

# Defenders of land and territory, resistance against extractivism and visions towards a post-extractivist egalitarian future

## **Introduction**

Two hundred years have passed since “independence” —or, rather, since the events that put an end to three centuries of Spanish colonialism and which were the basis of present-day neocolonialism. The official celebrations highlighted “the historical milestone of Independence” and celebrated, in the words of the Central American Integration System [SICA], that “Central America was born with a common history that should be used to promote it in a region of opportunities”. But what has happened to the opportunities that supposedly opened up two centuries ago, when these countries broke with colonial rule?

History seen through the mirror of the rulers reflects the eternal promise of prosperity, hiding the truth: the promise is fulfilled only for the few who hold political and economic power, whether viceroys or presidents, and is an illusion for the majority. Central America’s bicentennial celebration in 2021, was a year of multiple crises in the five “independent” countries—Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua. The “common history” reveals more setbacks than achievements. The main characteristics of colonialism—racism, the patriarchal system, looting, authoritarianism and violent repression—continue to be instruments of social control that guarantee the system of inequality and concentration of wealth reproduced in the modern era.

## **Extractivism, then and now**

Exploitation of natural resources by foreign extractivist industries is and has been a constant in this history. From the looting of gold and silver for the Spanish crown, it has gone on to the depredation of minerals, water, oil and other natural resources by transnational corporations within the modern capitalist system. The modalities have changed with new technologies, the intensification and diversification of extractive forms, and national and international contexts have changed. However, the power relations and threats to life inherent in this economic practice show remarkably few essential changes compared to colonial times.

How is extractivism expressed in the region today? Where and how are people resisting? What are the strategies and alternatives developed to break the vicious cycle of looting and conflict that has characterized the region’s economy in the last five hundred years?

To reflect on these questions, the application of an analytical power framework with a communitarian feminist perspective is proposed. These frameworks have been developed from the daily work of land and territory defenders, who fight on the front line of

resistance against the extractivist model and in the vanguard of efforts to build new worlds.

The essay is divided into three thematic parts: First, it presents the panorama of extractivism in the Central American region, its main activities and sectors, the environmental and social impacts differentiated by gender and intersectionality, and the power relations that define and shape the model. Second, it analyzes resistance and the results and consequences of social organizing, both positive in light of the achievements and its ability to stop the expansion of the model, and the costs in terms of the repression suffered by the communities at the hands of the companies and the States that promote extractivist projects. It highlights women's leadership and the link between the fight for gender equality and "buen vivir--good living. In this section, we present the examples of Honduras and Guatemala, based on our analysis and mapping of the conflicts and resistance movements linked to extractive projects in those countries.

The last section presents conclusions and visions for the future, based on the literature on post-extractivism, and on exchanges with women defenders and their organizations regarding the collective question: What do we want? The visions, transitions, and transformations needed are just a sketch, since the necessary future is a work in progress, a collective task for everyone in a society that not only promises democracy and development, but also it defines and creates them every day, from below, from and with the earth, from alternative visions of a harmonious future.

### **The modern crisis of extractivism**

The definition of extractivism is relatively simple. Alberto Acosta defines it as "those activities that remove large volumes of unprocessed natural resources (or that are limited), especially for export based on the demand of the central countries" (Acosta, 2016 p. 26) , attributing the definition to Eduardo Gudynas (Gudynas, 2015). Other studies add that the relationship is inherently unequal and is based on "the exploitation, control and export of raw materials from the South to supply the industrial development of the North" and that it has been carried out "both within the framework of colonial coercion as with the 'consent' of elites in the postcolonial era" (McKay, 2017, p. 187).

It is also important to take into account a definition that encompasses more than raw materials. "When talking about extractivism, it must also be considered that capitalism extracts other forms, such as historical knowledge, culture, the original fabrics of peoples, ancestral medicine and everything that can be dispossessed, expropriated, privatized and converted into merchandise." (JASS and Community Press, 2021).

From a strictly semantic perspective, the concept of "extracting", according to the dictionary, consists of "removing one thing from another in which it is contained or forms a whole with it". This definition illustrates some of the basic notions underlying the practice and explains the resistance against it. Extraction is an intrusion, often violent, into

a holistic structure to redirect the use of a single component, in this case for private sale and profit. Extractivism fractures, removes, exhausts, depletes.

From the logic of developmentalism, extractivism is the conversion of inert natural resources into wealth, which, in turn, is thought to constitute an ideal option for underdeveloped countries that have an abundance of natural resources, but do not have an advanced industrial sector or a significant offer of qualified services. Capitalist logic dictates that in these circumstances big capital supports “development” through the exploitation of natural resources and local labor, taking its cut and all added value in compensation.

The model reinforces the patriarchal logic that dominating nature and stripping it of its riches for the benefit of man is the great triumph of the human race. Together with the free market paradigm, the model gives free rein to maximum exploitation, executed in accordance with the interests and agenda of the few, largely without government regulation and with total disregard for the interests or defense of the peoples and territories.

Central America post-independence and in particular since the advent of the neoliberal under the Washington Consensus of the late 80s has assiduously followed the recipe oriented toward exploitation, exports and the concept of unlimited growth based on consumption. The process began in the 1990s and reached its peak with the signing of the Central American-DR Free Trade Agreement [CAFTA] with the United States, which entered into force in most of the signatory countries in 2006.

