network to facilitate exchanges. We are also launching a survey to raise awareness about exploitation in the agricultural sector.

How it works

Today, there are around fifteen of us behind the project. We have all been volunteers since the outset, and in 2023 we began to receive financial support and created two full-time equivalent jobs to allow us to commit fully. Then there are around a hundred volunteers who are involved, either in specific working groups or in local groups. Following the fact-finding trips that enable us to discover different areas, local groups are formed, creating local dynamics that become autonomous so as to maintain links with local farmers and craftspeople and develop exchanges and networks. **A4's primary goal is for the association to be run by the people it is intended for, and not by those who have a better command of French, or are better at public speaking or decision-making.** We are convinced that it is by being actors in our own lives that we can regain our dignity.

³ In the broadest sense (welding, carpentry, cooking, electricity, etc.).

Our operating principles are:

- to respect and treat each other as equals,
- the transparent flow of information,
- collective, horizontal decision-making,
- decision-making by consensus.

This can take time, especially as we do not all have a perfect command of French and we do not all have the same ability to express ourselves orally or in writing. But we prefer to take our time: the time to translate, the time to explain, making sure that everyone understands and expresses themselves, supporting each other through the difficulties we may encounter; and seeking efficiency in the active involvement of everyone rather than in the speed of our progress. Similarly, we need to deconstruct a lot of integrated racist behaviour, and we are training ourselves to improve this more horizontal and respectful way of working.

We hold meetings by videoconference, face-to-face over several days every 3-4 months, and we work in pairs or threes, with one person mastering certain aspects of a project while the other person focuses on others, observing and inspiring each other. In this way, we want everyone to be able to develop their skills, learn new things and move forward with their projects. It is important to help each other, work together and share each other's know-how.

Results and challenges

In its first year of official existence, the group has already hosted around fifty people (canning training, cookery courses, seasonal work, bakery courses, market gardening, construction projects, etc.), put people in touch with each other, set up 3,000 sqm of greenhouses in Lannion (growing peanuts, chillies, pineapples, etc.), organised five fact-finding trips and set up five local groups in Grenoble, Lannion, St Affrique, Ile-de-France and Anjou. It is hard to get our heads around it, and we still feel like we are in the early stages of this adventure. We still have a lot to learn, and the meetings we have help us to find solutions to the obstacles that may arise: groups of employers for farmers who cannot earn a full salary on their own, links between farmers, hosts and support associations to manage the reception process together, etc.

Secondly, we want to showcase our skills. Even though we do not have any qualifications recognised in France, we have mastered techniques and know-how that

HORIZONTALITY, DIGNITY, HUMANITY

we would like to share. We can find work easily on the big farms, but we do not want to continue to work in deplorable living conditions where our labour force benefits the country's economy without giving us anything in return. Sometimes, we have also worked for farmers who, for fear of what their neighbours have to say, have kept us hidden in their homes when there was an on-site farm shop. We are looking for dignified conditions, because when it comes to the work itself, we are sometimes already experts. And for those of you who want to find out about these jobs, we are looking for accessible training courses that can lead to work or to an improvement in your administrative situation.

I, Habib

As for me, Habib, from the time I left home until I arrived here, my life journey has given me considerable experience, both politically and socially. I've travelled through several countries and lived in several different cultures. It's opened my eyes.

The first thing I learned was to respect other people's cultures. And I opened my eyes to my own culture. I couldn't see it when I was at home because I only knew one way of looking at things. My journey allowed me to see how the world works. Seeing the western world, how it's organised, gave me experience. And I even learnt to criticise certain things, certain ways of life, that exist in the world. Before I left my country, the question of ecology didn't even arise. We don't worry about it. In any case, we grow organic crops. There's also agribusiness and people who use pesticides, but the question doesn't arise. Everyone does what they want. We don't have time for this issue because we have other urgent matters to deal with first. Coming here and hearing about ecology made me think about what it means. Here, especially in militant circles, you come across this word a lot. But to this day I don't really know what it means. It's a very broad concept, behind which you can put a lot of things. Like the concept of freedom. We say that one person's freedom ends where another's begins, but in reality that's not true. Yet it's a concept that we use all the time. It's the same for ecology. Everyone respects it in their own way. For you it's respect, for another person it's not. All these are open and vast words that are very complicated to deal with.

For me, ecology is the norm, normality. The environment has existed for thousands of years and becomes autonomous. Every individual plays their part in life, and life goes on. So even relationships between humans are a form of ecology too. **We're part of the world, we're part of nature, so ecology applies to us too. It's about**

respecting nature, and therefore also respecting each person, their language, their culture, their personality. Recognising them, taking them into account. Recognising others as others, in their entirety, even if they are different from me.

For example, we might say that ecology means buying organic and local produce. But there are people who can't eat organic because they can't afford it. You can't force people to eat organic food, otherwise they eat nothing. Of course, there are countries where there is plenty, so everyone can eat well. But people are starving in some countries. If there's a food system that consists of a big chain of shops that feeds lots of people, that's better than nothing. To reject that right away is not to realise that there are people who need it. The poorest people, who are in dire straits, don't know what ecology is and yet they don't have a car or eat meat. They are the most ecological people. **When you have a whole family to feed, you can't volunteer to fight global battles.** We have to think together, take an interest in each other, and think about how to include these people in our struggles and in our activities. You have to have a certain lifestyle, with free time, to be able to think. Otherwise it's not a priority. If I had important responsibilities tomorrow, I would have other priorities before thinking about ecology. When you're in survival mode, ecology isn't the first thing on your mind.

Of course, if eating organic and local food were accessible to everyone, it would be even better. But we're not all equal, and the current state of affairs means that some people can afford it more than others. And, for me, ecology also means respecting individual choices. There are supermarkets and there are organic shops. We make do, each of us lives our own life, and we respect each other.

I defend human beings, whatever their skin colour, culture or nationality. Every human being has the right to exist and live with others. Here, I get the impression that some people talk about 'patriotism'. For me, it's material. The most important things are human beings: that they are respected in their own country. Otherwise, we give value to material things: your country, my country, and so on. What's the point of being proud of your country if you don't respect human beings? The first thing that counts is to consider others as fellow human beings., to live with dignity, to have rights like any other human being. From then on, the person will respect the country and everything else.

I left my country because I wasn't respected. Now, here in France, what's going on? If I'd been respected in my country, if I'd had my rights like any other human being: to study, to receive medical care, to be respected as a citizen, etc., then

HORIZONTALITY, DIGNITY, HUMANITY

I wouldn't have had to leave. I wouldn't have come. It's important to take that into account and move things forward in the society you're in: making sure that everyone is respected, sharing that with people and moving forward with them. That's what life is all about.

If I'm in Europe and I don't care about other countries, there's no point. We're all concerned about respecting the climate and the environment. Otherwise, countries pollute on an international scale. We have to take responsibility at a national level. We have to take less developed countries into account, work together, have a common vision. It's an experience that I've learnt and it's something that the political places I've been to (ZAD, Calais, with activists, etc.) have made me think about. All I've learnt, even from A4 today, is how we can behave together despite our differences. Even when it comes to ideas and missions, we don't have the same ideas. It's not easy, but that's what we're trying to do at A4, and it works very well. All the meetings and discussions nourish me and encourage me to think. In time, I'm able to see things in a way that I didn't before.

I, Sembala

Back in my village, I was already talking to friends, seeing things happening and not understanding much. One day, without thinking, I didn't know what on earth I was doing there. Looking around, I was disgusted. I left straight away without telling anyone. I just took off. The only thing on my mind was to go to Europe. On the way, I went through a lot of difficulties and problems. Every country is different, and little value is given to humanity. The most important thing for human beings today is money. Some countries treat us as if we were nobody. They exclude us. When I was in my own country, I had already experienced all that.

I thought about going back but I wanted to find out more, and that pushed me to keep going until I got to where I am today. I was motivated to keep moving forward, to keep learning, to find solutions. In this world, I've met a lot of people with the same difficulties as me. I've been thinking about how I can also find solutions for these people who want to help, to create a collective to live together, to do things together, so that everyone can do what they want, wherever they are. When I arrived in France, I was thinking about it. I'm grateful for having met A4: it helped me to accomplish some of my dreams and goals, so that I can believe in myself even more. It inspired me to try to talk to people who have the same aspirations as me, who have a lot of experience in this field, create a network between us and

discuss, look for solutions, help each other and live with dignity. When I arrived at A4, at first I didn't understand much. I'm sometimes a very patient person, so I had the patience to watch, listen and observe. I understood what was at stake and decided to get involved and find out more.

This curiosity has enabled me to understand the fears I had about myself and to find solutions. You have to move forward and not stay stuck in a corner doing nothing. I decided that I can do something to move forward on my own and create something with the people around me, be and live together, move things forward together to make things better. Already, when you arrive in France, the only thing you're looking for is papers to legalise your status. You drop everything for that. It takes up all your energy, your thoughts, your desires... And it doesn't work. I thought I was wasting my time, but why not try to find a job to train myself, or someone who can train me for a few days and move on? That's an advantage. Once you've been trained, the papers arrive. Nobody arrives with papers, and that makes life difficult for us. While I was waiting for the papers to arrive – which takes an undetermined time, you never know when – I went on training courses and looked for work. That's why I came to A4. **With the fact-finding trips, I've been able to meet farmers, craftspeople, associations and groups, villages that live differently, that are working to move things forward, each in their own way.**

We created this association and it's great, with people who want the same things, who have tried things and it worked. When people see what we're doing, they say "Wow, we'd like to do the same thing, it's great!". It brings so much joy. "Well done!". It makes me want to continue. It gives hope, the desire to reproduce at home what I've learnt here. I want to help other people who have lost faith, everyone who hears us, and so many people who want to join us. So many things have progressed, so much joy and desire to participate and learn new things over the years. What is the country like where you live, how does it work, is it possible to live there with or without the right papers? As long as I live in France, how can I find a way to make a living? And how we can create a link between us, a network, and do things properly and respect each other's wishes? Respect is the bottom line. Without respect, I don't see the point of doing anything. If you lack respect, you lack everything. You can take all my papers, but leave me my dignity, my self-respect, and I can get back everything I've lost.

HORIZONTALITY, DIGNITY, HUMANITY

We, Aline, Alitzel and Idriss

It seems obvious to us that all human beings should have the same rights and be considered and treated in the same way. A world without discrimination, taking into account who each person is and ensuring that we live well together... But it turns out that this basis is not real, and that we have to fight to ensure that everyone's fundamental rights are respected. The same goes for the way we live. **Why, in the face of climate change and the need to protect the planet, are inequalities growing and individualism taking precedence?**

We've always said that we needed to meet others, to think together about the issues that affect us, such as migration. We've always been sensitive to the suffering of people in precarious situations. Perhaps because we have experienced similar situations ourselves. We want to get involved and find a way of solving these problems, the problems of life, of violence in the world, which is perpetrated against human beings and against all of nature. We want to find a way to make a difference, to find solutions, to think about how we can help others. That's why we're in A4. We were lucky enough to be able to talk to motivated people like us, who are upholding these same causes and trying to solve these problems. So we got together to design and build this project to improve the future or the lives of people in difficulty. We want everyone to be equal and to act according to their responsibilities, and we don't want anyone to feel superior to anyone else.

With A4, we have hope, enthusiasm and we are together. The aim is not to protect ourselves and get a job in agribusiness and that's it. No. The idea is that everyone should be able to work in decent conditions. That everyone can live where they feel comfortable, doing the things they like. We are all too aware of the abuses of posted labour or the working conditions in agriculture in Spain, or in the South of France, for example. We are opposed to and looking for alternatives to dying of dehydration, living in slums, being paid less than the minimum wage for the most exhausting work.

We also want to develop small-scale farming. More and more farmers are being forced to sell their land to large companies that will destroy the soil with monoculture and use farming machinery that is both polluting and requires increasingly sophisticated technology. Is this not the opposite of what we want for the planet and for future generations?

There are people who want to work, and who are forced to accept thankless, unfair and degrading contracts. There are farmers who want their land to feed people properly, locally, while protecting the species living around them, respecting the soil and respecting the workers. **We want these two worlds to meet and work together to find common solutions.** We're building the way forward together, and everyone has a say, a point of view and a contribution to make to the project. Without hierarchy, without 'doing things for others'. Together, equal, respected and dignified.

HORIZONTALITY, DIGNITY, HUMANITY

COMMENTARY

Respect for people, respect for nature (Guillaume, GRET)

“NATURE BECOMES AUTONOMOUS”

When we talk about ecology and empowerment, the first thing we often think of is ‘protecting nature’. We can add an environmental factor to our processes, finance its conservation, try to manage it sustainably...

And yet, as Habib writes, nature has been autonomous since the dawn of time. It protects itself in a ‘natural’ way. It is humans who have deregulated many ecological processes (carbon cycle, water cycle, deforestation, etc.). Humans are the executioners, not the saviours. Ecology demands humility. We owe a colossal climatic and ecological debt to future generations, but above all to the planet itself.

Embarking on ecological transition means taking the time to examine our relationship with nature. In the wake of the sixth mass extinction of biodiversity, I ask myself the question: hasn’t nature also ‘lost its papers’? Isn’t it also waiting for full recognition of its rights and respect? The parallel no doubt has its limits, because human suffering is expressed differently from the suffering of nature, but I personally see here a similar struggle against multiple but common relations of domination: money, neo-colonialism, patriarchy, etc. This is reflected in the testimony of Aline, Alitzel and Idriss, who propose small-scale agriculture as a response to the ecological crisis and the social relations imposed by the domination of agribusiness.

“RESPECT IS THE BOTTOM LINE”

How can we rethink our relationship with nature? Some countries, such as Ecuador, have recognised that nature has rights. But is that enough? Bruno Latour has also conducted experiments with the Parliament of the Loire where, around the table, there were different users and a ‘personification’ of nature: one person played the role of water, others the different animal species. The aim was to establish a ‘diplomatic’ relationship. Nature’s rights were therefore represented and upheld, but within the limits of the understanding that humans can have of nature and its empowerment processes. This can also lead to compromises that nature might not have accepted. Using other, more divine forms of representation – I’m thinking in

particular of the Mami Wata dances in Benin – might avoid such compromises by changing the balance of power.

“Without differences, without hierarchy, without ‘doing things for others’. Together, equal, respected, dignified.”

When I first read the topic ‘Ecology and empowerment’” proposed by F3E, I immediately thought of empowerment in favour of nature. I didn’t think about nature’s empowerment. After reading these testimonials, the idea of ‘our’ empowerment came to mind. And the four words at the end of A4’s text strike me as an ideal for our human-nature relationship.

Horizontality in NGOs (conversation with Zoé, GRET)

ZOÉ

The question of empowerment is central to the text by Aline, Idriss, Habib, Sembala and Alitzel. The angle from which it is approached, i.e. A4 as “an association run by the people it is intended for”, “without doing things for others”, has fuelled my reflections, albeit on a different scale, in terms of development aid and the international solidarity NGO sector.

On the subject of ecology, there is the idea that we are all concerned by these issues, and that at a national level we have responsibilities to accept, while taking less developed countries into account. The Global North has a historical responsibility for the ecological crisis, linked to unsustainable development models. Having recognised this, some French international solidarity NGOs have embarked on a process aimed at reducing the environmental impact of their work, to avoid falling into the following paradox: wanting to support vulnerable populations while at the same time helping to accelerate climate change, the impact of which primarily affects vulnerable populations (in all countries). This raises the question of how to move towards a shared vision of these issues and work together in this context.

A4

At A4, we manage to respect each other properly. If someone has an idea, they raise it and we discuss it. All our decisions are taken horizontally. And they have worked. Sometimes, there are subjects that could create tensions, but we take

HORIZONTALITY, DIGNITY, HUMANITY

more time and move forward in baby steps. Everyone at A4 is careful not to take power, and it's thanks to this attention that things can work.

However, we observe that the people concerned, who come from colonised countries, reproduce the same patterns as the colonisers. Often, the words of a white person will bear more weight and will be more listened to than if it's a black person who shares the same idea. This is because we have learned that white people know everything, that black people are inferior, that what white people say is more valuable. The problem of the dominant white man exists in colonised countries, and we continue to believe that others know best, that they are better and superior to us. How can we change this way of thinking, which is so ingrained in all of us?

We need a lot of tools to overcome these difficulties: to open our minds and decolonise ourselves. It is necessary to be clear that our words must also be respected, restore everyone's value, and show that everyone has their role to play in these areas, so that we may respect each other and work together. Building people's self-confidence is a grassroots effort, and that means listening, training, workshops, working with people who want to change things, like at A4. We need to make subjects visible, discuss them, with people who have already understood these issues.

With regard to the workings of international solidarity, development and cooperation non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which have a tradition of coming to the aid of others rather than operating horizontally, we question the effectiveness of the actions undertaken. Indeed, there are examples of NGOs, with salaried staff, that send food – sometimes out of date – to people who need it, when it would be more effective to put in place conditions that enable people to learn to cultivate the land, to ensure that they can feed themselves locally and by their own means. There are also NGOs that send medicine and medical staff to treat the illnesses of the people they are helping, rather than (re)giving people the means to look after themselves.

This raises the question of the autonomy of each community, each place. People need to have control over their own destiny, to set up a food system that ensures that everyone has enough to eat. There are NGOs with money and at the same time people are dying of hunger: how is that possible? People need to have food so that they can think and invest in projects, rather than spending their time looking for money to feed their families.

ZOÉ

I get the impression that things are changing in the sector, as shown by the projects aimed at turning young people into agents of change. However, we have inherited a paradigm of aid *for* and not aid *by*, and the international structure of this sector is organised in such a way that international solidarity projects are still very often run by Western NGOs that have the means to access funding and the capacity to meet the demands of donors.

I believe that the implementation of horizontality in decision-making and ways of working, as well as the idea of starting from real-life experiences and problems, is a key lesson that we need to take on board in the sector, in order to avoid repeating certain mistakes of the past and to move towards solutions that do not reflect a single vision of the world or a specific way of approaching the problem. In international solidarity projects today, we talk about co-construction with stakeholders, reciprocity, partnerships with local CSOs and so forth.