In reflecting on two hundred years since independence, CAFTA was a tremendous setback on the road to sovereignty. Like other U.S. free trade agreements (which are "agreements" in the US but binding international treaties in subordinated nations), CAFTA tied Central American economies and economic policy to the international market, and particularly to the needs of the U.S. market and transnational corporations within the neoliberal model.

National governments lost sovereignty under these agreements, due to explicit prohibitions against the use of important tools for economic planning such as protection and promotion of strategic sectors, environmental and social protections and procurement from domestic producers. On the other hand, the FTAs provided advantageous conditions for the liberalization (and loss) of national markets, privatization of public goods and services, foreign investment at all costs, and the export of goods and labor. The extractive industries, which are mostly headquartered in northern countries, benefited from the new framework and expanded, usually with the minor partner participation of national capital.

The boom has occurred in what are considered the traditional extractive industries, including mining, oil, hydroelectric, and timber and agriculture as seen in the extension of

Central America agribusiness such as oil palm, sugar cane, banana, pineapple, rubber, eucalyptus, teak and white pine plantations (García, 2020). Added to these are “green” megaprojects: large-scale wind power projects, agrofuel monocultures, etc., and non-traditional extractive megaprojects: megatourism, biopiracy that seeks to patent products of biodiversity and traditional knowledge, and the theft and commercialization of ancestral knowledge, and some large craft projects that appropriate traditional crafts, among others. In summary, it can be said that, more than the product or the activity, the definition of extractivism is applied according to its large scale, and its ways of relating to communities and the environment (or “natural assets”), production, and marketing.

Many authors have highlighted the few local and national benefits generated by this model, without weighing them against the high economic, environmental and human costs it generates. For years there have been data that, when correctly interpreted, show an indisputable negative balance. Despite this, governments generally refuse to recognize the damage caused by the model and institute measures to replace it as the motor of national economies (Acosta, 2013; Ortega, 2019). Statistics show that extractivism does not even make large contributions to the economies, while removing enormous amounts of non-renewable resources. The World Bank reports that in 2019, the last year registered, mining contributed only 0.3% of GDP in Guatemala and even less in Honduras (World Bank, 2019). Despite the difficulty in obtaining this figure, in 2016 the Central American Business Intelligence (CABI) reported that mining contributed only 0.9 percent of GDP at the regional level (El Periódico, 2017).

On the other hand, unfortunately there is currently no scientific methodology capable of accurately expressing the enormous environmental and social costs of extractive industries. However, direct observation and empirical findings from experience are the fundamental measure of the damage and harmful consequences of the model. Examples of this are some experiences that have been sadly infamous in past years. Among them is the devastating impact of the mining company in San Miguel Ixtahuacán in Huehuetenango, Guatemala, which has been widely documented (Tzayik and Consejo del Pueblo Maya, 2018).

What we do know is that the environmental damage caused by the extractive industry includes: destruction of water sources and quality, air pollution, loss of biodiversity (fauna and flora, agrodiversity), the loss of natural areas, displacement of local communities, destruction of regional economies, manipulation and imposition on rural communities or indigenous groups, increase in corruption, noise pollution, soil erosion, deforestation, conflicts and violence, division of communities, loss of social fabric, loss of surface vegetation, soil contamination, food insecurity and malnutrition, and large-scale alteration of geological and aquatic systems. The affected populations are, in most cases, indigenous peoples, who were often not consulted or the consultations were ignored or carried out by the States with groups that were not representative of the communities. The imposition of these projects in many communities have resulted in tension and conflict

leading to murders, defamation, persecution and criminalization of land and territory defenders in many parts of the world and particularly in Latin America.

Some of the attempts to measure the costs associated with extractivist projects have been based on comparing the income generated by large extractivist projects with the possible income from environmental services and payments for the conservation of forests, watersheds or rivers. Although such statistics are useful to illustrate that the associated damages have real costs in monetary terms, they do not fully fill the need to illustrate the core problem that we identify here: the clash between two competing visions of what constitutes “value” for societies. and the contrasting visions of the relationship with nature and life.

In the final section these concepts and contradictions are discussed further, but here we can state that the distinction rests on the profound difference in worldviews of the interested parties: for extractivism, water, land, air and minerals are “natural resources” that the planet supplies to society for its exploitation and commercialization; for indigenous and rural communities and human rights defenders, they are “common (or shared) natural goods”. María Guadalupe García from Guatemala explains:

“When we talk about natural resources, it is important for us to say that they are not natural resources, because when we talk about ‘resources’ we are thinking about money, that it will bring money, that it can be negotiated, that it can be sold, that it can be bought. And it is not like that. That’s why we have given the name a different meaning. For us they are natural assets, essential for our existence: like Mother Earth, water, forests, our knowledge and ancestral wisdom. They are not sold, nor bought, they have no price, they are not merchandise (García, 2020).

The extractivist model hides the social and environmental costs of its projects. Since they are not incorporated into market prices, it is as if these costs did not exist. Therefore, it is the public sector and the communities themselves that end up assuming the environmental and social costs, without support or remuneration and almost always at the expense of their lives, wellbeing and organizational forms. Although the latest reports on climate change make clear its relationship to more frequent natural disasters, and social conflicts as a result of extractivist projects have become daily news, the discourse of the powerful continues to insist that extractivist projects bring net benefits to the communities and nations where they are implemented.