Your story is inspiring, because it highlights the knowledge and experience that everyone shares, and it underlines the idea that this can take time: time for translation, patience, listening and observation. Yet this time is essential if we are to work together, understand each other and build new solutions. It is also a lesson to be valued, since time is of the essence when it comes to doing things well and challenging ourselves. Yet we often lack time in our work to implement international solidarity projects, seeking to achieve the results set in deadlines that do not take into account the timeframes in the field.

“ *This is a NO to a destructive economic system that harms people, land and nature from which powerful corporations profit* ”



GEORGINE KENGNE DJEUTANE

WOMIN
CAMEROUN

04

EMPOWERING WOMEN

**A COLLECTIVE CONTRIBUTION
TO SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL
JUSTICE IN THE MINING SECTOR
IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**



Current situation

Africa's soil and subsoil are packed with natural resources: land (vast expanses of arable land), water (major rivers) and mineral resources, including fossil fuels (oil, gas, coal) and minerals (gold, diamonds and other precious stones). According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), Africa is host to¹ more than 50% of the world's platinum reserves and 78% of the world's diamonds².

In 2009, the African Union adopted the Africa Mining Vision (AMV). One of its aims is to promote mining as a means of stimulating the continent's economic growth. Even today, development and industrialisation strategies in Africa continue to be based on the extraction of mineral resources.

Pressure on Africa's natural resources has continued to grow, driven by capitalist thinking, in an attempt to solve the multi-faceted global energy and climate crises. Extractivist projects, as well as large-scale land grabs for commercial monoculture (palm oil, rubber), biofuels and infrastructure projects, and the creation of protected areas and reserves, continue to have major social impacts and cause physical, cultural and environmental damage on communities, the ecosystem and the planet. These impacts include violence and conflict, loss of livelihoods and food sovereignty, health problems including reproductive diseases, loss of cultural heritage and denial of the right to self-determination, to name but a few.

The costs of these external factors on women

These social, economic and environmental external factors³ have a specific impact on women because of the patriarchal and neo-colonial division of labour and the exclusion of women from decision-making in their own communities.

Women bear the brunt of the externalised costs of extractive and infrastructure mega-projects. When land is taken from them, they lose the means to feed their families. When water is channelled away from the community or polluted, women have to walk further to find clean water sources. When forests are destroyed, women lack wood for household energy.

1 We say 'host' because Africa's mineral resources are not fully mapped.

2 Vision of Africa's Mining Regime, February 2009, African Union.

3 Social external factors can also be characterised as the transfer of economic, social and environmental benefits that should accrue to African communities and in particular to women.

EMPOWERING WOMEN

In the rare cases when there is compensation, it is paid to the recognised head of the family, usually a man. Women in the communities often say that the men flee to the towns and find themselves new wives or girlfriends once the compensation has been paid. This leaves the women and their children abandoned, with no means of support.

Existing legislation intended to protect communities is deliberately ignored by mining companies

However, certain protective laws do exist, in particular the principles of FPIC (Free, Prior and Informed Consent) set out in 1989 by the ILO (International Labour Organisation) Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (ILO Convention 169). Articles 6, 7 and 9 of this Convention stipulate that consent must be obtained before indigenous or tribal communities are displaced or development projects are undertaken on their land.⁴

In defiance of these laws, the current hegemonic and capitalist way of extracting mineral resources has undermined the rights of indigenous peoples and other marginalised communities, particularly the rights of women in these communities, to participate in the development of their lands and has exacerbated environmental destruction.

This push is akin to imperialism (at the heart of asymmetrical globalisation), as defined by Eduard W. Said: “Basically, imperialism means targeting, settling and staying on a land that you do not own, a distant place where others live and which belongs to them. For all these reasons, the prospect appeals to some, but for others it often means untold misery.”⁵

However, the communities affected, including women, have the right to self-determination

Many communities aspire to determine their own development path through internal processes, and to control their livelihoods, resources and land. They also want to be visible and have their rights recognised through all forms of participation, whether state-led or corporate. But their own community participation is paramount. It is important, because their own perspectives and practices will facilitate

⁴ https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/fr/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169

⁵ Eduard W Said, *Culture et Impérialisme*, Algiers, APIC Edition.

the definition and construction of local alternatives as part of a broader resistance to the dominant development model.

The participation of women is very important in this process. They have long opposed mining through resistance. They oppose the external values imposed on the lives of their people that limit their rights to land, livelihoods and the exercise of their social, economic and political rights. Women throughout the ages have resisted on a daily basis, opposing specific policies and building their own proposals and alternatives to the dominant development model.

Women's invisibility maintained by the patriarchal system and capitalism

In some African countries, the women massively impacted by these growing mining projects are increasingly marginalised and do not take part in the consultation process if there is one. Many of these women, although outraged and indignant, are not sufficiently equipped to defend their rights. They are faced with the false promises constantly hammered home by the mining companies about the benefits that the community or their children could derive from working in the mine. Feeling abandoned and voiceless, no longer knowing which way to turn, many have given up and others are on the verge of giving up the fight.

Their ongoing frustrations remain deep and acute because, throughout human history, traditional gender roles have often defined and limited women's activities and opportunities. This discrimination is reinforced by multiple forms of discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin, national origin, skin colour, social class, disability and age. Women are often excluded from decision-making bodies and consultation forums before mining projects are launched, even though, as we said earlier, they are the first to witness the impact of these projects on their lives and livelihoods.

The LILAK⁶ report sums up the violence and injustices perpetrated against women in the extractive sector: The findings are as follows: the attitudes of the companies have not changed, they talk about their promises and the benefits of mining, not about the extent and objective assessment of their projects; and consent is obtained through hand-picked indigenous leaders. As women are not always recognised as leaders in the communities, it is not considered necessary to inform them, or to give

6 LILAK (Purple Action for Indigenous women in the Philippines), *Mining and violence against rural and indigenous women in the Philippines*, 2013. <https://www.lilak.net/blog/mining-and-violence-against-rural-and-indigenous-women-in-the-philippines?categoryId=7504>

EMPOWERING WOMEN

them the opportunity to participate in any form of consultation leading up to the consent process, so their ideas and values are not taken into account in the whole process. Indigenous and/or impacted women are further marginalised and silenced throughout. Even their rights to information are violated by the government and mining companies, making them even more invisible.

In light of the above, shocked and driven to action by the various forms of oppression and forms of injustice that weigh on women, WoMin, a pan-African ecofeminist organisation, has been waging the battle since 2013. WoMin's⁷ mission is to mobilise and create women's movements to challenge the large-scale destructive extraction of natural resources and propose alternatives that meet the needs of the majority of African women⁸. It is in this capacity that we support certain women in impacted communities in Africa to better organise themselves and defend their rights, that we support their efforts to mobilise and resist, by making their "NO" heard loud and clear by decision-makers and mining companies. Over the years, we have consolidated a constructive partnership with these women, by supporting awareness-raising campaigns focused on women and geared towards activism.

Mobilisation strategy: power to women

Since 2017, WoMin's strategies and actions have included:

Organisational support

It is important to note that the movements we work with already existed in the communities. We did not create them. Our intervention took place in a context where, although these movements existed, they were struggling to make themselves heard. The women were resigned to the situation and had very little support at local or national level. They already had goals to achieve: to defend their rights to consent and, for many, to say no to these destructive projects that were plunging them into extreme poverty. We supported these women and initially helped

⁷ WoMin, an ecofeminist organisation, is based in South Africa <https://womin.africa>. We are a team of activists, thinkers, practitioners and researchers from across the continent. A team of 21 women work on four pillars or issues covering consent and the right to say no, alternatives to development, violence against women in the mining and energy sector, and climate justice. The Consent and the Right to Say No project works with women affected by the Bombore mining project in Burkina Faso, the Toliora (Tuléar) mining project in Madagascar, women processors in Bargny, Senegal, and women affected by the Souapiti dam in Guinea Conakry. See the WoMin website.

⁸ See the WoMin website, <https://womin.africa/>

them to obtain recognition of their legitimacy to set up a movement, and of the legitimacy of their demands at national level. In several African countries, in order to operate, you need to obtain approval from the relevant authorities. Thanks to our support, the women who had organised themselves into a movement were able to prepare the necessary documents and follow the procedures to obtain the necessary authorisations.

Continuing education

The first step was to deconstruct stereotypes and preconceived ideas about the role of women in society. We also had to work to restore their confidence by overturning the information that had been hammered into their heads: that there was nothing they could do, since the project had been decided and things were going to go ahead as planned by the mining companies, and that they would never win their case. To give them reasons to continue their resistance, they were provided with information on the existing legal and non-legal instruments to uphold human rights at national level (in particular the Constitution and customary law), but also at sub-regional, regional and international levels, which the communities can draw on to defend their rights. We have made these rights available to the women in simplified form and are helping them to understand them better, so that they can use them in their advocacy or lobbying if necessary.

We do not stop at that when it comes to training: **frontline activists are invited to take part in the feminist political schools that WoMin organises.** The aim of these schools is to create a space where women can talk freely about their problems, how these projects impact their lives, share their personal experiences and find common solutions. We also give them the opportunity to understand the root causes of their problems, such as capitalism and patriarchy, and how it works. This information is necessary to enable them to build counter-powers in their action to support other resistance movements in Africa.

Documenting the impact of projects on the environment and on livelihoods

We work with women to **document and highlight the impact of these projects on the environment, on their health and on their survival.** At the end of this phase, they know and understand the impact of the losses that await them, on their current families and on future generations. We give them the time and resources to learn about these impacts and the tactics used by the extractive industries to divide

EMPOWERING WOMEN

communities, so that they can protect themselves. Having mastered the documentation of impacts, either through drawings or the editing of short videos, we move on to the next stage by supporting them in major community awareness-raising campaigns, targeting men, young men and women, elders, in short all layers of the population, to broaden their support base.

Exchange and solidarity visit

We are increasing the number of solidarity and learning exchange visits, where **women from one community visit another community involved in resistance to learn from its struggle**. The women train each other and, as they are the custodians of knowledge, this mutual training and learning gives them the strength to resist, to continue the struggle and to make their voices heard because they know that they are not alone. A women's counter-power is thus created with the aim of amplifying their voice.

We have also helped set up a solidarity network by facilitating the creation of platforms and sub-regional networks where the various national struggles are connected and can come together to exchange ideas, such as the thematic Social Forum on the extractive economy.

Social media and community radio

We understand the importance of social media, especially with Covid19, and some of the women leaders have been trained in their use. They themselves take photographs exposing the ongoing impacts of mining projects on their communities and the environment, and publish them to mobilise public opinion. They also make short videos and post them on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Training in the use of community radio has also been very important, because these women, in their mother tongues, inform, raise awareness and make themselves heard. They do not need anyone to talk about their problems for them, because they are the ones experiencing them, and they have the necessary communication tools to expose them.

The right to say no (Right2SayNo)

As stated earlier, laws protecting communities do exist, but unfortunately very few of these instruments support a community's right to make decisions about the land and natural resources it occupies and uses. To remedy this shortcoming, and given that legal proceedings take a long time, we have joined forces with national

resistance groups to launch **the ‘Right to say NO’ campaign, which is a call by communities for the right to a good and decent life, to health and well-being, to control of seeds and respect for collective land rights, to live in a relationship of benevolent interdependence with nature, to be free from all forms of violence and to benefit from public and social services.** This is a NO to a destructive economic system that harms people, land and nature from which powerful corporations profit⁹.

This right (Right2SayNo) is born of resistance and is therefore essentially about **POWER** and a challenge to those who hold and use power destructively. Saying NO challenges systems of power and asserts the right of communities to define their own interests and their own future.

When communities and groups defend nature against major projects that destroy species and people, **they are defending the right of future generations to exist.**

Conclusion

Trained and equipped, women affected by mining projects speak out to defend their rights and make claims to the media, mining authorities and governments. They use their knowledge, their voices and design their own posters for awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns, and take part in sub-regional and regional meetings with investors to present the impact of their funding on their lives and on the environment.

In their resistance, women defend living and hoped-for development alternatives.

This is the key idea behind the YES for which women and their communities are fighting.

Women’s ideas and their real-life application of ‘development’, which focuses on sustainability, dignity and the well-being of people and the planet, are in conflict with corporate and government ideas of development.

By valuing women’s points of view and involving them in development decision-making processes, women become empowered. The work they do every day to ensure the well-being of their families is highlighted and valued. **Because in this way, they are fighting to free women, communities, ancestral lands and forests from the power of multinationals by saying YES to the preservation of biodiversity, ecosystems, ancestral production methods and above all to the preservation of the commons**¹⁰.

9 Information sheet 1: What is the Right to Say NO? <https://womin.africa/>

10 WoMin information sheet 4. Why the Right to Say No is a Women’s Rights question? <https://womin.africa/>

EMPOWERING WOMEN

COMMENTARY

The true wealth of a nation lies in its people, by Diego

This article, which highlights the role of African women in building a new perspective on what it means to lead a good life and how to achieve it, in this case from a gender and social inclusion perspective, was of great interest to me. As the Human Development Reports since 1990 state, “the true wealth of a nation lies in its people”, and this is even truer when it comes to the actions and visions of women, who suffer the negative effects of imperialism and asymmetrical globalisation.

As Pekka Himanen says, “the concept of dignity includes a dimension of care and empathy. Without this emotional core, ethics easily remain a set of abstract principles that are not put into practice. Dignity is a sense of the value of oneself and of others. From an ethical point of view, care is dignity operationalised”¹¹.

Basically, this article rethinks the position on human dignity and the just ecological entitlement that African women need, on the basis of justice and the inclusion of their capacities and needs.

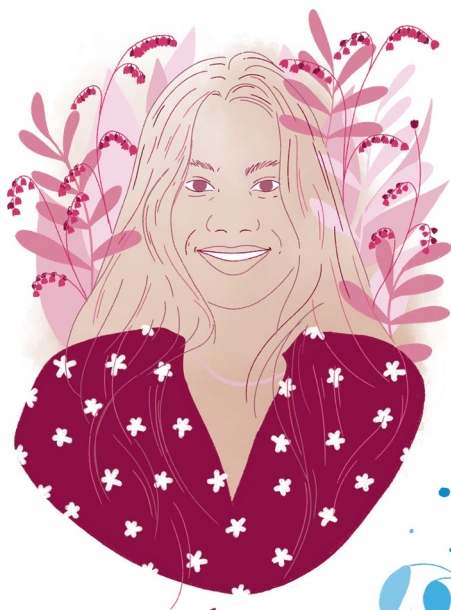
Another model is possible, by Blanca

This article does an excellent job of defining the impact of the patriarchal division of labour and the reasons why women are fighting for a different model, both at a more macro level and within our own organisations.

From the point of view of the most radical feminist and ecofeminist economics, the struggle aims to achieve a reproducible model (with rights covered and the resilience of commons), in order to put an end to the productive and productivist model, a cross between capitalism, patriarchy and neo-colonialism, which leads to commodification, privatisation and the concentration of power among transnational corporations.

11 Himanen, Pekka. Rethinking human development. The cultural link between informational development and human development. Translation by F3E.

“ How much of NGO emissions can really be ‘justified’ in terms of the purpose of their missions? ”



ZOÉ BOUAHOM AND GUILLAUME QUELIN

GRET
FRANCE

05

CLIMATE INEQUALITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

LET'S TAKE COLLECTIVE ACTION!



This contribution is based on experience gained in Guinea in 2023. The findings from the field are intended to highlight the concrete challenges facing communities and international solidarity NGOs in their efforts to fight climate change. At the beginning of the report, some of the courses of action put in place by GRET illustrate a possible approach to tackling these issues. The report is divided into 3 parts: observations / taking a step back from the issue / feedback from GRET's experience.

The two main issues are:

- the risk of maladaptation,
- reducing the carbon footprint of NGOs

The risk of maladaptation or the challenge of being able to act collectively and consciously at a local level

Feedback from the field – observations during site visits

Guillaume Quelin and Hamet Diallo, project manager for Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), carried out a one-month mission in the Fouta Djallon region of Guinea, at the request of the Fédération des Paysans du Fouta Djallon and their members, thanks to funding from the Agence Française de Développement and CCFD – Terre Solidaire. Known as the water tower of West Africa, this region has high rainfall but retains few of the water resources that feed the Senegal, Niger and Gambia rivers.

According to forecasts, climate change will cause temperatures in Fouta Djallon to rise sharply, at a rate equal to or even higher than the average for the sub-region¹. In particular, this will increase the water requirements of plants which, like us, transpire. The soil will be drier and therefore more difficult to work. While rainfall is likely to remain stable overall – except in the border regions of Senegal and Guinea-Bissau – it is likely to vary in time and intensity. Water resources are also dependent on human activities – and vice versa – and are sometimes vulnerable (urban sprawl, excessive logging, large-scale withdrawals, etc.) and sometimes protected (reforestation, protection of sacred forests, etc.).

1 SMHI, <https://ssr.climateinformation.org/>

CLIMATE INEQUALITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

By carrying out field visits along seven of the region's watercourses, we observed adaptation practices in progress:

- **the use of mulch**, an agro-ecological technique that protects the soil from the sun's rays and helps conserve soil moisture, thus reducing the need for watering;
- **the use of motor-driven pumps** to bring water from watercourses to the sometimes distant fields, despite the needs of other users;
- **working the riverbed to create storage basins**, sometimes blocking the normal flow of the watercourse, which has an impact on downstream users;
- **deforestation near watercourses to bring market gardening closer to the resource** and thus reduce the irrigation effort, which is often done with a watering can;
- **installation of agricultural irrigation structures** that can be functional but sometimes not maintained, poorly dimensioned or impacted by land disputes;
- **testing of new varieties such as shea** which is grown in regions further north in Guinea, where temperatures are currently higher, and therefore closer to the conditions that will prevail in Fouta Djallon;
- **decreased motivation for market gardening, which has become too difficult, in favour of cashew nut cultivation in particular**, strongly encouraged by the State and by its selling price at a given time. Cashew nut cultivation leads to significant deforestation and acidification of the soil, while cashew nuts are themselves vulnerable to changes in temperature;

in discussions with users of watercourses, we learned that almost all of them had observed an increase in temperature, but few were aware that this was due to global climate change. In their opinion, the explanation was almost exclusively deforestation, which their communities had themselves caused.