While the populations directly affected by the projects pay the hidden costs, and they are mostly impoverished indigenous/campesino populations, it should also be noted that within those populations, women pay a disproportionate part of these costs. The depletion and/or contamination of water in wells and aquifers forces women to bring water from increasingly distant sources, and reduces their ability to maintain adequate levels of hygiene, which --especially critical in times of pandemic-- leads to more hours caring for the sick. Diseases caused by chemicals and fumigations used in production

processes also generate a heavier workload in caring for sick people and also affects their health. Land grabs and displacement mean diminished ability to produce food for the family. Displacement also translates into overcrowded housing and forced migration of primarily men, leaving women as single heads of household, but also of whole families.

These externalized costs, that is, costs not incorporated into the price of megaproject energy, mineral and monoculture products, do not disappear by magic simply because they are ignored by the businesses--they are paid by the most vulnerable sectors of society and highlighted by women. The former Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples Tauli-Corpuz (2017) pointed to extractivism as one of the most serious threats to indigenous peoples:

“The intensifying expansion of extractive industries, agribusiness and mega infrastructure development projects, which encroach into indigenous peoples’ territories, are the main threats for most indigenous peoples. Conservation measures continue to pose risks to indigenous peoples, as do the swiftly expanding resources dedicated to climate change projects done without obtaining their free, prior and informed consent. The consequences of such violations on indigenous peoples, as I have observed in a wide range of countries across the world, continue to result in the expropriation of land, forced evictions, the denial of self-governance, lack of access to livelihoods and spiritual sites and the loss of culture. I am particularly concerned by the increasing number of direct attacks against indigenous leaders and community members who are defending their land rights...” (Tauli-Corpuz, 2017)

In addition, she specified that during her period as Special Rapporteur she had sent numerous messages of concern regarding these attacks to the governments of many countries, including Guatemala and Honduras.

Another constant feature of extractivism is violence. Violence is inherent to the model, which depends on the use of force to install and operate, uses violent forms of extraction and employs violence against any organization and community that opposes it. Attacks against defenders of land and territory who openly oppose extractivism are many. According to the Global Witness report, Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua are among the countries with the highest number of threats against land and environmental defenders (Global Witness, 2020). Although the report corresponds to the year 2019, news articles show that violence has not abated and, in many places, has increased.

## **Resistance**

Organizations from Central America and other countries in Latin America that resist the imposition of extractivist projects are deploying a wide range of strategies and actions. In many cases, they have succeeded and megaprojects have been prevented, suspended or cancelled. Strategies include lawsuits and legal defense, direct actions such as blocking the entry of crews and machinery, research on rights and impacts, national and international

solidarity campaigns, popular education, media campaigns to reach public opinion, spiritual and communitarian forms of resistance, and strengthening organizations and networks.

A strategy that has gained strength in recent years consists of lobbying and campaigning to stop or withdraw investment in extractivist projects that put the rights and well-being of communities around the world at risk. The “Behind Extractivism” tool kit developed from the research “Behind Extractivism: Money, Power and Community Resistance”, from the Count Me In! Consortium offers a roadmap for developing this strategy, starting with how to track sources of investment that often seek to cover their tracks and blur across multiple players. The strategy outlined begins with the identification of “pressure points” - the links most susceptible to breaking the investment chain (CMI, 2020 p. 17). The research analyzes three cases, one of them the Agua Zarca hydroelectric plant in Honduras, which illustrates the campaign carried out by indigenous defender and feminist Berta Cáceres before she was murdered in 2016 and the fight of her organization, the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras [COPINH]. The study offers tools for other communities in resistance and finds that successful campaigns typically target a particular sector or project, and work separately and combine research to uncover financial actors, with direct action.

Analyzing the power dynamics that operate within and around extractivist projects is at the center of the strategy. In this context, the role of the international financial system in promoting investment in extractivist industries is central.

“The financialization of the global economy is one of the main reasons for going behind the scenes, not only to identify the companies that have business models that are based on dispossession, but also to identify the investors and decision makers. decisions to support this business model and thus make them viable.” (CMI, 2021)

Knowledge of the precise role of private and state investors, has also highlighted the importance of international solidarity. International organizations in the countries that invest in these projects have developed research that reveals the contradictions between state investment in extractivist projects that violate human rights and governments’ commitments in international human rights agreements. All the emblematic struggles in the region have developed a strong component of visibility and international solidarity: for example, the fight against the electricity generation project and the broader initiatives of COPINH, the fight against the mining companies in La Puya, the campaign for the freedom of the political prisoners in Guapinol and of Bernardo Caal in Cahabón, and the aforementioned COPINH. International pressure strengthens local organization and increases the political price of repression for the governments of the region that try to weaken the resistance, puts investment and the ability to attract investment in the future at risk, and has the potential to destabilize geopolitical relations held by governments with questioned legitimacy in their own countries.

## Women at the forefront of resistance

Analysis, new stories, field research and reports from many NGOs agree that in Central American countries women participate in land defense activities and that the impacts they suffer are differentiated by gender. This despite the fact that they face huge political and legal barriers to obtain formal recognition of their land tenure rights and often do not have formal titles. They are also underrepresented in leadership and decision-making in the communities and the social organizations where they participate, due to persistent practices of discrimination and exclusion.

The declaration of the women of the Mamá Maquín organization expresses the reasoning that leads to the high participation of women in the struggles to defend the land and against the invasions of extractive megaprojects:

“For us, defending the territory means defending life. We are moving toward living in harmony, based on our own worldview. We consider that we are a WHOLE coexisting in a WHOLE. Defending the land is defending its rights against what capitalism has imposed on us: the idea of private property. We defend the land even without owning it, this shows that the power we seek is not a power of domination over others, but a collective relationship in harmony with those with whom we coexist.” (Mamá Maquín, s.f.).