Taking a step back from maladaptation

Adapting to the climate is an ancestral human skill. Human beings can live from the Sahel to Greenland. It is therefore normal to observe adaptation processes in a West African context where temperatures have already risen by an average of at least 1°C².

2 Temperatures have risen by 1-3°C in West Africa since the 1970s, https://cdkn.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/IPCC%20Regional%20Factsheet%20_West%20Africa%E2%80%93FR_web.pdf

Adaptation strategies observed can be classified into two categories:

- adaptation measures that aim to **continue ‘as before’** while trying to protect against the impacts of the climate. For example: *“I’m continuing to grow chillies but I apply mulch to limit the impact of the heat”* or *“I’m continuing to irrigate my field with a motor pump”*;
- adaptation measures that aim to **radically change practices** and behaviour to take advantage of climate change. For example: *“I’m testing the cultivation of shea, an endogenous practice from another region, or cashew nuts, an imported practice”*.

In both cases, there are good practices (mulch testing, shea testing, etc.) and bad practices (use of individual motor pumps, deforestation to bring market gardening areas closer to watercourses, conversion to cashew nuts, etc.). In fact, some practices are considered bad because:

- **they are unfair**, such as the use of individual motor pumps, which accentuates social and economic inequalities with those who cannot afford to use them and will have access to even less water;
- **they have an impact on the environment** and ultimately on the water resources that are sought after, like the practice of deforestation near watercourses;
- **they are themselves vulnerable to climate change**, like cashew nut cultivation, which is therefore not a sustainable safe option.

In addition, most of the stakeholders we met during our field visits (a day-long joint diagnostic walk-through) and workshops attended by around 40 people (industry representatives, individual farmers and farmers’ cooperatives, etc.) are unaware of global climate change and believe that a return to the climate of the past is possible if we reforest. However, even with reforestation, global climate change will continue to increase temperatures, uncertainty about rainy seasons and extreme events (storms, violent winds, etc.). Stakeholders must therefore also prepare for these changes, otherwise their efforts to adapt will be rendered null and void. Raising awareness and understanding the problem is therefore an essential prerequisite.

CLIMATE INEQUALITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

While human beings have a propensity to adapt, we must be aware of maladaptation³. Adapting to climate change therefore requires a collective response planned at a local level, which takes account of social and environmental repercussions, as well as a conscious response to global climate change and related uncertainties. Today, while adaptation planning is accelerating at a national level, it is still struggling to be co-constructed and operational at a local level. It also requires trade-offs between several options, which may be radically different (from economic resilience to strong sustainability). Adaptation cannot be reduced to a technical solution. It requires a political and societal response that opens the debate on possible futures for the region, nature and the community.

Following this participative diagnosis, the approach for the next three years was defined and will be based on 3 pillars:

- continuing the consultation process over time, to initiate integrated management of water resources, with the eventual creation of local water committees, which is in line with national guidelines but remains pioneering at a local level;
- continuing to promote more resilient agro-ecological practices, in line with the Federation's historical involvement in this area;
- co-constructing small-scale facilities to facilitate the absorption of water by the soil, and build up small stocks, managed by the consultation frameworks that have been set up.

³ The concept of maladaptation is also used to refer to a change in the natural or human systems coping with climate change that leads (unintentionally) to increased vulnerability rather than reduced vulnerability. A situation of maladaptation corresponds to one of the following situations: i) inefficient use of resources compared with other options (for example, massive use of air conditioning instead of investment in insulation); ii) uncontrolled transfer of vulnerability: from one system to another, but also from one period to another; reduced scope for future adaptation (measures that limit potential flexibility, e.g. planting long-rotation tree species); iii) calibration error: under-adaptation or sub-optimal adaptation (e.g. a protective dike has not been built high enough). ONERC, https://www.adaptation-changement-climatique.gouv.fr/sites/cracc/files/fichiers/2020/03/La%20mal-adaptation_0.pdf
Translation by F3E

WOMEN, THE FIRST TO BE AFFECTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE

At the start of each workshop, we asked a man and a woman to what extent they had witnessed climate change. The first woman to speak went straight to the point: “We women are the first to be affected by climate change”. We then explored this with all the participants, using the ‘typical day’ method. The women, then the men, listed the tasks they had to carry out i) in the rainy season and ii) in the dry season. The results were similar in the seven sub-watersheds. There are inequalities in the distribution of tasks between women and men. Women are responsible for all household and childcare tasks, as well as working in the fields, while men are confined to agricultural activities. Yet in all their roles, women are responsible for fetching water, the need for which is set to increase as a result of climate change. Women were already talking about the need to get up earlier, go to bed later and fetch water further away. Inequalities between men and women are therefore sensitive to climate change and will increase if equitable adaptation is not put in place. The whole challenge of building local water governance will revolve around this.

Feedback from GRET on integrating climate into international solidarity projects

Avoiding maladaptation is a challenge for GRET because, like other international solidarity NGOs, we work on a range of issues that are sensitive to climate change: flood control, access to water, agriculture, hydroelectricity, forestry, etc. Although GRET has been working for many years on participatory approaches to provide collective responses that take account of social and environmental issues, not all projects yet include analyses of future climate change.

In 2022, GRET defined an ‘ecological transition’ strategy⁴ which has two main drivers of action, one of which is dedicated to integrating climate into projects: “GRET is committed to strengthening its contribution to the fight against climate change by

4 GRET’s Ecological Transition Strategy, <https://gret.org/du-global-au-local-la-nouvelle-strategie-climat-du-gret/> – Translation by F3E of the original french text.

CLIMATE INEQUALITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

developing specific expertise on ecological transition and by systematically taking into account the challenges of ecological transition (climate and biodiversity) in all its projects”.

In particular, a list of questions has been drawn up, which looks at the risk of new GRET projects being maladapted. Training courses and thematic tools have also been set up, in response to requests from GRET’s various thematic teams. This is a first step towards reducing the risk of maladaptation, within GRET’s teams. However, it is also necessary to adapt to the realities on the ground and, in particular, to focus first and foremost on local communities’ understanding of the phenomenon of climate change.

This approach is part of a collective dynamic, particularly at the level of Coordination Sud’s Climate & Development Commission, where other NGOs are involved in this field, such as Geres (climate compatibility approach), Initiative Développement (implementation of vulnerability analysis upstream of projects), CARE France (resilience marker, community analysis approach to climate vulnerability, etc.), etc. Joint publications capitalise on this learning⁵.

The climate and environmental responsibility of organisations and the challenge of rethinking our methods of action and partnerships

Feedback from the field – a feeling of unease and responsibility

When we had to talk to the communities of Fouta Djallon about the involvement of greenhouse gases in the changes we were experiencing and those to come, I felt a sense of unease deep inside. **Yes, my European lifestyle, my very arrival in Guinea, contributes directly to the problems we have come to try to resolve.**

As a reminder, temperatures have risen by 1 to 3°C in West Africa since the 1970s. If we drastically reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, we can hope to see global warming in West Africa at around 1.4°C by 2100, but if we do not reduce our

5 Example of a collective publication: <https://www.coordinationsud.org/wp-content/uploads/Coordination-SUD-Etude-CCD-integrer-adaptation-resilience-2021.pdf>. Traduction libre de texte original en français.

emissions sufficiently, this could rise to 4 or even 5°C. So there is an adaptation factor in Guinea, but also a driver for action in countries historically responsible for the situation, to reduce their emissions. Their emissions or our emissions?

As Valérie Masson Delmotte, co-chair of IPCC Working Group 1 on emissions mitigation, reminds us, “every tonne counts”, and so do the tonnes produced by international cooperation.

As part of this project, we have tried to optimise air travel compared with the initial scenario, by carrying out an initial one-month mission, in pairs with one person from France and one person from Senegal. For the rest of the project, only Hamet Diallo, from Senegal, will travel to Guinea once a year. The pairing will be physically formed once only, at the end of the project.

Taking a step back from a collective dynamic

Increasingly, international solidarity NGOs are taking steps to reduce their emissions. There are many reasons for this:

- a necessary and appropriate response to the climate emergency;
- growing demands from employees;
- changes in donor funding criteria (introduction of climate project classification at Agence Française de Développement, introduction of minimum environmental standards by the European Union's Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations;
- emulation within collective dynamics (Réseau Environnement Humanitaire, Coordination Sud's Climate and Development Commission, Groupe Initiatives, etc.).

Generally speaking, the humanitarian sector has a longer-standing commitment in this area than the development sector. Réseau Environnement Humanitaire (REH) has a charter in which signatories undertake to reduce their emissions by 50% by 2030, based on the IPCC's recommendations. Emissions reduction initiatives within NGOs raise questions about the share of 'essential' carbon: **how much of NGO emissions can really be 'justified' in terms of the purpose of their missions?**

As air travel is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions for international solidarity NGOs, these initiatives are linked to the question of where aid should go, the decentralisation of French NGOs and partnerships in the field. They also raise fundamental questions about North-South / South-South relations within civil

CLIMATE INEQUALITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

society. **This is as much about the power to act for ecology as it is about ecology questioning our means to act.**

NGOs adopt different types of strategies:

- some only set targets for air travel, as this is the main source of emissions and the easiest to monitor and evaluate (on the basis of travel agencies' factors);
- some estimate their emissions and define actions in several areas (transport, energy, purchasing, etc.) without setting a quantified reduction target;
- some also set a quantified emissions reduction target.

Several exercises to capitalise on these transition approaches are underway, including a thesis by Vincent Pradier at Coordination Sud, a planned publication by the Initiative Group and an annual survey that has just been set up by Coordination Sud's Climate and Development Commission, in partnership with Réseau Action Climat (RAC), Réseau Environnement Humanitaire, the Initiative Group and the Developing Countries Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). However, there is as yet little consolidated long-term feedback.

Gret's experience – ecological transition strategy from design to validation

One of the drivers for action in GRET's 'ecological transition' strategy is the reduction of its greenhouse gas emissions.

We started from the observation that GRET, with its headquarters – a major emitter – and our 15 representations around the world – with their different historical, security and other contexts – had similarities with COP member countries. The COP, or Conference of the Parties, brings together every year the countries that have decided to work together on climate change, i.e. 197 countries in 2023. One of the fundamental principles of these negotiations is the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities': each country emits in different proportions, but they do not all have the same historical responsibility or the same capacity to change their trajectory (particularly the least developed countries).

At COP21, in 2015, governments adopted the Paris Climate Agreement, which sets out a specific version of this principle. The States, as a whole, have set themselves a common objective: to limit global warming to 2°C or even 1.5°C, and each, individually, has sovereignty to define its contribution to this global objective. Today, the sum of all the States' contributions, if they were respected, would lead to global

warming of around 3°C. Every five years, countries must raise their ambitions to collectively reach the target set in 2015. There are no penalties, but technical and financial assistance is available to developing countries that are having difficulty meeting their targets.

GRET was inspired by this approach and has set itself an overall objective: *“GRET is collectively committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by an average of 50% for each of its employees by 2030, compared with 2019,”* and has put in place contributions at each site: *“Each site will plan its own reduction actions and define its own reduction target, while respecting the minimum threshold of an average reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 25% per GRET employee by 2030”.*

GRET’s ‘ecological transition’ strategy was validated in 2022 at an Extraordinary General Meeting, the only decision-making body capable of adopting such a strategy. The development of this strategy was therefore based on a consultation process that alternated between time spent ‘clearing the ground’ in small groups and time for collective feedback and debate. This consultation was also based on a long-term awareness-raising approach: around 15% to 20% of GRET employees took part in a climate fresco. The parallel with the Paris Agreement also made it easier for colleagues in all the countries where GRET operates to take ownership of the approach, since all the countries have adopted their own national contributions.

On 11 May 2023, GRET organised its first ‘COP’ to monitor the commitments of each team and each site. All the sites adopted an initial action plan drawn up in the field, and the first concrete steps are now being taken: maintaining cooling by fans rather than air conditioners (sufficiency), lowering the set temperature in winter (sufficiency), purchasing electric vehicles (renewable energy), installing solar panels (renewable energy), etc.

The reduction of emissions linked to air travel is the subject of a parallel consultation project. It is based on consultation sessions using the assertion-thesis method, which consists of testing ‘shock’ ideas, getting participants to work together to find a consensus, and then setting up consultation sessions to define a long-term vision of a low-carbon and resilient GRET.

CLIMATE INEQUALITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

COMMENTARY

Taking responsibility to help combat climate change, by Georgine

This article is very rich in terms of their experience with communities, highlighting the strategies used by the communities visited to adapt to climate change, and their proposals that put the communities in a position of responsibility to act collectively to avoid maladaptation.

The integration of climate into GRET's projects is all the more commendable given that you have taken on your climate responsibilities and are positioning yourself as one of the NGOs making a visible contribution to the fight against climate change.

In your '2022 climate transition strategy', the focus is on reducing our carbon footprint, and we can add reducing electricity consumption, reducing waste, reducing digital pollution and favouring less polluting transport. These efforts are commendable.

However, if the international community does not respect its commitments to contain the average rise in temperatures at the Earth's surface, the Paris objectives will never be achieved. The major polluting countries, and the big mining companies, must reduce their activities linked to large-scale extractivism (the production of fossil fuels, such as oil and coal, being activities that release large quantities of greenhouse gases), industrialisation and the unbridled extraction of mineral resources that pollute the environment, deforestation and intensive agriculture. Countries need to be much more serious about supporting green projects and the transition to clean energy.

“ We are a riverbed in rebellion,
and we will continue to fight
until the last drop of stolen
water is recovered. ”



MANUELA ROYO LETELIER¹

MODATIMA

CHILE

¹ National spokesperson for the Movement to Protect Access to Water, Land, and the Environment (MODATIMA) 2022-2023

06

WATER STRUGGLES IN CHILE

**THE EXPERIENCE OF THE
MOVEMENT TO PROTECT ACCESS
TO WATER, LAND, AND THE
ENVIRONMENT (MODATIMA)**



Life is dependent on water. The latter constitutes around 80% of most living organisms, and the vast majority of metabolic processes within and between these organisms rely on it. Humans are composed primarily of water, which makes up 60% of a human body and 65% of its mass; for newborns this figure can be as high as 70% to 80%.

Other forms of life on earth also need water to survive. Indeed, the earliest forms of life evolved in water. It covers over 70% of the planet's surface, in oceans, lakes, and rivers, but also in the air and the earth. It is vital for regulating the world's climate and biodiversity.

Water is essential for life. There is no substitute for the survival and reproduction of all forms of life, and as such, **it constitutes a basic human right, humanity's and nature's common heritage.**

However, today we face a major crisis due to the deterioration of freshwater sources and in some cases, an irreversible water crisis, water scarcity and climate change. This situation has revived and focused international analysis on the importance of water for life, which in the Chilean case has been exacerbated due to privatisation and unequal access to this vital resource.

The neoliberal reforms implemented in Chile during the 1970s and 1980s led in economic and social terms to a new way of approaching societal development, with a complete shift towards the free market², privatisation, the commodification of social rights, and plundering of the natural commons.

In Chile there are 1,251 rivers, 15,000 lakes and lagoons, and 24,114 glaciers, comprising 80% of the glacial area of the southern Andes. However, **the abundance of water sources is not synonymous with its free and fair distribution.** On the contrary, the reality of Chile's water situation is highly alarming: we are the only country in which water is privatised at a constitutional level, as a legacy of the dictatorship that endures day on day as part of the extractivist model under which we live.

In this context, MODATIMA's struggle has focused on condemning and spotlighting the conflicts over human access to water, and on safeguarding it as a vital element for life.

2 Garretón, M. (2012). Neoliberalism corrected and limited progressivism: the governments of the Concertación in Chile, 1990-2010. Santiago: Editorial ARCIS

WATER STRUGGLES IN CHILE

It is not drought, it is looting

The movement for the protection of water was established in the province of Petorca in 2010. As a result of water being monopolised in the hands of the few, **the surrounding hillsides which flourish with avocado trees contrast sharply with the lack of access to water for farming families and communities.** This region is infamous as an environmental sacrifice zone, characterised by the consumption of thousands of litres of water in pools to irrigate large areas of avocado monoculture, in contrast to the lack of drinking and subsistence water supplies for the communities and the rivers, which have dried up³.

What is happening in Petorca is not an isolated incident: 70% of water in Chile is consumed by agro-exporters and mining companies, that are not willing to regulate their business model to one that is fair to neighbouring communities and the environment. In the 2019-2020 season, Chile produced 168,000 tonnes of avocados, of which 28% were consumed domestically and 72% were exported, mainly to Europe, the United States, China and Argentina. **By all odds, what we export is water.**

Currently, most of the country's river basins are overexploited, especially in northern and central Chile. The river basins in seven regions are over-allocated by the General Water Department, which means that more water rights have been granted than water actually available in the aquifers. For over ten years, and particularly in the last five, droughts have had severe consequences on multiple sectors, accentuated further through hoarding and the unscrupulous theft of water from river basins.

In recent years, 184 municipalities in the country have been living under a water shortage decree, 400,000 families have received water supplies by tanker, and in some cases, schools have been closed due to a lack of drinking water. Currently, 84% of water consumption rights lie in the hands of mining and agro-export companies, irreversibly affecting our national sovereignty over an asset considered strategic for national security and which, above all else, is a fundamental human right.

The current private model of water ownership in Chile promotes concentration in the hands of the few, and does not recognise the democratic and inclusive participation of different stakeholders living in the river basin. Nor does it promote community or public management systems, such as those implemented by rural drinking water

3 Panez, Alexander, Faundez, Rodrigo and Mansilla, Camilo (2017) Politicización de la crisis hídrica en Chile: Análisis del conflicto por el agua en la provincia de Petorca, in Agua y Territorio, N°. 10, pp. 131-148, July-December 2017. In Spanish.

committees, as well as the indigenous peoples and municipalities that have been managing the misnamed ‘water emergency’ for decades, in order to provide water and sanitation access to hundreds of thousands of families. The permanent declaration of water scarcity zones has prevented the safeguarding of ecological flows and favoured the maintenance of water uses that existed in times of greater availability, so that its successive application promotes structural conditions of overuse and the degradation of ecosystems⁴. At the same time, the Chilean water privatisation model only grants decision-making over hydraulic works and their management to waterway management boards and advisory boards (bodies made up of water rights owners), to the detriment of sustainable and participatory drainage basin management.