The concept of body-territory lies at the heart of Central American women's resistance. An indigenous participant at the Alchemy School for Women's Leadership founded by Just Associates (JASS) in Guatemala explained the relationship this way:

“Extractivism not only violates our rights, but also limits us from exercising a life free of violence. With the militarization of our territories, there is fear, there is terrors in our territories, brought by these extractivist megaprojects. Our relationship with the territory, with water, mother earth, grandmother moon, seeds, among others, is broken. It disrupts the body of women, our sexuality, our emotions; they see us as a sexual object... For that same reason, we began to decide that we must defend the first territory, which is our body, and declare all territories or spaces free of violence against women.” (García, 2020).

The concept of body-territory has been elaborated by several women defenders in the region and now constitutes an important axis in the conceptualization of their work and the training of land defenders. It clearly establishes the relationship between sexist violence and extractivist violence, and between feminist resistance and resistance in defense of the land.

Women's participation in defense of land and territory and rights has a very high cost. Among the risks they face are the following, as reported by defenders themselves:

- Increase in racialized and gender-based structural violence used to divide communities, weaken women's leadership and overcome resistance

- Cultural and spiritual destruction of traditional livelihoods and economies
- Public shame, stigmatization, criminalization and attacks on honor and reputation
- Threats and attacks in the private sphere and against friends and family
- Physical attacks, sexual violence, torture, murders and forced disappearances
- Attacks against groups and movements of women defenders (CMI, 2021).

Women defenders in the Mesoamerican subregion carry out their work under conditions of discrimination, violence and impunity that put their physical integrity and work at risk. Throughout the region there are multiple manifestations of violence perpetrated by different actors: State actors, including politicians and security agents employ the excessive use of force, home searches, criminalization and prosecution, illegal detention and arbitrary arrests, torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, restrictions on freedom of movement and association. Private companies use threats, intimidation and psychological harassment, criminalization and judicialization. Sometimes women activists face exclusion from decision-making spaces or expulsion within their own organizations. In the community and family sphere there are also different manifestations of violence aimed at forcing women to abandon their roles as leaders and defenders (JASS, 2018, p. 26).

The report of the Mesoamerican Initiative for Women Human Rights Defenders [IMD] notes that in 2020 women defenders of land and territory were the group that reported the highest number of attacks and murders. (IMD, 2021).

## **Honduras**

The following analysis of extractivism in Honduras and the resistance of women human rights defenders is based on several studies in which we have participated as Just Associates, JASS. The first is the "Report - Mapping: Women and the struggles for land and territory in Honduras" (JASS, 2018), a mapping of megaprojects and resistance published in 2018 and based on research and work in the field in 10 of the 18 Honduran departments.

The report identifies "critical struggles" linked to defense of common goods (rivers, water, territory, land) that seek to achieve specific objectives. The methodology identifies: the type of struggle, the location and areas affected, the conflicts that women face, and the consequences and results that these struggles have had in the lives and work of the women defenders. The field work was carried out between 2017 and 2018 through the application of one hundred and forty-two surveys, twenty-seven in-depth interviews and seventeen focus groups, in addition to the review of secondary information sources.

The study is part of the work carried out by JASS to strengthen the leadership of women, their organizations and movements, and uses popular feminist education and power analysis as tools,

“[...] analyzing how the relations of domination expressed in the extractivist economic model, which interact with the patriarchal, racist and colonialist order in the Latin American region and particularly in Honduras, undermine fundamental rights and conditions of lives of the majority of the population, at the same time that it affects women in a particular way.” (Flores, 2018)

The second is “Behind extractivism: money, power and community resistance”, a study focused on Honduras, Indonesia and Zimbabwe, commissioned by the Count Me In! Consortium. This research deals with the financing behind the extractive industry with specific sections on Honduras (CMI, 2020, pp. 12-18). The study illustrates the links between private actors, investors and the Honduran government to promote a project that, although it was finally suspended thanks to the organization and the solidarity of the affected peoples, led to the murder of at least two leaders of the organization, COPINH, that opposed it: Berta Cáceres and Tomás García. Berta's death was a catalyst for international feminist organizations to rethink strategies and forms of South-North solidarity, and to redouble their commitment to local struggles.

The Honduran experience with extractivism illustrates the main dynamics in what can be considered a worst-case scenario. A convergence of negative factors weakened the ability to build democratic, peaceful and effective responses, despite of the existence of many brave forces in defense of rights and territory.

The most important elements that changed the correlation of powers in favor of the extractive industries are: 1) the lack of governance and democratic institutions after the 2009 coup and the permanent crisis of government legitimacy; 2) the use of militarized repression as a strategy of social control against the opposition to the authoritarian coup regime and against the struggles for land that affect the economic interests of the political/economic elites; 3) uncertainty and lack of legal guarantees regarding land ownership in the face of a State strategy of supporting land grabs by the powerful; 4) the violent presence of organized crime in the territories; 5) the existence of structural inequalities based on an economic system of colonial heritage; 6) the laws and public policies in order to strengthen the extractive model and 7) the strong link between the development of extractivist projects and corruption (Flores and Infante, 2018, p 56).