Despite a Water Code reform in 2021, the water market continues to be maintained as a mechanism for the private reallocation of this good, perpetuating the concentration of water rights in the hands of certain productive sectors, speculation, and the exclusion of less competitive and non-profit sectors. **There is a complete lack of protection for ecological flows with ecosystemic criteria that guarantee the protection of biodiversity and the sustainability of river basins. The ancestral rights that indigenous communities hold over the river basins they have traditionally inhabited and used have been completely overlooked.**

In this scenario, the water movement continues to grow and is today taking on new challenges in the struggle to protect water as a natural, unclaimable common good to sustain life in a context of profound crisis and inequality.

Movement for the protection of water: experiences and challenges

Understanding water outside the logic of property implies venturing down paths that challenge consensus built over centuries. It means developing the capacity to forge community, to see the water commons as a perspective of meaning for life, and together to navigate a way out of the climate crisis towards the necessary de-privatisation of water, and its recognition as an essential good for the cycles of nature and human life⁵.

4 Alvarez-Garretón, C., Boisier, J.P., Blanco, G., Billi, M., Nicolás-Artero, C., Maillet, A., Aldunce, P., Urrutia-Jalabert, R., Zambrano-Bigiarini, M., Guevara, G., Galleguillos, M., Muñoz, A., Christie, D., Marinao, R., & Garreaud, R. (2023). Water Security in Chile: Characterization and Future Prospects. Centre for Climate Science and Resilience CR2 (ANID/FONDAP/1522A0001).

5 Panes, Alexander (2022) El río recuperando su cauce : despojos y resistencias en los conflictos por agua tierra-territorio bajo el neoliberalismo en Chile, Campina Grande/PB: EDUEPB, 2022.

WATER STRUGGLES IN CHILE

Along these lines, the Movement to Protect Access to Water, Land, and the Environment is growing and taking root nationwide in regions where water and land protection require a social and political approach. An array of possible strategies exists. To speak out against water pillaging, we began a national tour to explain how the water market model works and its consequences; **we organised regional debates with social and environmental organisations to highlight the importance of ecological struggles within every transformative political project.**

Given the current climate, and the structural and political nature of the water problem and the socio-ecological crisis, in 2017 we took the collective decision to form a national movement. During the first few years, the challenge was to raise the movement's profile and to provide training. Through action, training, advocacy, and acts of resistance, the movement grew. Step by step, we have managed to bring people from different regions into the movement, which has expanded nationwide, thanks to voluntary, self-managed action to protect water and local areas. **We have also led initiatives and mobilisation against water grabbing and investment projects that affect the water cycle in different phases of glaciers, wetlands, aquifers, and rivers.**

Chile's recent history has had a profound impact on us. We took part in the 2019 social movements, and successfully integrated the 2022 Chilean constitutional process, during which we put forward proposals such as the nationalization of water as part of local planning and the recognition of the rights of nature, among other founding proposals of Chile's new Ecological Constitution.

At the same time, thanks to the water movement, our former national spokesperson, Rodrigo Mundaca, became the governor of the second largest region in the country. The regional government of Valparaíso has established a policy to support local, integrated watershed management as part of a regional plan for water democracy. Public spending has been channelled towards improving infrastructure and equipment, especially rural community drinking water organisations, and public resources redirected to ensure access to water as a human right in the region.

In relation to community management, we have been involved in supporting rural drinking water cooperatives. Such committees and cooperatives were set up in Chile in the 1960s as community initiatives to solve the problem of human access to water in rural areas. They subsist to this day, addressing the considerable demand

for water in rural areas, many of which do not benefit from state provision and are bereft of public drinking water systems⁶.

Women protecting water

The ingrained relationship between the subordination of women and the destruction of nature is a commonality among ecofeminist schools of thought, whose validity is embodied in praxis. It is a theory and at the same time a political and social movement that criticises exploitation methods and environmental domination by a capitalist system that pays no heed to human life and nature's limits.

Overcoming ecosystemic limits has meant imposing a model that undermines the material bases that sustain life. This drive towards destruction and subjugation primarily affects women, as clearly demonstrated by the impact of climate change on nature and on the lives of those who inhabit it.

Over the course of this struggle, women have played a fundamental role, mainly in building a collective narrative and practice that challenge prevailing logic and pave the way to build a programme that establishes water as a common good and a human right. By integrating feminism into environmental issues, we recognise that the oppression that we experience as women also affects local areas. For water autonomy and bodily autonomy!

The experience of the Modatima women of Petorca has shown us how **the progressive denaturalisation of the hydro-social cycle generates damage, but also resistance and organisation**. The *Mujeres Modatima* women's movement has drawn attention to the situation of women environmentalists and the permanent threat to their lives.

In 2022, four women from the organisation were elected to the Constitutional Council, and during this process, action was undertaken to raise the profile of ecofeminism on the front line of social struggles against extractivism. In the words of Carolina Vilches, spokesperson for the movement: "The body, our primary dominion, has been socially neglected, objectified, and devoid of protection through public policies in our country, and in a large part of the continent. We bear witness every day to this shortcoming in rural areas and among the most excluded women. From an

6 Movimiento Regional por la Tierra y el Territorio (2020) Case Study a Familia del Agua: La Unión de Agua Potable Rural en Petorca, p.3, at: <https://porlatierra.org/docs/1969ba4a49237aa8c55974bf9ccb52c4.pdf>

WATER STRUGGLES IN CHILE

eco-feminist perspective, we maintain that the realities of the places we inhabit reflect that 'patriarchy does to our bodies what the extractivist economy does to our regions'. In Petorca, there has been no water for over a decade; food and water are fundamental needs and without water we have no food. That is why we resist as a community, demonstrating that cooperation is the way to solve collective problems. As such we have managed to supply homes to women who still live in plundered Petorca because, without water there is no food, and without food there is no feminism".⁷

This process of growth and politicisation is related to recognising other ways of understanding water, which criticise the instrumental rationality that dominates current forms of appropriating this essential element, as part of processes of accumulation by dispossession that we see in Chile and globally, which expose us as women, and also call us to act:

"Resisting the extractivist advance is not an option, it is our duty. As organised and responsible women, we take the attitude that it is not possible to stand by and watch while we perish. It is our duty to the land, to water, to our own existence to change course, it is a call to love ourselves more, because without water everything simply dries up: gardens, throats, skin, and life stagnates.... without water, life is no more".⁸

Until water is returned to communities and regions

The struggle to reclaim water is a complex and extremely challenging journey. Yet, as long as water, a human right and an essential part of nature's cycles, remains privatised, the water movement, and those who fight to uphold dignified life, will continue enacting strategies to recover water, in the firm belief that by combining multiple strategies we can restore, rehabilitate, protect and preserve natural and cultural ecosystems.

As a movement we believe in taking back and strengthening community water management, in protecting nature and natural commons, in the right to access land, and in protecting nature. We believe in building a militant social fabric, connected across regions, so that we can play an active part in socio-environmental conflicts

7 Vilches, Carolina (2022) Boletín Ecofeminista, 8 March 2022

8 Royo, Manuela (2022) Boletín Ecofeminista, 8 March 2022

and take action with communities to influence institutional transformations in order to address our collective demands.

Social movements are constantly questioning and challenge the flaws created by capitalism and governments that have distanced themselves from the people. But we also put forward alternatives, solutions, new organisational models, and community-based economic and political management systems, and their relationship with the environment.

We are aware of the recent relative success of fascist narratives, yet choose to focus on winning the long-term strategic discourse, so that we can prescribe a programme of alternative social and political movements, and keep challenging institutionality when assuming positions of popular representation. This is the key to improving the quality of our democracies and ensuring our rights, by building from the trenches of water protection, a fair, dignified life in harmony with nature.

The water movement will continue, because we believe in the universal ethics of water as an ecological necessity, as opposed to the corporate culture of privatisation, greed and hoarding. Water belongs to everyone, it is a minimum requirement for a dignified existence, because without water our eyes, our throats and our land dry up, our lives perish. **We are a riverbed in rebellion, and we will continue to fight until the last drop of stolen water is recovered.**

WATER STRUGGLES IN CHILE

COMMENTARY

The decisive role of women in social mobilisation, by SSP

This text demonstrates a wealth of learning on the issues of ecology, governance and community access to water in Chile. It describes the country's ecological diversity, the impact of climate change, and the lives of local, indigenous communities who are denied access to water. The text also explains the challenges of the country's political and economic history and how the development model has affected communities and nature.

Modatima's vision of water, nature, and life is beautifully articulated throughout the text. The objectives and programme descriptions seem to include indigenous women's leadership and the impact of climate change on water, ecology and people. This inspires further learning about the nature of the organisation and its institutional systems, which would be very instructive, especially as the Water Movement now seems to be running a regional council. How this process has unfolded and how it is able to make policy decisions that reflect its vision of empowerment and sustainability would be an important learning point.

In this vision and in the programmes, the position on the role of women, how they are empowered and how feminism is mainstreamed can be a key strategy for any organisation, and represent important lessons learnt for similar initiatives around the world.

“ A new look at food not only
as a commodity, but also as a
human right, a vital necessity ”



SERGI ESCRIBANO

SPAIN

07

FOOD COMMONS

**DRIVING THE ECOLOGICAL
TRANSITION OF URBAN
FOOD SYSTEMS THROUGH
SOCIAL CONTROL,
LOCAL GOVERNANCE,
AND ECOFEMINISM**



The vulnerability of urban ecological food systems in the face of climate emergencies and energy transition makes it necessary to cultivate creative approaches that also induce new narratives in the food sector. In this challenge, **commons take on importance as an alternative for governance and social control of food's structural and strategic elements.**

Urban food systems in urban planning

Food production in urban areas presents major challenges in terms of access to the resources necessary for food growing and reproduction: soil fertility, water quality, availability of equipment for food production and processing, access to markets and climate change are currently structural conditions that need to be considered.

Cities, as densely populated areas, have always been areas of consumption that are highly dependent on imported energy, water and food. The development of infrastructure for their supply has historically been subject to significant tension due to the high cost and environmental impact of the construction of infrastructure (high voltage lines, reservoirs, markets) as well as the speculative interests of certain lobbies.

In this context, cities have planned their urban development or their energy and water supply infrastructure with varying degrees of success. However, **there are only a few dozen experiences of urban environments around the world that have tackled the planning of their food system.** The growing urban population, which according to UN forecasts, will reach 68% of the world's population by 2050, raises the need to question the future of cities and their material limits of development (place, energy or food). Generally speaking, municipal food policies are under-represented in terms of both their number and the economic weight of the local public policies implemented. However, there has been a change in trends governing the design of urban policies, as well as a growing concern for food in these areas. At the international level, this effort resulted in 2015 in the Milan Pact on Sustainable Food for Cities, a non-binding declaration sponsored by the FAO and signed by more than 200 cities worldwide.

Concern about urban food security in cities therefore remains an increasingly topical issue. The vulnerability of urban food systems today depends on two major challenges.

FOOD COMMONS

Firstly, **the ecological transition of food systems**. Industrial agriculture, livestock and fisheries are responsible for 23% of total greenhouse gas emissions. This significant impact shows the considerable dependence of food systems on fossil fuels, both in the production and in the processing, preservation and distribution of food. The absence of consensual regulatory frameworks to facilitate a just energy transition across all elements of the system to comply with the Paris Agreement¹ increases uncertainty about the future viability of a globalised and highly industrialised food system.

Secondly, **universal access to quality food today is not guaranteed**, as demonstrated by the more than 820 million people who, according to the FAO, suffer from hunger and malnutrition. 70% of these are women. On the other hand, this unequal reality is compounded by the growing number of overweight and obese children and adults in urban environments. Among the many factors that contribute to this absurd dichotomy, we should highlight the volatility of food prices, the result of trade tensions between the major powers (China, Russia, Europe, USA), and speculative financial behaviour applied to international food markets. In this context, conflicts such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine or Israel's invasion of the Gaza Strip contribute to creating the conditions for rising energy costs or speculation on basic foodstuffs, making access to food more difficult for the world's most vulnerable populations.

In this way, urban food systems, at different scales and levels, are in a vulnerable position as they rise to these challenges. In particular, they have to deal with negative external attitudes that consider food as a simple commodity. **It is urgent to consolidate and build a change of approach, a new look at food not only as a commodity, but also as a human right, a vital necessity**, a determining element of the culture of peoples and a renewable resource that shapes our landscapes.

The transition of urban food systems is now a reality that must respond to environmental and social justice challenges, breaking with the logic of the accumulation of technological and financial power already in the hands of a limited number of transnationals². In this sense, two strategies have been identified to accompany the food transition towards a more resilient model.

1 United Nations, Paris Agreement, 2015, the first universal and legally binding agreement on climate change, adopted at the Paris Climate Conference (COP21) in December 2015 : <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>

2 Four large corporations (Monsanto/Bayer, Dow/Dupont, Syngenta and Limagrain) account for 66% of the world seed market in terms of economic weight. This concentration of power is compounded by the merger of these corporations with chemical transnationals, the concentration of food distribution (Walmart, Sainsbury's, Carrefour, Mercadona) and the arrival of major non-food players (Facebook, Amazon) in the sector.

Firstly, **food sovereignty should be developed as a set of proposals that place human rights and the rights of nature at the centre of food systems**. It is necessary to move towards regionalised sustainable models that reduce the carbon footprint in the production, conservation and distribution of food by **bringing production spaces closer to places of consumption**. At the 1996 World Food Summit, Via Campesina defined food sovereignty as “the right of peoples to define their own sustainable policies and strategies for food production, distribution and consumption, guaranteeing the right to food for the entire population, based on small and medium production, respecting their own cultures and the diversity of peasant, fishing and indigenous ways of agricultural production, marketing and management of rural spaces, in which women play a fundamental role”.

Secondly, **the food system needs to be considered as commons**, a new approach that incorporates the tangible and intangible dimensions of food. To conceive of food as commons is to go beyond the traditional concept of commodity and **recognise not only the productive but also the reproductive importance of food systems**. The transition from a productive to a reproductive approach also means recognising and projecting into the future traditional forms of community governance which, since Roman times, have allowed relevant agents to control the resources necessary for the reproduction of food systems. Understanding food as commons allows us to construct alternatives to the public-private dilemma in order to propose an alternative, the common management of food systems.

Regionalising urban food systems

Within places, the issue of space and the biotic and abiotic³ elements that occur within them must be taken into account, in order to recognise the dynamics of socio-ecological interactions and their interdependencies. There is for example, the capacity of human beings to transform and control the environment, to exert power over their surroundings and over other humans. It is also necessary to consider the appropriation or domination over certain physical spaces, including material and immaterial goods, fauna, flora, hydrocarbons, water, oxygen and everything that “recognises that the material and carbon footprint of those who have the most is undermining the opportunities of those who have the least”.

3 We consider abiotic factors to be elements of the place, whether physical or chemical, that shape it, such as climate, soils, rain.

FOOD COMMONS

It is worth noting that in this sense, those movements that propose some kind of political, social, economic and/or cultural construction in the place they interact, necessarily enter into conflict with an 'other' that also disputes, shapes and controls the territory. The "construction of one type of territoriality almost always means the destruction of another type of territoriality, so that most socio-territorial movements are formed from processes of territorialisation and deterritorialisation"⁴.

Redefining urban food's politics of place has three fundamental proximity components that have been lost in today's globalised agro-industrial system:

- First proximity: **agroecology**, understood as a form of food production that integrates agricultural, livestock and forestry production in the same place. The aim is to generate a renewable circular system, in which energy inputs and outputs are minimised.
- Second proximity: **short food chains**, which bring agricultural and livestock production centres closer to food processing centres, reducing the carbon footprint of agri-food industrialisation at this stage.
- Third proximity: **short marketing circuits** that reduce the distance to market between food producers, processors and consumers, the final recipients of food, while maintaining nutritional, organoleptic, environmental, social and cultural quality.

In Spain, there is a wide range of regionalised food experiences whose economic and social weight in relation to the national agri-food system is, unfortunately, not very representative. The implementation of this food transition requires municipal policies supported by actions at regional, State and European level to be able to tackle the transformation of structural elements of food systems.

Food commons: an ecological reconciliation between countryside and city

Although they have now reclaimed their relevance, food commons have been present in our rural and urban areas since ancient times. In rural areas, the ancestral communal management of forests, pastures and fishing resources survives, as do the communal tasks of maintaining agricultural infrastructures such as irrigation

4 Mançano Fernandes, Bernardo (2005), "Movimientos socio-territoriales y movimientos socio-espaciales" in *Observatorio Social de América Latina*, N°16, CLACSO, Buenos Aires. Translation by F3E

channels and roads. These practices continue to be customary in many places, in some cases benefiting from protection from chartered communities (or the ‘foral’⁵ regime) and governance systems that ensure compliance, as in the case of the rural areas of Navarre or Galicia. In urban environments too, food commons survive as an organisational culture of some of the public and private food stakeholders that are strategic for our cities’ food systems. In some food market areas, such as the Tira de Contar in Valencia⁶, networks of municipal markets or direct sales markets, forms of community governance, coexist with formal decision-making structures.

The promotion of food commons and their socio-ecological integration into the framework of the new generation of urban commons are the two determining factors for food transition. By combining regionalised food systems with the food commons approach, we will obtain systems based on the values of sustainability, democracy, universality and inalienability. Connecting community experiences of food distribution in cities with community spaces of production and transformation nearby is a means of regionalising food systems. It therefore seems appropriate **to call for dialogue between the largely urban-based commons movements and the mainly rural-based food sovereignty movements** in order to cultivate policy proposals that strengthen the resilience of our food systems, as well as the places and people that sustain them.

Ecofeminism as a structural approach to food commons

Leveraging the design of urban food policies for the transition towards sustainable systems must integrate the ecofeminist approach. Recognition of the role of women in traditional and contemporary food systems is still a pending issue. It is not only a symbolic debt, but also a necessity that allows the ecofeminist approach to be extended to all stakeholders in the agri-food chain. The following should be highlighted:

- **The eco-dependence of food systems.** The reproductive approach is an intrinsically agro-ecological approach, conceiving food systems from frameworks that integrate the material limits of the planet and propose circular designs that

5 The ‘foral’ regime (in Spanish: *Régimen foral*) designates institutions and jurisdictions specific to the former kingdom of Navarre and historic Basque areas such as Alava, Biscay and Guipuscoa (source: Wikipedia).

6 Market of ancestral origin of producers from Vega de Valencia for the direct wholesale of their food products.

FOOD COMMONS

integrate food into natural ecosystems. It stands in contrast to the extractivist logic of agricultural systems that are high consumers of water, soil and energy.

- **The socio-dependence of food systems.** A sustainable approach implies conceiving the relationships between stakeholders in the food chain from a collaborative and non-competitive point of view, placing the care of people at the centre and not only the maximisation of economic profit.
- **A rights-based approach** for all stakeholders involved in food systems, with a particular focus on women. Formal recognition of women's rights in food systems also remains a pending issue in Europe, where women have taken on 'invisible' roles aimed at creating the conditions for food production and reproduction: management of the farming or fishing enterprise, food preservation and cooking, among others. Formal recognition of these roles implies legal recognition.

A case study: Valencia, towards ecological and sustainable food transition⁷

Valencia's agri-food ecosystem used to be made up of a series of material and immaterial elements, of public, private and community ownership, which interacted with each other to form a dynamic and complex food system, where power relations prevailed over the common good of society and the place in which it was based. In 2015, Valencia City Council began a process to draw up a Municipal Food Policy, which would gradually lay the foundations for the transition towards a fairer, more sustainable and healthier local agri-food environment. In addition to this local work, in 2017 the FAO declared Valencia the World Capital of Sustainable Food, and in 2019 it recognised the historic irrigated land of la Horta de Valencia as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS). **In short, it recognised the ancestral work of men and women who, with their practices, have kept a place alive to this day**, and the struggle of social movements for the preservation of the Horta in the face of the speculative policies that have guided the city's urban development in recent decades.

In this context, the transition towards fairer and more ecologically sustainable food models, as well as the strengthening of the city's resilience amidst climate change and desertification, requires the strategic identification and enhancement of

⁷ Valencia City Council's Department Of Agriculture, Sustainable Food And Market Gardens, "Estrategia Agroalimentaria València 2025", 2018.

tangible and intangible food commons for the city. The strategic material heritage includes the people (involved in farming, fishing and consuming) of our urban area, their places of activity such as the Horta de Valencia (agricultural production), the Albufera lake (artisanal fishing and rice production), the fishing port (artisanal and trawling) and its coastal area (traditional aquaculture), as well as the network of municipal markets and the logistics centre represented by MercaValencia and its 'Tira de contar'. In addition to these elements, there is the network of small and medium-sized food processing and marketing enterprises (SMEs). All of them make up the agri-food system of the metropolitan area of Valencia, without which the city could not feed itself in a sustainable way.

In all these strategic elements, food commons constitute an invisible majority. Places, heritage, forms of governance and stewardship crystallise into a community entity that is barely studied and characterised as a system. In the field of intangible agro-food heritage, fishing and farming knowledge is classified as strategic in terms of sustainable food production as are customary forms of management, such as the Real Acequia de Moncada, the Tribunal de las Aguas, the Comunitat de Pescadors de El Palmar and the Marina Auxiliante del Cabanyal⁸. There are also new legal frameworks and political initiatives that attempt to reinforce the social control of the food system, such as the 'Valencia Food Strategy', the 'Valencia Food Council', the 'Law of the Huerta' and the designation of its irrigation system as GIAHS.

8 Living examples of community management in Valencia city such as the irrigation communities (Acequia de Moncada and the Tribunal de las Aguas) or fishing communities (El Palmar or Marina Auxiliante).

“ The women succeeded in
improving household access
to food and savings ”



NASEEM SHAIKH AND JIJI SEBASTIAN

SWAYAM SHIKSHAN PRAYOG (SSP), MAHARASHTRA, INDIA



RATNA MATHUR

GENDER AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONAL, NEW DELHI, INDIA

08

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN FARMERS

**LESSONS FROM DROUGHT-
PRONE DISTRICTS IN
MAHARASHTRA, INDIA**



Local solutions, global crisis: women's livelihoods, agriculture and climate change

This paper describes the case of Marathwada region in the western Indian state of Maharashtra, where a convergence of initiatives by women farmers, a civil society organisation, and local government programs have taken up the challenge of developing sustainable models of farming and socially inclusive collectives of women farmers.

India's geography and its socio-economic landscape is historically characterised by diversity. India's climatic regions vary from tropical to sub-tropical, arid, semi arid, coastal, and mountains. Many of the regions are dependent on annual monsoon rains.

India has emerged globally as the fifth largest economy in the world, while still having the largest number of poor people in the world. The World Inequality Report 2022¹ ranks India as one of the most unequal countries in the world. Rural communities, especially those from historically excluded social groups, and the landless, are amongst the poorest.

Small and marginal farmers comprise nearly 78% of India's farmers. They are more vulnerable to climate shocks, low levels of income, distress migration, and in extreme cases, suicide. Among these marginalised groups, women in agriculture have lower access to food security, healthcare, education, natural and financial resources, and technology. In the country, 73.2 percent rural women workers are engaged in agriculture, but women own only 12.8 percent of land holdings². In Maharashtra, 88.46 percent of rural women are employed by agriculture, the highest in the country. **Traditionally bound into subordinate roles, women have challenged severe disadvantages in securing their wellbeing and security.** To overcome these challenges, the government of India has several policies and approaches that promote economic growth, which have been successful during the last few decades after the end of colonial rule. The policies to overcome social barriers and economic discrimination against women have been less successful in implementation.

1 World Inequality Report 2022. World Inequality Lab. UNDP. (pp 11-12, 197-198). Retrieved from https://wir2022.wid.world/www-site/uploads/2023/03/D_FINAL_WIL_RIM_RAPPORT_2303.pdf

2 India Spend, September 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.indiaspend.com/73-2-of-rural-women-workers-are-farmers-but-own-12-8-land-holdings/>

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN FARMERS

The state of Maharashtra in the western part of India³ is considered to be one of the most socio-economically developed in the country. However, the Marathwada region in the state is considered one of the driest regions in the country, with three major agro-climatic zones: scarce to moderate to assured rainfall. The region gets 44% less rainfall than the country average, and only 20% of its agricultural land is covered by irrigation⁴. The region has been experiencing recurring drought for several years due to low rainfall at the time of plantation, as well as unseasonal and unprecedented floods. The region has rich black soil, with cotton and soyabean as the major commercial crops.

The overall agriculture system in the country is dominated by market-driven processes, even though the government has several programs to secure farmers income. While commercial agriculture has increased productivity, **the emphasis on monoculture of commercial crops with water-intensive systems in a drought-prone region like Marathwada has resulted in significant extraction of groundwater**, contamination of soil and water from chemicals in fertilisers and pesticides. The high input cost of these farming practices in the region has led the farmers to take loans repeatedly. However, the uncertainties of climate change have led to failure of crops. This financial stress due to intensive demands on natural resources has particularly impacted small and marginal farmers, who do not have enough land assets or savings to absorb the losses. In addition, the high input costs of growing a single cash crop has reduced their access to food crops, forcing them to buy food from the markets, thus effectively reducing their financial security and their food safety.

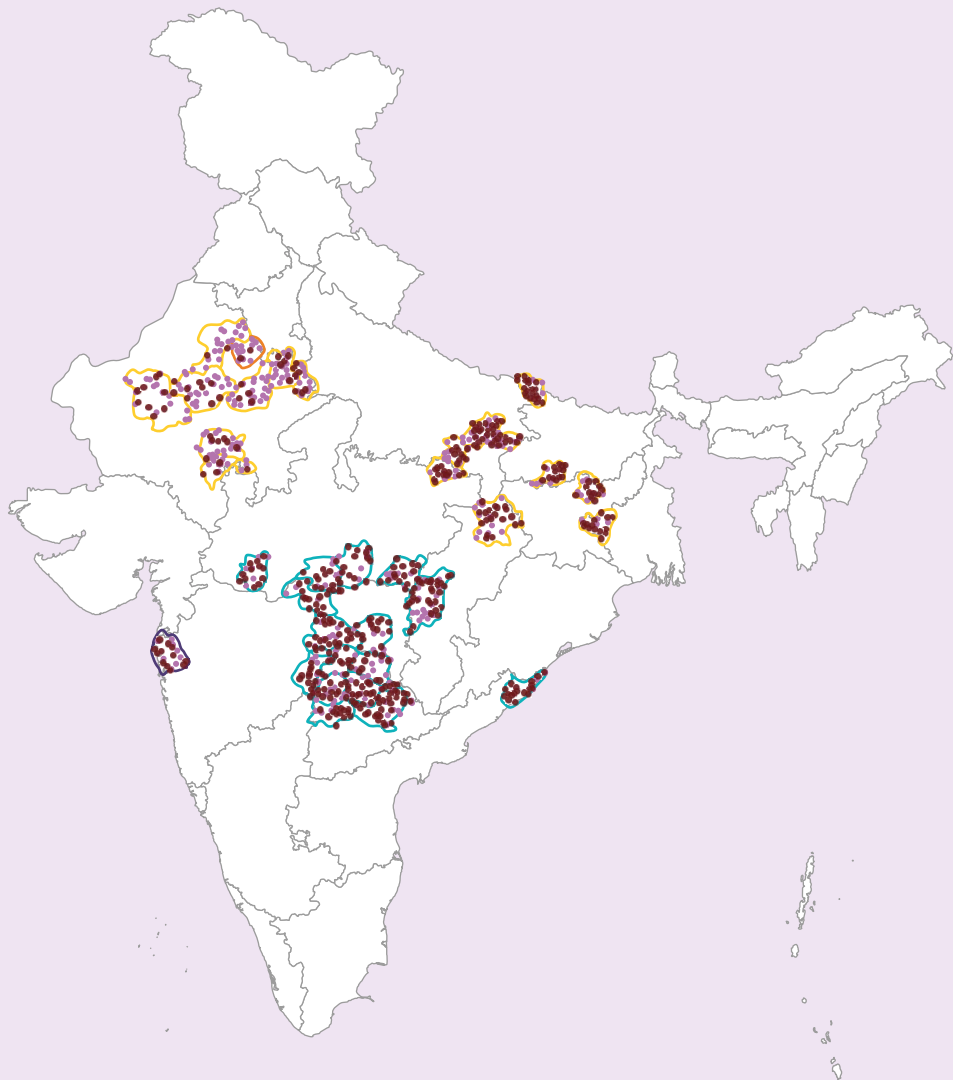
Women in farming communities in Marathwada, particularly among small and marginal farmers, have had to develop resilience in overcoming these multiple social, economic, and human induced climate adversities.

Women in the region at risk from climate change are already affected by recurring cycles of drought and flooding⁵, as well traditionally restrictive gender norms. Thus





3 Down to Earth. Retrieved from <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/factsheet/here-is-a-panoramic-view-of-the-growing-threat-to-agriculture-in-india-61780>

4 Economic Survey of Maharashtra 2021-2022. Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Planning Department, Government of Maharashtra, Mumbai, India. Retrieved from http://mls.org.in/pdf2022/budget/ESM_2021_22/Economic%20Survey%20of%20%20Maharashtra%202021-22.pdf

5 Iyer, K. (2021) Landscapes of Loss: The story of an Indian drought. (pp 12-19, 162-168). NOIDA, Uttar Pradesh, India: Harper Collins Publishers.



Climate risks in Hotspots

-  Heat Wave (Zone1 - East and West)
-  Probability of drought (Zone 3)
-  Heat Wave and Drought Probability (Zone 2)
-  Excess Rainfall and Drought Probability (Zone 4)

District level female participation in agriculture

- 15,000 femmes cultivators per dot
- 15,000 femmes labourers per dot

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN FARMERS

it becomes important to examine how they manage to ensure the survival and well-being of their households and environment.

The map⁶ shows the high climate risk zones of India with high rates of women workers in agriculture.

Women's leadership for climate change adaptation and social inclusion

Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP)⁷ was established in 1998, four years after partnering with the Government of Maharashtra after the massive earthquake in Latur. It commenced its activities with a reconstruction project in 1,200 villages in the Marathwada region. During the reconstruction project, SSP reshaped a beneficiary program into a successful community women led effort under the leadership of its founder, the late Ms Prema Gopalan. Through the process of engagement with the local communities, particularly with women, it **started to respond to the needs of women farmers and workers to be recognised as decision-makers** within their own communities, and in their relations with government and market systems. Over the years, as the recurrence of droughts and financial distress increased, it initiated a participatory climate adaptation initiative with sustainable local solutions and collective community-centred ecological practices. These focussed on Latur, Osmanabad, Solapur and Nanded districts, and with extension projects in other districts and regions of the country.

The experiences gained to date have been synthesised and grouped into four main strategic areas:

- **women-led climate-resilient agriculture;**
- **women's entrepreneurship;**
- **social protection and services;**
- **clean energy and the environment.**

6 Woman in agriculture, and climate risks: hotspots for development, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10584-018-2233-z/figures/3>

7 Profile of Swayam Shikshan Prayog, <https://swayamshikshanprayog.org/whoweare>. Some of the awards received by SSP are – Global Climate Adaptation (GCA)'s Local Adaptation Award for Capacity and Knowledge (Women Led Climate Resilient Farming Model) at COP27 in 2022; NITI Aayog Women Transforming India Award from the Government of India in 2021; Schwab Foundation's Outstanding Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award (World Economic Forum) 2019; Schwab Foundation's Social Entrepreneur of the Year India 2018; UNDP Equator Award 2017; and UNFCCC Momentum Award 2016.

SSP implements projects supported by several donors on each of these strategic priorities. In each of these projects, women led community development is the foundational approach. In the broader context of civil society organisations working in India, SSP has focused on repositioning women's leadership as a central process for community development. SSP formalised its **Women's Initiative to Learn and Lead (WILL)** framework over the years. The framework is focussed on facilitating mentoring and supporting women farmers to emerge as community leaders. The process invests in developing inclusive approaches for increasing the participation of socially marginalised and landless groups. In the current operational framework, this strategic process has enabled women leaders to set their own local priorities and shift narratives about women's traditional roles at household level towards more public roles in agriculture, markets and governance.

The WILL framework has enabled SSP to work with a new generation of women leaders from diverse castes and communities – some marginal small-scale farmers, others from landless households, and many from the most vulnerable groups of migrant daily wage workers – who have emerged from their homes, inspired by the SSP's Sakhis (local women leaders) and the presence of an enabling environment. A process of self-evaluation was started by SSP after its internal analysis revealed more participants from privileged higher castes in its programmes, as these social groups traditionally control productive assets. This internal analysis process is encouraging integration of the approach in all the projects being implemented by the organisation. The organisation launched an **intensive process to involve and mentor a large number of women from socially marginalised communities**, now formally known as Village Action Groups.

Village Action Groups (VAGs) were formed in 503 villages in four districts of Marathwada. The new cohorts of women from marginalised social groups wanted to gain self-confidence and management skills, as well as a better understanding of the scale of the climatic and political challenges impacting on the survival and security of vulnerable rural women, and their access to justice and finance. Through the provision of essential knowledge and access to markets related to climate adaptation strategies for organic farming, the transition to clean energy and sustainable livelihoods, the key approach of empowering women and their inclusive collectives is being integrated into organisational systems. The entire process of training new leaders and entrepreneurs is conducted by women themselves, with support from SSP team members. Many of the project teams are led by local women themselves, and they are also represented in SSP's senior management.

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN FARMERS

The influence of women on decision-making is through the VAG members, who are now being trained to work with local governments, called Gram Panchayats, by defining its priorities to be more centred on vulnerable women and children from marginalised communities, particularly on social security provisions, health, education, water, sanitation, and livelihoods. They are collectively developing micro-plans and share them with local village authorities, to encourage them to include women's priorities in the official development plan and budgets. A local platform called Sahyogmala (inter-connected chain of cooperation) is being set up to take advantage of government programmes to involve women in agricultural decision-making bodies at district level.

Following recurrent droughts in the Marathwada region from 2014 onwards, the women with whom the SSP worked were able to combine their traditional knowledge with some of the modern organic farming practices and linkage with local markets and government programs. **This has been developed as the Women-led Climate Resilient Farming (WCRF) model**, popularly known as the One-Acre⁸ farming model. The One-Acre model enables women to take active leadership in farming, as it does not require investment in purchasing chemical fertilisers and pesticides, or electricity to run pumps to grow commercial seeds with water-intensive methods. **The process makes a modest start: one acre of a family farm is converted to organic farming, with emphasis on growing nutrition-intensive food crops, and the entire process is led by trained local women from the community.**

There are several challenges faced by farming communities in taking up organic collective practices led by women that are based on agroecology⁹. The traditional gender biases about women's capabilities and leadership however remained widely prevalent. Women themselves were not used to analysing their own diverse contexts, and were not confident about their own knowledge and abilities. They were also not used to being in public domain, nor in working in socially diverse collectives, and did not recognise themselves as community leaders. SSP found that even educated women in farming households in Marathwada were not being recognised as farmers or decision-makers in their own households and communities, despite women doing a major part of the farming work in small and marginal farmer households. Thus, the organisation initiated a women's leadership program, and started testing climate change adaptation strategies led by women. This needed the development of an enabling environment for local women's leadership to emerge.

8 i.e 4 047 m²

9 Misereor. (2017). Agroecology as a Pathway to Sustainable Food Systems, a report. Retrieved from https://www.misereor.org/fileadmin/user_upload/misereororg/publication/en/foodsecurity/synthesis-report-agroecology.pdf

Early results and emerging challenges for advancing women's leadership

The actions taken by women representing various socially marginalised groups within the SSP prompted a reassessment of the environment in which women operate and grow. This resulted in shifts at both the household and organisational levels, impacting how they can secure their own education and well-being.