As in other countries, the state's almost unconditional support for extractivist industries does not lead to significant benefits for the national economy. The 2018 mining census registered 854 mining concessions in the country, while official data revealed that mining activity provided employment for less than 1% of the economically active population, more than half of them without benefits and without employment registered for women (The Social Forum on External Debt and Development of Honduras -FOSDEH, 2020). Investment promotion policies imply loss of income for the national government in the form of tax exemptions and expenses in different types of subsidies, without counting the cost related to the deployment of public forces to protect private projects. With the Honduran General Mining Law of 2013, the State awarded itself the rights to minerals in

national territory, taking control of “underutilized” lands for economic development areas often in ancestral use by indigenous and campesino peoples, and without taking into account the provisions of Article 15.2. of Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization [ILO] on procedures for the self-determination of indigenous peoples, ratified by Honduras.

Honduras also exemplifies the clash between the use of land and territory for private sector exploitation of resources for export by transnational companies, and the use of land and territory by communities, which is mainly to live and work in collective food production.

The defenders and organizations interviewed pointed out that dispossession and the imposition of megaprojects breaks with this logic of collective production and leads to the deterioration of the land.

“When large landowners evict the cooperatives, the production of basic grains begins to disappear and the production of African palm begins and there begins to be destruction of natural resources in the areas of territories where there were lagoons, living beings, aquatic species abounded, but the landowners wiped out those lagoons, they built drains, and they filled them to plant African palm”. (Flores and Infante, 2018, p. 44).

The surveys also identified various forms of violence against people participating in the resistance, such as death threats, criminalization, persecution and harassment, assaults, murders, and sexual violence. Specifically, they established: “Regarding those who perpetrate these forms of violence, the police, companies, armed forces, public and municipal officials, other communities and organized crime are the agents most mentioned. These data confirm that there is an established pattern of violence that affects organizations and leaders dedicated to the defense of land and territory” (Flores and Infante, 2018, p. 56).

Likewise, they confirm the urgency of supporting protection mechanisms and models. Particularly, in collective protection that focuses on strengthening the entire community. It is important to point out that all the studies cited included a protection perspective to reduce risks and safeguard the safety and well-being of WHRDs.

The mapping of conflicts and resistances concludes:

“Most conflicts identified are linked to the usurpation of land and opposition to mining projects, which leads the organizations to confront local governments and landowners, since it is about defending the lands where they have always lived and cultivated the food that enables them to survive”. (Flores e Infante, 2018, p. 24)

The surveys and interviews also revealed that the violence that Honduran women face when defending land and territory are different from those experienced by men, since

women face more physical and sexual assaults and threats actually are born out in attacks in a higher percentage of cases, while men are criminalized and murdered more often. The mapping confirms that violence against women defenders has the double function of being a punishment for their activism and inhibiting their participation, and that it intimidates women who already participate and reduces the possibility that younger women join.

Police officers are the largest group of perpetrators of violence, followed by state agents in general, and people employed by companies. There is also a significant number of cases of violence against women by their domestic partners. This violence "weakens social movements and their struggles, by hindering and/or weakening the contribution and participation of women in the defense of natural goods, land, and territories." The study also found that, although women constitute the majority of members of organizations, they are not adequately represented in the leadership of their organizations and communities due to patriarchal concepts that produce excuses such as 'they are not prepared', 'they are not want' or 'they have too much work at home'.

### **Guatemala**

A defender from the area of the south coast of Guatemala describes what it is like to live next to extractive agribusiness projects, in this case oil palm, and why she decides to fight:

“Currently, we find ourselves in a country that is marked, very strongly, by agro-industrial production, and many of the women with whom we work live in the midst of large farms producing for agro-export. Every day the few lands that are still in the hands of peasant men and women are becoming more and more concentrated. We consider that there have been no policies or strategies on the part of the State to guarantee that women can have access to all the means of production, taking into account that land is a fundamental element for families’ lives in rural areas, for peasant farmers, but especially for peasant women. (Regional Group on Gender and Extractives, 2021)

Extractivism in Guatemala has expanded under a series of governments criticized for their proximity to corruption scandals and anti-democratic practices. In mining, there are two hundred mining exploitation licenses in force, thirty-four exploration licenses, one hundred eighty-three applications for mining exploitation licenses in process and two hundred thirty-six procedures for exploration licenses, all data up to January 2021. This expansion has had a strong and negative impact on the communities and has resulted in assassinations and persecution of those who oppose these projects, in addition to fueling conflict and causing divisions in the communities and in society in general (Veliz, 2015). The decision of the Minister of Energy and Mines during the pandemic to allow mining operations to continue as an "essential activity" while subjecting the population, including the communities in resistance, to strict confinement measures, enabled mining companies to extend their activities and influences (Acoguate, 2020, with data from the Ministry of Energy and Mines).

Guatemala also has ninety-eight hydroelectric plants currently in operation. According to available official data, the main monocultures cover vast tracts of land, the most important being: coffee 365.6 thousand hectares, sugar cane 278.9 thousand hectares, African palm 152.7 thousand hectares, rubber 100 8 thousand hectares and cardamom: 55.9 thousand hectares (National Institute of Statistics [INE], 2015, cited in JASS and Community Press, 2021).