Developing strategies to shield women seeking change from negative reactions and establishing safe spaces for them to navigate public areas and patriarchal systems became imperative. This marked an intense learning process focused on gender equity across all levels. Within this process, the economic security initiatives spearheaded by women farmers and workers, involving a transition to organic farming, adoption of clean energy, and reduction of CO2 emissions, are carefully harmonised with a keen awareness of the necessity to foster socially inclusive, just, sustainable, and resilient communities.

The scale of the challenges faced by women in climate-risk zones can be understood from a study carried out by the SSP in Maharashtra in March 2023¹⁰ with women from small and marginal farming households (with landholdings of less than 5 acres) who were trained to set up non-agricultural micro-enterprises to supplement their reduced income from agriculture. While income from the sale of milk and vegetables has increased, most of these businesses are unregistered and owned by individuals, who run them using their own labour or that of their families. Around 96.6 percent of produce was sold on local markets, with an average monthly income equivalent to 130 euros.

On an average, around 6,000 men and women farmers are trained, and a further 20,000 learn about the WCRF model's organic farming processes each year. These farmers become role model early adapters for others in their villages. The process is led by a cadre of women drawn from the same communities trained by SSP. With modest success and virtually no financial investment, the **women succeeded in improving household access to food and savings**. The model was then systematically extended to other locations, where these women become mentors

10 Impact Evaluation: Promoting women's empowerment at grassroots level through entrepreneurship, March 2023, Swayam Shikshan Prayog for Shapoorji Pallonji Finance Company Limited; with 266 women in the districts of Latur and Osmanabad, Maharashtra, India. Retrieved from https://www.shapoorjipallonjifinance.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/SPFPL_CSR_Swayam-Shikshan-Prayog_Annual-Report_2020-21.pdf

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN FARMERS

and trainers to the local women, thus expanding their supportive network. The process was given a major impetus by the Government of India's investment in organic farming¹¹ as part of its commitment to preserving natural resources and reducing the debt burden on farmers. While this initiative may not significantly advance climate justice, the National Mission for Natural Farming has increased the availability of technical assistance to farmers switching to natural farming, with a priority for women farmers.

SSP's initial experiences with training farmers increased their incomes, and enabled women to overcome individual limitations in traditional patriarchal households, such as lack of self-confidence, restrictions on movement, lack of skills and an overall lack of recognition of their identity and aspirations. It was found **that although the majority of women work on family farms, only 14.2 percent identified themselves as farmers**, while 63.9 percent identified themselves as housewives earning nothing, and 15.04 percent as farm workers. After training and managing their own micro-enterprise, 97.7 percent of the women said they had gained confidence, but only 6.02% felt they were consulted on important family decisions. Thus, it became important to have more intensive strategies for developing women's confidence and effective leadership.

Intensifying power shifts for women farmer leaders in climate risk zones

The recognition of women as decision-makers and power holders within their households and communities sometimes only comes after their acceptance as leaders within the governance system. India has a structured institutional systems for gender equality in its local government – reservation of seats for women in elected local governments ranges from 30-50 percents in different states. India's flagship social protection and safety net programmes are specifically focussed on women and children. Each of these have provisions for women's participation. SSP started using these provisions effectively as drivers for institutionalising and recognising women's leadership and their ability to find effective local solutions.

11 Government of India Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Promotion of Organic Farming, Press Information Bureau release, 08 February 2022 Retrieved from <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1796561#:~:text=Under%20PKVY%20%26%20MOVCDNER%20schemes%20farmers,%20Dcompost%2C%20botanical%20extracts%20etc.>

Women's traditional knowledge of ecology and agriculture has not been fully recognised, even by women themselves, and much of this knowledge has been lost through decades of commercial farming. When the WCRF model brought women in decision-making roles in households, many changes started being made by farming communities in agricultural and domestic practices. These practices range from **the abandoning chemical and water-intensive agriculture in favour of organic farming, conservation of natural resources**, and increased access to education and healthcare services for women and girls.

SSP has extensively trained farmers in organic farming practices for a wide range of indigenous food crops. It has also facilitated the training of women in diversified livelihoods and small enterprises for marketing agricultural products. Groups of women farmers have been formed, and many of them have become Farmer Producers' Organisations (FPOs). Experience to date with FPOs shows that a limited number of basic agricultural products are adequate to establish organic value chains. However, the women need much more training in financial management and negotiating with agricultural market players to be able to make autonomous decisions and not be dependent on project staff. This is because the processes related to markets and banks require their presence in nearby cities and agriculture markets, which is still a limiting factor for several women. Similarly, while women leaders have become adept at using social media platforms for communication and education, the digital platforms widely used in agriculture for secure online transactions require more training and confidence.

Women's low level of land ownership remains a deep-rooted problem that prevents them from playing a role in decision-making. The already unequal traditional social practices are worsening as a result of enhanced economic pressures, which increases the value of land as an asset and productive resource to be controlled by powerful men in households and communities. In operational terms, the SSP has met the challenge tactically with the One Acre Model, under which control of a one-acre portion of family land was transferred to women only for organic farming of food crops for the household and local markets only. There is a fear of potential conflicts among the women themselves over the feasibility of financial management. With these limitations, and leveraging the government policies favouring women's land ownership, the process of motivating families and government land registration systems was started. On average, SSP presently monitors the process of transferring or ensuring joint ownership of land for around 3,000 women annually.

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN FARMERS

The partnership between women-led community groups and systems of governance¹² has required innovations in the provision of social protection services and means of communication. Rural women, engaged in the government system in large numbers for the first time, have become more self-aware and empowered. **They use technology and social media for local communication, and they consolidated their farming practices to focus on the health and food and nutrition security¹³ of their households and communities.**

The impact of women's voices and decisions on households and communities was observed during the COVID¹⁴ crisis, when women leaders demonstrated their effectiveness in addressing the most pressing issues with collective energy and inclusive spirit in rural communities. Many of the changes triggered by this crisis however have yet to be fully documented or their impact studied. **Measuring changes in the agency, voice and power of women from marginalised social groups requires a fundamental shift for development planners and governments.** While women's participation in public life is not a taboo in the country, the prevailing attitudes and tools for monitoring transformative changes in gender are still evolving.

The women leaders of the SSP are also actively involved in the South Asia Climate Action Network (CANSA)¹⁵ and share their knowledge with the network and on digital media. CANSA is a coalition of about 250 civil society organisations working in eight South Asian countries to promote governmental and individual action to limit human-induced climate change, and to promote equity and social justice among peoples, sustainable development of all communities and protection of the global environment. This engagement has strengthened women's learning within the SSP network and has also provided an impetus for linking policy, research and action-based work on the adverse impact of climate change affecting the region.

The SSP has extended local solidarity to global solidarity with women in marginalised communities as decision-makers, participating in the Huairou Commission¹⁶.

12 UNICEF. (2020). W-SHARP: Linking Climate-Resilient WASH, Social Protection and Food Security to Empower Women in Maharashtra, India. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3Aiqbr2>

13 KamalUdwadia Foundation. (2022). Reducing Mortality through Addressing Anaemia and Malnutrition Endline Survey Report. Retrieved from <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Ce66unxAQHh3R9yVdoXP66CEQOsVtQi>

14 UNICEF. (2021). Building COVID-19 Recovery With GO-NGO Collaboration Process Document on Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and building COVID preparedness across 2,700 communities in three districts of Maharashtra. Retrieved from https://swayamshikshanprayog.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Process_Doc_Covid_resilient_WASH_sensitive_panchayats_and_communities_March_2021.pdf

15 South Asia Climate Action Network, CANSA, <https://cansouthasia.net>

16 Members of the Board of Directors of the Huairou Commission; Retrieved from <https://huairou.org/governing-council/>

The Huairou Commission is a coalition of grassroots women's groups and women's advocates, academics and professionals committed to publicly recognising the leadership of organised grassroots women's groups for poverty eradication and sustainable development, and to positioning local women-led organisations as driving forces in public agenda-setting and political accountability. Involvement in the process has enabled SSP to empower more of its women leaders to take forward a social movement-building approach by establishing structures and processes in the overall governance of the organisation.

These wider partnership processes extend the SSP's WILL concept, whereby women manage their own organisations at all levels. A senior woman SSP leader, Godavari Dange, director of the Vijaya Sakhi Women-led Farmer Producer Organisation, is now a board member representing Asia on the Huairou Commission as part of the transfer of decision-making power from the allies and professional staff to women leaders representing grassroots women's organisations. This global leadership was a major motivation¹⁷ for the women across SSP sites and has transformed the aspirations of young women in the region. Another SSP leader, Devkanya Jagdale, is managing several projects for training of women leaders across SSP projects in the Marathwada districts.

Analysis of local and global experiences shows that complex processes in climate-sensitive social and economic systems can be effectively led by women leaders in ecologically diverse zones and countries. While there are no simple solutions, **the ways in which women farmer leaders are addressing their local challenges is a demonstration of wider change.** Development sector systems can be adapted to create an enabling environment for women's leadership on climate change. The dialogue itself strengthens women's leadership in community development and social justice frameworks.

17 A Drop of Rain in the Drought: Godavari Dange; Retrieved from <https://scroll.in/article/1012729/this-comic-book-shows-how-godavari-dange-worked-with-women-farmers-to-beat-the-marathwada-drought>

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN FARMERS

COMMENTARY

Agroecology and adaptation: what are the right choices for communities? by GRET

GRET is also working on the issue of agroecology. We note that practices such as mulching help to conserve moisture at the base of plants for longer. However, the question is whether this practice will be sufficient in a world with a possible increase of 4°C.

SSP's approach is very interesting because it is based not only on agro-ecological practices but also on more general principles of human permaculture, such as mutual aid, so the women train each other according to peer-to-peer principles. What's more, you're diversifying the economy towards non-agricultural sectors, which limits dependence on climate-sensitive economic activities.

If we come back to the question of adaptation in agriculture, when it comes to climate projections to try and anticipate climate change and align our strategies, we often use the following website: <https://ssr.climateinformation.org/>. It is fairly easy to use.

There are two main types of adaptation: adaptation that aims to preserve existing modes of development but protect them: for example, I continue to grow onions even if the weather conditions are less good but I put in place measures to protect my crop (even though this may be ineffective in the long term) and 'transformative' adaptation measures that aim, for example, to test new crops that will be more resistant in the long term (but which require risk-taking and a change of culture). It seems to me that it would be really interesting, all over the world, to look more closely at the preferences of the people concerned, and therefore of women in this particular case, for a particular type of adaptation measure.

“ Giving consideration to an ecology of difference nowadays that does not restore people’s power over their own local area is a fallacy ”



DIEGO ESCOBAR DÍAZ
COLOMBIA

1 Many thanks to the whole F3e team, to Isabelle, Armelle, Vladimir and all colleagues for the great meeting we had in Paris and to everyone who contributed to this document with their suggestions and comments.

09

A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF DIFFERENCE

**TOWARDS A NEW MODEL
OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
BASED ON THE DIVERSITY
OF AFRO-DESCENDANTS
AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES,
COLOMBIA**



Analyses of ecological problems have multiple perspectives, all of which are important. In this document we will prioritise conceptually those that we consider fundamental to understanding the current situation and context in Colombia. In the footsteps of Arturo Escobar, we draw on the concept of a **Political Ecology of Difference**, by which he means “conflicts over access to and control over natural resources, particularly as a source of livelihood, including the costs of environmental destruction”², in addition to which (at the heart of the debates and problems) are the geographical and multicultural dynamics that will be described here.

Approach to the context

It can be affirmed that, since the mid-twentieth century, what we call conservative modernisation has become an economic reality in Colombia. Specific characteristics include the lack of commitment to industrialisation due to unfair economic growth and, fundamentally, the consolidation of a major ecological crisis affecting regions and diversity.

This situation has presented an opportunity for other parallel dynamics to evolve, associated with the accumulation of political power in the hands of the few. Between 1970 and the beginning of the 21st century, a trade system was established that ended up consolidating drug trafficking. This organisation, promoted by the elite, is rooted in intensive farming, and based on the high quality and productivity of land, as well as historical tax evasion. It thereby exacerbates the culture of consumption of unproductive goods among the dominant sectors, and by logical extension among subordinate sectors, imposing conditions through the use of force, which is not always in the hands of the state. This has led to a climate of terrible violence, land dispossession, and the internal displacement of approximately nine million people³. We must rise to this great challenge if we wish to change or at least improve the model of human development in the country.

It is also important to note that **the conservative modernisation model's lack of competitiveness not only fosters informality** (Colombia has one of the highest

2 Escobar, Arturo. *Territories of difference. Place, movements, life, redes*, Department of Anthropology, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. First edition in Spanish, 2010. Page. 23

3 According to official data: the government of Colombia reports that 8,375,715 people were listed in the Single Registry of Victims of forced displacement events from 1985 to 31 December 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/las-cifras-que-presenta-el-informe-global-sobre-desplazamiento-2023>, to these figures must be added those of forced migration and those that have not been officially reported.

A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF DIFFERENCE

rates of informality in all Latin America⁴), but has also brought with it a growing concentration of Colombian exports over the first two decades of the 21st century, **based on reprimarisation**⁵. This means a very low level of innovation in textile and craft exports, because economic development is mainly **based on the export of oil and minerals**, which is subject to international market prices and generates employment for a highly qualified few.

In short, it is an economy based on the low-tech exploitation of commodities and natural resources, bearing in mind that, “in terms of technology, Colombia continues to suffer a huge digital divide compared to other Latin American countries. Among the main causes are a lack of trained workers, a linguistic gap, a lack of incentives to access technology, and a low level of investment in this field”⁶. Whereas a real change in the model of human development should be based on the use of high-tech media products, and fundamentally promote respect for the ecosystems, communities and cultures that sustain it, in other words, fair development is lacking⁷.

The mining and energy extractivism model not only demonstrates the country's dependence on technological transfers, but also provides a glimpse of how devastating it is in environmental and sustainability terms. Eco-systemically, when state intervention leaves the initiative of development to the private sector, and especially to multinational companies, the latter end up taking away strategic wealth without settling their social debt or restoring the imbalance created in the environment, increasing tensions and the huge gap between the living standards of local people and the business sectors and leaders.

4 According to the Office for National Statistics, informality is 52.8% in metropolitan areas and as high as 84.21% in populated and dispersed rural centres. This means that the majority of people live in job insecurity, without the adequate conditions to lead dignified lives, which increases displacement and poverty conditions. See: <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/salud/informalidad-y-seguridad-social/empleo-informal-y-seguridad-social-historicos>

5 In other words, a return to the exploitation of natural resources as a central source of income for the country's economic and social development.

6 As described by the Colombian Association of Systems Engineers ACIS. <https://acis.org.co/portal/content/noticiasdelsector/panorama-y-desaf%C3%ADos-del-sector-tecnol%C3%B3gico-en-colombia>

7 As mentioned by some neoliberal observers in Colombia, “According to data published by countries in their official sources, the average person in an advanced economy produces in nine days what the average person in an emerging country produces in a year. This leaves nations like Colombia and a good part of the region in a very bad place.” <https://www.larepublica.co/economia/la-baja-capacidad-innovadora-ha-llevado-a-una-perdida-de-productividad-en-colombia-3072695> This is a situation with which we disagree in this document, as high levels of productivity depreciate local areas, people's quality of life, and their entire ecological environment.

Is it possible to establish a political ecology of difference without local knowledge?

The ‘ecological’ mindset, promoted by companies and supported by traditional conservative governments, has consisted of exploiting the land and its resources without taking into account the importance of community fabric. In doing so, this has destabilised the eco-systemic balance, plundered natural resources, undervalued traditional cultures and markets, disempowered local communities, established ethnic and economic barriers, and generated radical inequalities, supported through alliances with legal and illegal armed operators.

Giving consideration to an ecology of difference nowadays that does not restore people’s power over their own local area is a fallacy. It is fundamentally wrong because of the historical struggles that have taken place over these areas, where local, mainly indigenous, Afro-descendant and farming communities, have fought to defend their culture, their land and their homes, and to fiercely protect a healthy, sustainable ecosystem for future generations. **This is where the relationship between the body, ecology, the environment, ancestral wisdom and the clash between a local and an extractivist economy have developed,** as Escobar Arturo points out, “there is a corporeity and a location of human life that cannot be denied”⁸. There is a real need to neutralise and stop the socio-economic trends that promote the disappearance of place, fundamentally those that prioritise global over local.

In addition, there are very significant regional inequalities within Colombia: certain strata of the population are excluded from the benefits of economic development, and are not able to achieve basic levels in order to maximise their capacities and thus achieve wellbeing. The gap is also reflected in the latest National Quality of Life Survey, recently released by DANE⁹: while in towns and cities 35.3% of heads of household consider themselves poor, in the rest of the country, particularly in the Pacific region, the figure rises to 67.7%. Not surprisingly, during 2014 and later in 2019, 2020 and 2021, the World Bank announced that Colombia was among the six countries with the greatest economic inequality in the world¹⁰, with levels comparable to those of Haiti and Angola.

8 Escobar, Arturo. Ob Cit. page 24.

9 Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (Office for National Statistics) <https://www.dane.gov.co/>

10 Social Panorama of Latin America. United Nations and ECLAC, December 2021.

A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF DIFFERENCE

Capital opposes ecology, negatively transforming communities

The expansion of extractive activities over the first two decades of the 21st century led to the destruction of strategic ecosystems in Colombia, where thousands of hectares of tropical rainforest, Andean forest, *paramos*¹¹, mangroves, perennial snows, and wetlands have gradually disappeared. **This has affected not only biodiversity, but also the economic, social, and political sovereignty of cultures and areas within the country.** It has also jeopardised the environmental stability and the future human and inclusive development of local residents, especially in areas inhabited by Afro-descendant and indigenous communities.