Defenders and their organizations report that the level of risk rises in the context of the pandemic:

“[...] the crisis is increasing the vulnerability and risk of women defenders in the territories. Some of the extractive companies and their machinery have not stopped and rather take advantage of the pandemic to continue their activities and exercise control of the population in collusion with other powers. This situation favors the alliances of corrupt mayors, security forces, groups outside the law and extractive companies [...]. The quarantine contributes to strengthening the repressive vigilance against women and the resistance in the places where they are organized. Authoritarianism is strengthened by fear and uncertainty in the face of the pandemic”. (JASS Bulletin, May 2020)

In 2020-2021 JASS carried out a mapping that identifies and classifies one hundred and twenty-two extractive projects in various regions of the country. The study also records data on the resistance that has been generated as a result of the imposition of these projects. The mapping collects information on the type of megaprojects, their location, environmental damage and affected resources, the phase of operation the project is in, the affected population, data on the company, resistance and their demands, social impacts and gender-differentiated impacts.

The mapping notes that sixty-four (52%) of the conflicts have to do with mining projects, twenty-two (18%) with hydroelectric projects, ten agro-industrial (palm, cane, etc.) and twenty-six in various other categories, including forestry, oil, electricity distribution, pollution and evictions. These data are similar to the experience in Honduras and other countries in the region.

The registered environmental damages include: destruction of water sources and quality, air pollution, loss of biodiversity (fauna and flora, and agrobiodiversity), loss of natural areas, displacement of local communities, destruction of regional economies, manipulation and imposition on rural communities or indigenous groups. Likewise, there is an increase in corruption, noise pollution, soil erosion, deforestation, conflict and violence, division of communities, loss of social fabric, loss of superficial vegetation, soil contamination, and alteration of systems large-scale geological and aquatic. The affected populations are in most cases indigenous peoples, who often were not consulted according to the law, or the consultations were ignored to continue with the extractivist projects.

The opposition to the projects registered shows several key characteristics: its sustainability over time using a diversity of strategies, the high participation of women, the use of laws and the courts —despite the lack of credibility that the majority of the population has in the institutions of justice—, and community organization based on cultural identity. It is striking that of the one hundred and twenty-two registered extractivist projects where there is resistance, forty-eight, or almost 40%, have been prevented, suspended or cancelled, largely as a result of community organization, almost all in the mining sector.

In addition to the use of the courts, the communities develop public information campaigns based on the rights of indigenous peoples, especially the right to free and informed consultation, the rights of nature, and citing breaches of national and international laws by of companies. The responses of the state include repression, criminalization, defamation and arguments of national and regional development (Mesoamerican Project). In some cases, such as La Puya, companies have launched million-dollar lawsuits against states as a measure of coercion to stop resistance (Institute for Policy Studies [IPS] and Earthworks, 2021).

### **Conclusions: visions and transitions for the next 200 years**

It is increasingly evident that the earth, the human species, and the flora and fauna will not last another two hundred years with the current extractivist socioeconomic model. How is a new post-extractivist, post-patriarchal and post-neocolonial society imagined and how is it built?

The first conclusion is that centuries of extractivism have not achieved development in the region, much less benefited the majority or lifted communities out of poverty. The first problem is the premise on which the extractivist narrative rests: the equation extractivism = exports = growth = well-being has not turned out to be true. It has been demonstrated that the profits remain in the hands of the elites and the model increases poverty and displacement, among the many other costs mentioned above.

The second problem lies in the meaning of “development”. The CMI! study that collected the perceptions of affected communities in Honduras, Zimbabwe and Indonesia, explains the dilemma:

“The elitist framework of the theme portrays a struggle between the forces in favor of development and those against it. COPINH and other organizations that oppose extractivist projects are labeled “anti-development”, while model cities are presented as job creation zones. Investment is the engine of this development. This is the narrative promoted by the International Monetary Fund [IMF] and the World Bank, and also by the Honduran state.” (CMI, 2021, p. 18).

Model cities or special development zones are built through policies that offer exceptional terms for attracting foreign investment. They encourage the creation of enclave economies that often suspend obligations, including compliance with certain national laws. This is the most recent and most extreme method of capitalism to strip lands and territories from the control and use of the communities that inhabit them and hand them over to transnational corporations.

In Honduras the government of Juan Orlando Hernández created what are now called Employment and Economic Development Zones [ZEDE] and elevated them to constitutional status, which according to some constitutionalists violates the constitution. In Guatemala, the so-called ZOLIC (Zona Libre de Industria y Comercio) play the same role. Entering into a discussion of this model is beyond the scope of this essay, however it is important to point out their role, the threat they present to the environment and human rights given their exclusive purpose in generating profits for the private sector, as well as highlighting that there are important organizational efforts at the national level and in the areas implementation to resist the model (FOSDEH, 2021).

Communities that fight against extractive megaprojects emphatically deny that they are anti-development. Laura Zuñiga Cáceres, a member of COPINH and daughter of Berta Cáceres, stated: “They have tried to discredit us with this idea that we are not part of development, this “development” that they want us to believe in, which is based on the destruction of some peoples for the survival of others” (Chávez and López, 2021). The Garifuna leader and defender Miriam Miranda clearly expresses “the recovery of identity that has to be done as a result of this process of [...] countering this vision of false development that is racist, sexist, discriminatory and colonialist. We have to fight to recompose, from our entrails, what we are. To return to a culture where solidarity, complementarity and mutual aid prevail, and not the most brutal individualism that this predatory system instills in us” (Chávez and López, 2021).