The conservative bodies of the Colombian state have drawn strength from the neoliberal version of competition, in both the economic and the cultural order, because “Colombia must understand the dramatic changes in the world economy and adapt to them”, and therefore “advance decisively in terms of equity, understood fundamentally as equality of opportunity”¹². **This ignores the urgent intercultural negotiations and the interdependence of stakeholders and social sectors in favour of mutual recognition and human development that guarantees the achievement of different lifestyles within the same area.**

The political ecology of difference links place, culture and community

Let us highlight some aspects of Colombian multiculturalism and the political ecology of difference that further our understanding of the possibilities, obstacles and challenges to achieving, or at least initiating, intercultural practices in a country of marked conservative neoliberal modernisation. In a state that neither recognises cultural freedoms, nor allows citizens in general, and especially minority groups, to exercise their rights¹³, is it possible to advance an intercultural model based on differences?

11 high altitude neotropical biotope of the Andes Cordillera

12 National Planning Department (2007). *Forging a culture for coexistence*. Bogotá, Imprenta Nacional (p. 6 and 7). Available at: https://colaboracion.dnp.gov.co/CDT/Desarrollo%20Social/Forjar_cultura_para_convivencia%2830_10_07%29.pdf.

13 We accept the concept of historian Papi Ndiaye, who cites the work of several Chicago School sociologists: Donald Young and above all Louis Wirth. In a 1945 article, he defines a minority as a group that “because of physical or cultural characteristics, is

Multicultural and eco-resistant struggles: respecting dignity, worldviews, and place

The political ecology of difference and its intercultural effects in the country focus on the following aspects:

The value of respect as the linchpin of an eco-systemic perspective:

“We must respect our cultures and beliefs, our rituals and our choices; we need to be listened to and treated equally, and to have a say in the decisions that affect us. On the other hand, we want to live the way we have chosen to live, not the way others think we should live”¹⁴.

On their first reading of this text, A4 members responded to the issue of respect (see ‘Commentary’ below) based on their experience as immigrants in France, and what they say applies to the whole of Europe, but also to the whole world:

“As in Colombia, we used to live in our own lands and had our own understanding of the world, our own respect for nature, our own culture and traditions. But we were forced to leave our families and our land. We were not respected as human beings. Our departure was imposed on us when we would have preferred to stay. We went on the road and now we are in France, where many people think we came for the money, to ‘take advantage’ of the system. And here, where we are not at home, where we are foreigners, we also feel rejected. We are often alone, isolated, we have lost the bearings and environment that used to support us. We have to adapt to the culture, beliefs and way of life of the country where we live, we have to respect these differences; but we also need to be supported, welcomed and cared for so that we can rebuild and continue to live after this break with our previous life.”¹⁵

subjected to differential treatment in society and is regarded as the object of collective discrimination (...); a minority may be demographically in the majority, as in colonial situations, but it is characterised by the common experience of discriminatory and stigmatising treatment, whether on the basis of gender, or the actual or supposed origin of the ‘racialised’ phenotype”. The Atlas of ethnic, national, social, linguistic, religious and sexual minorities. *Le Monde Diplomatique/La vie* (2013). Pub. Cono Sur / Argentine. Capital intelectual, p. 12.

14 Johana Eede (pub.) (2010). *We are a tribute to indigenous peoples*. Barcelona, Blume, p. 5.

15 A4, Commentary on Diego’s text.

A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF DIFFERENCE

This disrespect is especially felt against native communities, against internally and externally displaced people, immigrants who have had to flee to other countries, where a sense of non-place, of ‘adaptation’ and detachment is perceived.

The political ecology of difference values respect as a universal principle of coexistence and as a fundamental axis in the construction of new, more horizontal and enriching relationships in the search for an eco-systemic balance. Here, culture, human beings and nature are protected rather than exploited for profit by the devastating capital that commodifies places in all their dimensions.

This is also the view of the members of A4:

“What we champion, and what the political ecology of difference lens also helps us understand, is that wherever we are, we must respect each person as a human being. So that everyone can live their life as they see fit, and can be happy and follow their own path, in line with their traditions, their worldview, their way of doing things; and so that these different cultures can coexist everywhere. We seek to strengthen human capacities and social relations between people of different cultures living in the same area”¹⁶.

Hence the need to take up other important elements in the political ecology of difference, as outlined below.

The vital importance of recognising different worldviews

It appears vital to **value and recognise the wide variety of knowledge, diverse visions and worldviews** held about land, culture, economics, models of life and development, governance, forests, communities, politics, medicine and art. The accumulated set of feelings, perceptions and knowledge represents the ethical values that guide behaviour and whose diversity has so far been ignored by society at large. The political ecology of difference brings into play an ethical code which respects all forms of life, congruent with equity, sustainability, biodiversity, coexistence, peace and responsible practices for the future of the planet.

In the world, the knowledge of native, Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples, as well as migrants arriving in Europe, the United States, Australia, Latin America, etc., poses new challenges to the global ecological agenda. To take just a few examples, it can be said that, in Mesoamerica, “Indigenous peoples know a great

¹⁶ A4, Commentary on Diego’s text.

deal about climate dynamics, the behaviour of biodiversity and natural resources in direct relation to climatic variations. This knowledge and experience, accumulated throughout their existence, serves to manage their productive activities, as they design adequate strategies to solve their subsistence needs as a family and a community, as well as to make decisions at a social and cultural level”¹⁷. This can be seen at Ixil University in Guatemala¹⁸, which promotes millenary and ancestral practices based on a worldview and respect for nature.

It is also worth highlighting A4’s suggestions when they refer to “exchanging knowledge and know-how” in agricultural terms between those who come from countries in the Global South and French farmers¹⁹. If this diversity of knowledge and practices is taken into account, the ecological balance of the planet can be safeguarded, and worsening human conditions, especially for the most marginalised sectors, can be avoided.

Development, a concept to be reconsidered

The discussion, expansion and promotion of human development as a concept and set of actions that does not simply show the rise or fall in a country’s income, but ensures “the environment necessary for individuals and groups to develop their potential to lead creative and productive lives in accordance with their needs and interests”²⁰. As is evident from ecosystem-friendly community practices, “this way of looking at development focuses on expanding the options people have to lead the lives they value, that is, on increasing the set of things people can be and do in their lives”²¹. **Thus, development is much more than economic growth, which is simply a means – one of the most important ones – to expand people’s choices,** that must be coupled with respect for cultures and the promotion of interculturality.

This must include “the costs of these external factors for women”, as in Sub-Saharan Africa, where “women bear the brunt of the externalised costs of extractive and infrastructure megaprojects. When land is taken from them, they lose the means to feed their families. When water is channelled away from the community or polluted, women have to walk further to find clean water sources. When forests are

¹⁷ <https://www.alianzameoamericana.org/es/saberes-ancestrales-aporte-de-los-pueblos-indigenas/>

¹⁸ For a more in-depth look at this example, I refer you to Ecology and Ancestral Knowledge of the Ixil People, by Elena Brito.

¹⁹ A4, Commentary on Diego’s text.

²⁰ <http://www.pnud.org.co/sitio.shtml?apc=a-c020081--&m=a&e=A>

²¹ Ibid.

A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF DIFFERENCE

destroyed, women lack wood for household energy”²². This situation is replicated in the Colombian, Venezuelan, Brazilian, Ecuadorian, Bolivian, and Peruvian Amazon, as well as in Mesoamerica and many parts of the world.

A deep-rooted, dynamic vision of ecology

It is essential to **strengthen and build human capacities that have a dynamic and profound vision of ecology**: “The most basic capacities for human development are: to live a long and healthy life, to have access to the resources that allow people to live in dignity and to be able to participate in the decisions that affect their community. Without these capabilities many choices simply do not exist, and many opportunities are inaccessible”²³.

As can be seen in other articles in this discussion group, for example, La Horta de Valencia, which suggests the need to “consolidate and build a change of approach, a new look at food not only as a commodity, but also as a human right, a vital necessity, a determining element of the culture of peoples and a renewable resource that shapes our landscapes”²⁴. It also includes a feminist and ecofeminist perspective that emphasises the importance of care²⁵.

The concept of sustainability

It is necessary to include the concept of sustainability “as the potential of an area to maintain a process indefinitely; this potential depends on the distinctive human and non-human factors of that area and of the selected process”²⁶. In relation to sustainable development, the Afro-descendant communities of the Colombian Pacific advocate recognition of “the worldview of the ancestral peoples [as] the main source of inspiration for ethical principles and values that can ensure sustainable practices and harmonious coexistence with nature. The valuing of and respect for biological and cultural diversity, as an organising element, as a guiding

22 See Georgine Kengne Djeutane’s paper: “Power to women: a collective contribution to social and ecological justice in the mining sector in sub-Saharan Africa”.

23 Sebastião Haji Manchineri (2002). “Sustentabilidad humana y ética desde el punto de vista de los pueblos indígenas”, in Enrique Leff (coord.): *Ética, vida, sustentabilidad*, p. 210.

24 Sergi Escribano. “Food commons: social control, local governance and ecofeminism as drivers in the ecological transition of urban food systems”.

25 As Blanca Baya Fernández puts it. “The intersection between ecofeminist proposals and people power. Ecofeminism: the reproduction of life between feminist economics and ecological economics”.

26 Julio Carrizosa (2002). “Hacia nuevas economías. Mimesis, hedonism, violence and sustainability”, in Enrique Leff (coord.), *op. cit.*, p. 43.

thread of thought and behaviour. This diversity must be enhanced and increased. Places must enjoy well-being so that there is abundant food and health. Justice is the ultimate aim. One of the things that globalisation and the free market have made clear is that the societies in which we live are only possible if they are fair”²⁷.

Beyond the intercultural disputes over paradigms of place, **the aim is to consider the ethno-cultural and forestry option as an alternative for “local development:** it is presented as a real option to simultaneously overcome a series of constituent factors that characterises the reality of the Colombian countryside: lack of government and basic services; difficulties establishing the rule of law to guarantee human and civil rights; lack of access to markets (infrastructure, information)”²⁸.

This intricate struggle of interests, based on multiculturalism and different world-views about land, place, and well-being, is one of the main elements of intercultural negotiation in this country in terms of achieving a dignified life, in which the following are particularly important: “1. Autonomy: freedom, agency, empowerment. 2. Sociability: social relations and belonging to a community. 3. Meaningful activity: work, leisure, play”²⁹.

As Georgine Kengne Djeutane rightly states, “thinking about an ecology of difference in the Colombian context also means reviewing the perspectives of the peace agreements”³⁰. This is what is happening, because so far this year alone, 103 community leaders have been assassinated in the country, including farmers, indigenous people, Afro-descendants, and trade unionists³¹. The state is currently discussing a Total Peace agreement, which recommends that all armed groups, regardless of their motivation – criminal gangs, drug traffickers, illegal mining developers, loggers endorsing deforestation, corrupt politicians, etc. – unite behind a proposal to lay down their arms, but above all to agree on a National Pact to reconcile the different perspectives that motivate social and environmental conflicts in the country.

The confiscation of cocaine in large quantities by the current government has shown that **the main issue is not only the fight against drug trafficking, but also the fight**

27 Hernán Cortés (2002). “El sistema biocultural y la ética del ‘vivir bien’ de los pueblos afrodescendientes del pacífico colombiano”, in Enrique Leff (coord.), *op. cit.* p. 217.

28 Peter Sale (2004). “The Future of Forestry and Traditional Forest Owning Communities”, in Vivi Doraceli and Peter Sale: *National Dialogue. Forests and communities, VIII National Forestry Congress*, p. 69.

29 Pekka Himanen (2014). *Rethinking human development. Dignity as Development: The Cultural Link Between Informational and Human Development*. Oxford, UK, p. 425.

30 Georgine Kengne Djeutane’s commentary on the paper presented to the F3e team.

31 For further information about the people and places where they have been killed see: <https://indepaz.org.co/lideres/>

A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF DIFFERENCE

against deforestation, wildlife trade, the pollution of rivers and the destruction of forests in the Amazon, where not only illegal activities but also 'legal' ones have been set up, such as hydrocarbons, timber and even tourism. There is now talk of new illegal routes, which reach Europe via South America and Africa. This situation is increasing the ecological imbalance, not only in the country's ancestral lands, but also in Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, Uruguay and Paraguay, which has set off alarm bells throughout the continent on an ecological level.

Hence, looking at the reality of communities and places through the political ecology of difference lens constitutes a new challenge for a deeper understanding of the ecosystem. This can be seen through the sensitivity of communities that inhabit it in a respectful, sustainable, and healthy way, in order to achieve a balance between human beings, their cultures, and nature. The former are suffering dramatically from the disaster we are experiencing due to the current development system, which encourages extraction, competitiveness, environmental degradation and impoverishment.

This perspective can help empower communities, from the place, to reposition the importance of capital in more constructive, less predatory dimensions (e.g. CO2 emissions), to resume ancestral practices, to strengthen networks of local initiatives run by women, young people and elders, to boost their capacities and make local to global matters ecology-centred.

COMMENTARY

Regardless of who we are, our duty is to respect all people as human beings, by A4

In Colombia, as in other parts of the world, many people are forced to leave their homes in order to survive. Whether because of a new infrastructure project (dam, mine, etc.), because there is a war, or because of climate change, many people move against their will (740 million in 2015³²). And sometimes we have to move to another country (243 million in 2015³³), or even another continent, to find a new 'home'. But what does 'home' mean if we have been driven away from where we came from?

As in Colombia, we used to live in our own lands and had our own understanding of the world, our own respect for nature, our own culture and traditions. But we were forced to leave our families and our land. We were not respected as human beings. Our departure was imposed on us when we would have preferred to stay. We went on the road and now we are in France, where many people think we came for the money, to 'take advantage' of the system. And here, where we are not at home, where we are foreigners, we also feel rejected. We are often alone, isolated, we have lost the bearings and environment that used to support us. We have to adapt to the culture, beliefs and way of life of the country where we live, we have to respect these differences; but we also need to be supported, welcomed and cared for so that we can rebuild and continue to live after this break with our previous life.

But if already we were not respected at home, how can we be respected when we are not at home? If, as in Colombia, the indigenous or Afro-descendant people who live in an area are not respected, are not considered, and private companies working hand in hand with the State exploit their resources, their land, their forests, their workforce... What respect can we expect once we are no longer at home? We have no rights, no land, no home. We are in someone else's home and we have to adapt. We have been driven from our homes, and we no longer belong anywhere.

What we champion, and what the political ecology of difference lens also helps us understand, is that wherever we are, we must respect each person as a human being. So that everyone can live their life as they see fit, and can be happy and

32 2015 UN International migration report.

33 Idem.

A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF DIFFERENCE

follow their own path, in line with their traditions, their worldview, their way of doing things; and so that these different cultures can coexist everywhere. We seek to strengthen human capacities and social relations between people of different cultures living in the same area.

To respect someone, you have to understand them. And to understand them, you have to take an interest in them, find out about their culture and habits. Only then can you really understand the other person, and therefore respect them. Because in practical terms, respect does not translate in the same way in every culture.

For example, in France you have to say 'please' and 'thank you' very often, almost at every interaction. If we are sitting at table and I ask you to pass the salt, I have to do so by saying please and then thanking you. But in some cultures this is not necessary, because it goes without saying that if you ask me for salt I will pass it to you, and so I can ask you knowing that you will pass it to me too. Saying please and thank you would suggest that the person handing over the salt is making an exceptional gesture of sympathy, and that they could refuse. But between friends or family, it is unthinkable to refuse such a request. On arriving in France, we do not know that here we have to say please and thank you every time. The people in front of us will then think that we are disrespecting them, that we are not grateful for the welcome they offer us, that we have not been properly educated. Over time, we learn these cultural codes and imitate them, but it is really a cultural difference and not a lack of respect on our part when we do not say these expected forms of politeness.

On the other hand, we have been in this country that is not ours for varying lengths of time, and we have put aside many of our traditions and habits. But we would like to be able to continue our lives, with our culture, with who we are, here. We want our traditions to be understood and respected, to be accepted without judgement, with openness and interest. But some countries find it hard to accept certain cultures. They do not clearly state that they do not want to accept our culture, but they let us know in a very implicit way. It is then up to us to find a solution, to try to understand what we might have done that would have offended the person in front of us. It is not easy, and it hinders our integration and personal development.

We hope that, from the perspective of the political ecology of difference, we will be able to develop this attention to respecting each people, each culture, each worldview that cohabits the same space, whether because we are at home or because we have been forced to leave home. Or, simply because we are.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION, SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SOLIDARITY SECTOR

When we refer to ecology here, we consider the living world (both human and non-human) and the non-living world (air, fresh water, saltwater, landscape, earth, minerals, etc.) as a whole. In indigenous culture, elements of the so-called 'non-living' world are considered to be alive, including mountains, rivers, forests and other natural resources. **This approach to ecology includes the fight against colonisation and gender inequality:** colonisation of land, whether wild or domesticated, of bodies, whether put to work or attacked, of cultures, knowledge and spiritualities, which are modified or erased in favour of Western knowledge, cultures and spiritualities upheld by dominant groups.

The ecological struggle is therefore not only a struggle against the monopolisation of what humans call 'natural resources', but also a struggle against the destruction of worldviews, cultures and spiritualities, and/or the monopolisation of material and intangible elements from these cultures, such as symbols, objects and ideas, in a context of domination (what we call cultural appropriation).

This battle cannot be fought without the people affected, without respecting and enhancing their empowerment. This means fighting against patriarchy, capitalism,

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SOLIDARITY SECTOR

racism, the disregard or subordination of indigenous cultural values to those of Western culture, extractivism, and other forms of exploitation which are the consequences of colonisation.

How can CSOs take up the fight?

Historically, so-called international NGOs, i.e. those from 'Western' countries, have helped to disseminate a Western-centric vision of development. This development, based on a predatory system over regions, bodies, minds, cultures, and human spiritualities, has been advocated as a model for the entire planet. So, what can we do to break with this paradigm?

The outcome of this collective work and the preceding contributions has been the formulation of recommendations. Some of these should be applied by CSOs to themselves in terms of ecology and empowerment, in order to develop a fairer and more equitable paradigm.

CSOs, allies of those affected

Firstly, CSOs must position themselves as allies. What do we mean by allies in this context? It is simple: **CSOs must act as support roles for the people affected.**

In terms of our stance, this means sweeping aside our conventional development narratives and 'listening to what others want for the world', offering our services to contribute to what already exists and is emerging. We can do this by co-creating conducive, secure frameworks for effective participation and leadership, in particular for people from indigenous communities, and especially women, including in terms of material conditions and decision-making.