Changing the idea of development and elaborating a new concept of well-being urgently requires reducing affluent consumption in the north. A recent study titled “Material Transition: Supply and Demand Solutions for Renewable Energy” by the London Mining Network warns that a response to climate change that remains extractivist may exacerbate the crisis (Whitmore, 2021). The study emphasizes that we cannot depend on mining, which implies the sacrifice of ecosystems concentrated in the global south, to get out of the climate crisis. It stresses that the solution is not to designate zones or populations to be sacrificed, but to build on the base of the preservation of traditional cultures and livelihoods, particularly in the global south. “Many of these communities [that the current model is willing to sacrifice] are the ones that are setting the example by protecting lifestyles that show Western society how we should live, that embody the idea of how we can transform our energy sources, with fair access to essential elements and an emphasis on good living.”

The study offers a series of recommendations, including developing a "circular economy" that reduces needs related to the use of extractive materials through recycling, reuse and redistribution, not only of materials but also of wealth, power, technology and knowledge. It is also necessary to elaborate, along with affected communities, binding laws for environmental protection, regulation of mining companies and human rights monitoring systems.

The concept described above echoes the principles of 'living well', *Buen Vivir*, shared among indigenous peoples in the region, aiming to live in balance with the land, in a society where people can satisfy their needs without excesses, sharing common goods and with a commitment to the community and the well-being.

There is a growing consensus among land defenders and researchers on these issues that this goal is not compatible with development as defined in the neocolonialist capitalist system. That is why some, like Gudynas, start talking not about development or "alternative development", but about "alternatives to development". He says: "It is rejecting the possibility of continuing to advance along the path of contemporary capitalism, with high consumption of matter and energy, by trying to cushion its most unpleasant effects. It is clear that a substantial change of course is necessary" (Gudynas, 2011 p. 195).

From the academic sphere and from the practice in the communities, there are many people who are thinking about answers to the question, in the best of cases, united in a radical and transforming praxis. Some principles emerge:

- Transitions to a post-extractivist world do not propose the prohibition of all forms of extractivism, "but rather explore ways that allow these sectors to be resized, stop being economically dependent on them and maintain only those that are truly necessary, and under conditions acceptable operating conditions" (Gudynas, 2011, pp. 187-216).
- The goal is not unlimited growth. The climate and material crises lead us to deeply question the goal of development based on unlimited growth, based on a consumer society with enormous inequalities. Development must be based on the eradication of poverty and ecological sustainability.
- The post-extractivist future has to be post-patriarchal. That means, among other transformations, the elimination of violence against women and gender equality in all spheres: the family, the community and State policy.

The talk of the future "post", or after, the current period ends in general terms, because the vision of how it will be is under construction and will have to be collective, with respect for differences and diversities. As the Zapatistas say in Mexico, "a world in which many worlds fit". The resistances are already growing, with many elements of this vision-- combining ancient worldviews and scientific knowledge and cutting-edge technologies. They are governed by some principles, as we have highlighted, opposed to the premises of the extractive model, starting with the idea of land:

“For the women and the native peoples of Abya Yala, the territory is much more than a physical space, a location on a map or an administrative political division. It is about the place that a group assumes as its own because it has its livelihood and recognizes its history, because it is there that they are buried and the memory of their ancestors is honored. The territory is understood as a web of life in which humanity is not the center, but only a small part that interacts interdependently with all other beings”. (Chávez and López, 2021)

## Bibliography

Abya Yala (2019). *Extractivismos y corrupción, Anatomía de una íntima re- lación*. Nueva edición, Ecuador.

Acoguate (29 de diciembre de 2020). *Extractivismo en tiempos del COVID-19*.

<https://acoguate.org/extractivismo-en-tiempos-del-covid-19/>

Defensoras de tierra y territorio, resistencias contra el extractivismo y visiones hacia un futuro...

Acosta, Alberto (2016). Aporte al debate. El extractivismo como categoría de saqueo y devastación. *Forum for interamerican Research*, 9 (2), 24-33. [www.interamerica.de http://interamerica.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/02\\_fiar-Vol.-9.2-Acosta-25-33.pdf](http://interamerica.de/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/02_fiar-Vol.-9.2-Acosta-25-33.pdf)

Acosta, Alberto (2017). Postextractivismo: del discurso a la práctica- Reflexiones para la acción. *International Development Policy*.

Acosta, Alberto (2021). *Postextractivismo: del discurso a la práctica- Reflexiones para la acción*. <https://doi.org/10.4000/poldev.2496>

Alayza, Alejandro y Gudynas, Eduardo (eds.) (2011). *Transiciones: Postextractivismo y alternativas al extractivismo en Perú: Caminos para las transiciones postextractivistas*, Lima: Red Peruana por una Globalización con Equidad y CEPES.

Banco Mundial (2011). *Rentas mineras (% del PIB)*. <https://datos.bancomundial.org/indicador/NY.GDP.MINR.RT.ZS>

Blackmore, Emma; Bugalski, Natalie y Pred, David (2015). *Following the Money: An advocate's guide to securing accountability in agricultural investments*.

<https://www.followingthemoney.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Following-the-Money.pdf>

Campanini O., M. Gandarillas y E. Gudynas.(2020). Violencia y derechos en los Extractivismos. Extracciones en Bolivia y América Latina. *La Libre*, Cochabamba.