This also implies a certain **dignity**. Above all else, the dignity of those people affected must always be respected. That said, dignity (whether violated, or respected) should not only be voiced in relation to people who are oppressed. We can also call out the indignity of people in power, who do not use such positions to reduce the inequalities from which they benefit. To be worthy, people in power should systematically work for the collective interest, with a global, long-term vision, and a trans-generational objective, rather than for short-term, narrow, national interests.

CSOs should therefore systematically:

- **include indigenous communities, and the most disadvantaged social groups within them, particularly women**, in decision-making processes, project governance bodies, and/or in their action;
- **serve to amplify the voices** of the least heard and least listened;
- set up horizontal, fair, and representative forums for dialogue at an international level, based on mutual trust, and equal power sharing;
- above all, be aware of a critical point: **avoid instrumentalising or essentialising the people affected**.

Rebalancing knowledge relations

To rebalance power relations, we need to **rebalance knowledge relations**, so we need to **think critically about the hierarchy of knowledge, and (re)value situated knowledge**.

Situated knowledge refers to the knowledge that a person acquires from their particular position in the network of oppression, i.e. from the lived experience of oppression (racism, sexism, etc.). However, to become knowledge, and therefore a resource, this experience has to be made conscious on the basis of understanding these systems of domination. Once depersonalised and guilt-free, this experience and this knowledge become resources, because people with 'situated knowledge' develop a finer and deeper understanding of how our societies work and of the mechanisms that reproduce oppression, exclusion, and injustice, at both local and global levels.

However, the contributions, practices, and experiences of local communities in the Global South (particularly indigenous communities, and especially women), and vulnerable communities in the Global North (including social groups in insecure situations, and migrants) are not currently systematically recognised as valid knowledge, unlike the value placed on academic knowledge. These different types of knowledge need to find their place through interconnected dialogue.

As human beings, we are not just made up of knowledge and rational thought. It would therefore be a beneficial to allow ourselves to take into account the emotional basis of our actions, indeed the emotions of all stakeholders, and to allow ourselves to consider the greatness of respiritualisation based on inter-connect-edness and mutual respect.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SOLIDARITY SECTOR

One of the consequences of colonisation and extractivism is the despiritualisation of people and places. The work of CSOs is therefore to enable this respiritualisation of communities and places as soon as possible.

This includes:

- creating safe spaces for participants to share their emotions, but also their vision, including their spiritual vision of places;
- systematically placing the vision of the people affected at the heart of our action.

The Western vision of place is very narrow and universally imposed, whereas many other visions exist, which consider places as much more than simple providers of resources: rather as meaningful, spiritual and even sacred.

Giving consideration to all places

In order to avoid taking a 'top-down' approach to ecology, situated knowledge should be the **starting point** for all local thinking, from which a **global strategy** for action can be devised. This global strategy must be based on international alliances, rooted in and representing **all places and genders**.

Many places have been left aside and need to be recognised as ecological areas, and their inhabitants listened to and considered first and foremost:

- **Urban areas.** It is important to consider ecological issues in terms of their interaction with urban life, through a cross-cutting approach to all the issues involved in promoting a sustainable way of life in urban areas: transport, urban planning, housing, anti-pollution measures, democracy, the local economy, etc. This is all the more important in the case of poor, suburban neighbourhoods, inhabited overwhelmingly by disadvantaged and racialised people. Due to their proximity to factories, waste recycling centres, motorway junctions, and other hazardous sites, these areas are significantly more polluted than middle-class, city-centre neighbourhoods.
- **Waste dumps.** Most often open air sites, particularly in Asia and Africa, these are mainly made up of waste produced in Western countries, which is then transported, legally or illegally, to less fortunate countries. Aside the environmental cost of transport, this system results in mountains of hazardous and even toxic waste being processed manually by poor workers in extremely insecure conditions. This has a detrimental impact on their health, particularly from direct handling and through soil, water, and air contamination.

- **Dwelling places.** In Africa and Asia in particular, indigenous and local communities have been removed from areas deemed ‘conservation zones’, which are managed by large Western organisations in the name of ‘nature conservation’. In these areas, the creation of which is accompanied by increased militarisation, the rights of local populations are flouted, and their cultural model based on agropastoralism denied. At the same time, the Causses and Cévennes areas in France have been recognised by Unesco’s World Heritage list as ‘cultural landscapes of Mediterranean agropastoralism’. What is denied on the one side is valued on the other. In the Americas, the land of indigenous peoples was seized by landowners for farming and by national and multinational corporations for extractive projects.

The fight against the monopolisation of power by a few individuals or entities is a global struggle that cannot be confined to a limited area. In this sense, CSOs can support each other not only to make communities’ rights clear to them, and to help them enforce these existing rights, but also to demand new rights: for humans (of all kinds), for non-human living beings, and for the non-living world.

To achieve this, a whole host of tools can be used to take action on all fronts. These include:

- **forming alliances and carrying out collective international and local action involving self-training, advocacy, legal action, citizen mobilisation and civil disobedience;**
- **forming a network to take collective action and keep each other informed of the lessons learnt from local battles and victories.**

Rethinking our relationship with the non-human

Most often imagining humanity at the top of a pyramid made up of the non-human living world (fauna, flora) and the non-living world, dominant thinking refutes the idea that **human beings are an integral part of the planetary ecosystem**. The anthropocentric vision, which separates what is supposedly the domain of economics, culture and the mind from what is the domain of ‘Nature’, allows human beings to have a dominant relationship over the ecosystem to which they belong.

But what we call ‘Nature’ does not need human beings to exist. The Earth existed before humans appeared, and it will continue to exist after they disappear. The carbon cycle and the water cycle, for example, will continue to exist after the disappearance of the human species.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SOLIDARITY SECTOR

On the other hand, 'Nature' provides many services – free of charge – to humans, known as 'ecosystem services'. These include the seasons, the pollination of plants by insects, the storage of CO₂ by forests, the purification of water by the earth and plants, as well as landscapes, which appeal to our sense of beauty and deepen our spirituality. However 'Nature' can also be destructive, through fires, flooding, earthquakes, and tsunamis.

When humanity decides to 'protect Nature', it is more a question of protecting its own viable environment and limiting the impact it has thereon, in order to safeguard that viability. Taking an anthropocentric view of this issue can be dangerous, because ecosystem services run the risk of being financialised and instrumentalised. Rather than rethinking the balance of power to establish a more equitable, integrated relationship with the non-human world, 'nature-based' solutions are put forward, particularly 'offsets' ('carbon offsets' or 'biodiversity offsets', for example), which allow the existing unequal, extractivist, and capitalist system to continue.

To avoid falling into this pattern, CSOs, as responsible organisations, must:

- **limit, as far as possible, the negative impacts of human consumption** on biodiversity, climate, soil, water, and air, whether in terms of the destruction and fragmentation of habitats, various forms of pollution, waste production, greenhouse gas emissions, or extraction;
- **stop seeing the ecosystem solely as a provider of resources.**

Taking time to care

It is also about **slowing down, despite the climate emergency**. Slowing down to avoid community or gender-based conflicts, militant exhaustion, and the exhaustion of bodies and minds. Taking the time to take care of each other, ensuring that everyone takes a caring role and not just or mainly those traditionally responsible for care. **Care must be everyone's business**, not just women's, especially poor and racialised women.

Slowing down means taking care of ourselves and needing others to take care of us less. At the CSO level, this can mean:

- **choosing sobriety in our actions**, whether technological or financial, in our relationships and action, at all levels;
- **seeing health as a global issue**, based on the observation that the health of human beings, both physical and mental, and the health of non-human beings,

both living and non-living, are extremely related, because we are all part of an ecosystem;

- **taking time to develop action over the long term and, above all, building trusting, fair relationships.**

To spur on these changes, it is essential to devote **time and human resources** to them, with an emphasis on promoting the leadership of women and marginalised groups. To achieve this, **funding for the solidarity sector needs to be long-term, and channelled towards the human resources needed to devote time to this change in leadership, attitudes, action, and partnerships. The time spent working on these issues must be part of the time funded by donors.**

Donors and CSOs must also be wary of replicability, as each action must be specific, which requires time for work and analysis with stakeholders, rooted in their specific context, while allowing for continuous learning. Funders have a major responsibility to move forward along this path.

For their part, CSOs have a major responsibility to deconstruct their current vision of local and international solidarity, their missions and therefore their professions, in order to rebuild one that starts from the people affected, that genuinely allies itself with them, and that serves them fairly.

This calls into question the use of numerical indicators derived from a logical framework produced solely by a project team prior to implementation: not all activities can be defined in advance. A period of joint work with the people affected, to define a collective vision, the targeted changes, and activities must be planned at the start of any action – and this must be considered as a constituent part of the action. And, so as not to ask people to work for free, so as not to monopolise their knowledge, expertise and resources, **this work must be recognised as having the same value**, and therefore receive fair pay. The principles of fairness, respect, and care need to be the foundation of our collective vision and action.

The principles of fairness, respect, and care must underpin our vision and our collective action.

These recommendations were drawn up jointly by the book's contributors and the participants in the event on 14 November 2023. The F3E team in charge of the project prepared an initial draft, which was revised by the contributors.

THE CONTRIBUTORS

Elena Brito Herrera

Elena Brito Herrera is a member of the Ixil Maya community in Guatemala. She is a rural community development technician at the University of Ixil, coordinator of the Tiichajil Tenam community radio station and promoter of the Ixil Q'imb'al women's weaving association. Through her research, she highlights the need to value and apply ancestral ecological care practices to combat climate crises and the degradation of nature.

Elena Brito Herrera contributes to the project through her knowledge and study of the ancestral knowledge of her community. In particular, she highlights the importance of education in sharing experiences and recovering lost ancestral practices. Finally, she talks about her experience and resistance against multinational companies that threaten the quality of life of the people of the Ixil region.

To find out more:

Herrera B. Elena. 2020. "Radio Tchichajil Tenam becomes a reality", Cultural Survival. <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/radio-tiichajil-tenam-becomes-reality>

Blanca Bayas Fernández

Blanca Bayas Fernández is a member of the Observatori del Deute en la Globalització (ODG), an organisation with 23 years' experience based in Barcelona. She studies the impact of the capitalist and patriarchal system and puts forward proposals to stimulate reflection on alternative models. Blanca stresses the importance of rethinking the relationship with the commons and creating policies that are more rooted in local realities to build eco-feminist and eco-social transitions, which are more necessary than ever in times of emergency (care, social and ecological).

At the event, Blanca focuses on the perspective of the commons and public services through the prism of ecofeminist theories and feminist economics. She presents principles and proposals for rethinking cities in the face of corporate extractivism and for promoting more inclusive and disruptive public policies.

To find out more:

Blanca Bayas Fernandez. 2020. "Taking care of life in cities. Feminism and remunicipalization in Spain against the commodification of care", Vil·les contre multinationals, Passerelle, N°20, (February), 149-204: https://multinationales.org/IMG/pdf/passerelles_20.pdf

Blanca Bayas Fernandez, Joanna Bregolat i Campos. 2021. "Ecofeminist proposals for rethinking cities. Pathways to public and community access", Observatori del Deute en la Globalització (ODG), (October), 29: <https://odg.cat/es/publicacion/propuestas-ecofeministas-para-repensar-las-ciudades/>

A4

The Association d'Accueil en Agriculture et Artisanat (A4) was born of the desire to bring together people wishing to work in a dignified way in the fields of agriculture or handicrafts, but who encounter practical difficulties due to their situation. The aim of A4 is to build a dynamic of reception, training, access to work and administrative support for people with or without papers, urban or rural, in the fields of Agriculture and Crafts.

A4's representatives talk about the process of co-construction with farmers, craftsmen and members of the association, of networks of welcoming places with the aim of finding solutions together. They talk about the horizontal dynamic of welcoming farmers on which the association is built, enabling it to link existing territories and initiatives.

To find out more:

<https://a4asso.org>

Georgine Kengne Djeutane

Georgine Kengne Djeutane is an author and economist trained in conflict resolution, gender and human rights. She works with the WoMin organization to improve women's access to resources and livelihoods. As part of the "Consent and the right to say no" project, she strengthens women's ability to defend their own rights in the face of mining projects that are set up in their communities without their consent.

During the conference, Georgine highlights the disastrous consequences suffered by women as a result of these destructive extractive activities. Finally, she talks about WoMin's role in supporting initiatives and struggles that place women at the core of the fight against mining.

THE CONTRIBUTORS

To find out more:

Djeutane, G.K. (2001). La place de la revendication de l'annulation de la dette dans la lutte pour un ordre social plus juste, Forum du Tiers-Monde.

Djeutane, G.K., & Munditi, N. (2014). An Overview Of Domestic Debt In SADC: A Synthesis Of Trends, Structure And Development Impacts.

Le Gret

GRET is an international solidarity association whose aim is to improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable populations and promote social justice, while preserving our planet. Its actions, from the field to politics, are part of a process of capitalising on experience and research-action.

Guillaume Quelin, a member of GRET and Zoé Bouahom, former member of GRET, share their experience of climate transitions in the field (how to avoid maladaptation and support fair transitions) and at the level of organisations (how can the development cooperation sector, at its own level, contribute to the global effort to reduce emissions?)

To find out more:

<https://gret.org>

Manuela Royo Letelier

Manuela Royo Letelier is a lawyer and feminist activist, member of the Movement for the Defense of Water, Territory and the Environment (MODATIMA) and Vice-President of the NGO Ecofeminista SurTerritoria. Specializing in constitutional law and the human rights of indigenous peoples, she has initiated legal proceedings in defense of the right to water and against the violation of the rights of the Mapuche people. Manuela fights to advance the inclusion of social justice, ecology and feminism in Chilean politics.

As a representative of MODATIMA, Manuela discusses the issues of water grabbing and the violation of people's rights at the event. Her intervention also highlights the importance of feminist struggles in challenging the dominant logics of water management.

To find out more:

Royo M. Melin M. Mansilla P. 2017 “MAPU CHILLKANTUKUN ZUGU: Decolonizing the Wallmapu map, Constructing a cultural cartography in Mapuche territory,” Temuco: Pu Lof Editoriales, 126. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Pablo-Mansilla-Quinones/publication/342923416_MAPU_CHILLKANTUKUN_ZUGU_Descolonizando_el_Mapa_del_Wallmapu_Construyendo_Cartografia_Cultural_en_Territorio_Mapuche/links/5f0db5a5a6fdcc3ed7056a05/MAPU-CHILLKANTUKUN-ZUGU-Descolonizando-el-Mapa-del-Wallmapu-Construyendo-Cartografia-Cultural-en-Territorio-Mapuche.pdf

Sergi Escribano

Sergi Escribano is an agricultural engineer, teacher and entrepreneur working on food systems and

their economic, social and environmental sustainability. He is involved with Comonpolis, Empodera Consultores and Agroa, which promote social innovation for change and individual and collective capacity building.

Sergi's contribution provide a better understanding of the major challenges facing urban food and ecological systems, and the alternatives for bringing about the food transition towards a fairer, more resilient model.

Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP)

Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) is an organisation recognised for its climate change adaptation work on behalf of vulnerable local communities in India.

SSP promotes inclusive and sustainable community development by building resilience and empowering women in low-income areas threatened by climate change.

Naseem Shaikh and Jiji Sebastian represented SSP during the process, with the support of gender and social development professional Ratna Mathur. Here they highlight the association's initiatives to create local solutions with women on issues ranging from resilient agriculture to entrepreneurship and the protection of natural resources.

To find out more:

<https://swayamshikshanprayog.org/>

THE CONTRIBUTORS

Diego Escobar Diaz

Diego Escobar is a teacher, historian and peace activist in Colombia. He mainly studies conflicts linked to the distribution of natural resources and the way social movements deploy their political power over territories.

Diego discusses these issues through the notion of the “political ecology of difference”. Taking the example of the communities of La Guajira and the Afro-descendant communities of the Caucasian Pacific in Colombia, he propose solutions to the irrational exploitation of resources by multinationals and the resulting loss of local traditional and cultural practices.

To find out more:

Escobar D. Diego. 2020. “Security according to the Indigenous Guardia in Colombia,” *Proposals and Inspirations for Transition in Territories*, Commonsopolis, (November): <https://commonsopolis.org/fr/propositions/la-securite-selon-la-guardia-indigene-en-colombie/>



Ce document est mis à disposition selon les termes de la
Licence Creative Commons Attribution – Pas d'Utilisation
Commerciale – Pas de Modification 4.0 International.

Vous êtes libres de reproduire, distribuer et communiquer ce document au public. Néanmoins, vous devez respecter les conditions suivantes : vous devez citer le nom de l'auteur original de la manière indiquée par l'auteur ou autrice de l'œuvre ou le titulaire des droits qui vous confère cette autorisation (mais pas d'une manière qui suggérerait qu'ils ou elles vous soutiennent ou approuvent votre utilisation de l'œuvre); vous n'avez pas le droit d'utiliser ce document à des fins commerciales; vous n'avez pas le droit de modifier, de transformer ou d'adapter ce document. Le texte intégral du contrat est disponible à l'adresse suivante :
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

How and why should ecology and empowerment be linked when it comes to issues of solidarity in general and international solidarity in particular?

Ecology and empowerment aims to explore this issue for the F3E network.

By giving the floor to contributors from 6 different countries, the F3E has sought to show a diversity of approaches, which have one thing in common: the link between ecological issues and social justice.

For almost a year, the authors of the 9 articles in the book exchanged their points of view before starting to write. The product of these exchanges is in your hands: commentaries enriching the articles have been preserved to show the links between the different positions.

The book concludes with recommendations drawn up by the participants in a day dedicated to the presentation of these articles at the end of 2023, enriched by the views of the contributors.

Whether you are involved in a civil society organisation or a local authority, whether you work in France or abroad, this book is for you!



17, rue de Châteaudun
75009 Paris, France
T : 33 (0) 1 44 83 03 55
M : f3e@f3e.asso.fr
f3e.asso.fr

AVEC LE SOUTIEN DE