CEPAL (2015). *El rol de las empresas y los Estados en las violaciones contra los defensores y las defensoras de los derechos de la tierra, el territorio y el ambiente. Informe Conjunto de organizaciones de la sociedad Civil* [Informe a la Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos 156o periodo de sesiones]

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Environment/>

[ImplementationReport/Civil%20society%20organization%20joint%20report%20SP.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Environment/ImplementationReport/Civil%20society%20organization%20joint%20report%20SP.pdf)

Chávez, Lolita; Marusia López Cruz (2021). Protección colectiva para defender el territorio, defensa del territorio para proteger la vida: Aportes de defensoras de tierra y territorio en Mesoamérica. <https://www.jass-fghr.org/proteccion-colectiva-para-defender-el-territorio-defensa-del-territorio-para-proteger-la-vida?source=share-jass2>

Count Me In! (septiembre, 2021). *Divulgación de quiénes son los financistas y facilitadores de proyectos extractivos*.

Flores, Daysi e Infante, Mariela (2018). *Informe Mapeo: Las mujeres y las luchas por la tierra y el territorio en Honduras*. Tegucigalpa: JASS. [https://justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/informe\\_ejecutivo\\_extractivismos\\_jass\\_correccion\\_dos\\_27-07-18.pdf](https://justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/informe_ejecutivo_extractivismos_jass_correccion_dos_27-07-18.pdf)

Foro Social de la Deuda Externa y Desarrollo de Honduras (2021). Honduras, Globalización y la aventura de la ZEDE. Tegucigalpa. <https://fosdeh.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/fosdeh-2021-aventura-ZEDES.pdf>

García, María Guadalupe (11 de junio de 2020). Curso de liderazgo estratégico – Escuela de Alquimia Feminista. [Documento interno de JASS], Guatemala.

Grupo Regional de Género y Extractivas (2021). Situación de mujeres indígenas y rurales en defensa de la tierra y el territorio en Guatemala ante la pandemia de la COVID-19. *Boletín del Grupo Regional de Género y Extractivas*, 4 (9).

<https://sway.office.com/ESZSxM0PIHPLnBhy?ref=Link>;

<https://sway.office.com/c82Wob7bOE9vhhjK?ref=Link>

Gudynas, Eduardo (2011). Transiciones: Postextractivismo y alternativas al extractivismo en Perú: Caminos para las transiciones post extractivistas. En Alejandro Alayza y Eduardo Gudynas (eds), Red Peruana por una Globalización con Equidad y CEPES, Lima.

Gudynas, Eduardo (2015). *Extractivismos - Ecología, economía y política de un modo de entender el desarrollo y la Naturaleza*. La Paz: CLAES - CEDIB. <http://gudynas.com/wp-content/uploads/GudynasExtractivismosEcologiaPoliticaBo15Anuncio.pdf>

Gudynas, Eduardo (2021). *Caminos para las transiciones postextractivistas*. Centro Latinoamericano de Ecología Social [CLAES].

Institute for Policy Studies, Earthworks (1 de octubre de 2020). *Mining Injustice through International Arbitration*. [https://ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Guatemala-Mining-Injustice-Report\\_esp.pdf](https://ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Guatemala-Mining-Injustice-Report_esp.pdf)

Instituto Centroamericano de Estudios Fiscales [ICEFI] (2014). *Diagnóstico de la situación minera en Honduras 2007-2012*. Honduras: Instituto

Centroamericano de Estudios Fiscales. [https://icefi.org/sites/default/files/diagnostico\\_de\\_la\\_situacion\\_minera\\_en\\_honduras\\_2007-2012\\_version\\_para\\_sitio\\_web.pdf](https://icefi.org/sites/default/files/diagnostico_de_la_situacion_minera_en_honduras_2007-2012_version_para_sitio_web.pdf)

JASS (2020). Boletín.

JASS Mesoamérica, Prensa Comunitaria (2021). Mapeo final [Trabajo interno no publicado].

Jayasinghe, Namalie; Jiménez de la Rosa, Mirna; Tamara Billima-Mulenga Maritza Ruiz y Cheelo, Mwiinga (2019). *Accountable to Whom? Promoting women's rights through extractive industries revenue accountability*, Oxfam Research Backgrounder.

Kafati, Alejandro y García Obed (2020). *Ilusionismo económico, modelo extractivista y COVID-19 en Honduras, las consecuencias en una economía debilitada*. Foro Social de la Deuda Externa y Desarrollo de Honduras [FOSDEH].  
<https://fosdeh.com/publicacion/ilusionismo-economico-mo-del-extractivista-y-covid-19-en-honduras/>

McKay, B. (2017). *The politics of control: New dynamics of agrarian change in Bolivia's Soy Complex*.

Organización de Mujeres Mamá Maquín (s. f.). Manifiesto de Defensa de la Vida, Cuerpo y Territorio. Guatemala: S. F.

Ortega, Ana (s. d.). *El extractivismo en Honduras*. <https://library.fes.de/files/bueros/fesamcentral/11626.pdf>

Rights Action (2014). *Invirtiendo en Conflicto; Destrucción local, ganancia ajena*. Canadá.

Silva, Manuel (21 de agosto de 2017). Minería redujo su aporte al PIB en 1,93 por ciento en los últimos años, *El Periódico*. <https://elperiodico.com.gt/noticias/economia/2017/08/21/mineria-redujo-su-aporte-al-pib-en-1-93-por-ciento-en-ultimos-anos/>

Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana [SICA] <https://www.sica.int/conmemoraciones/bicentenarioca>

Tauli-Corpuz, Victoria (12 de octubre de 2017). *Statement of Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the seventy-second session of the General Assembly*. Nueva York. <https://ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22242&Lang=D=E>

Tramel, Salena Fay; Naqvi, Arif; Wesso, Ronald (2020). *Detrás del extractivismo: dinero, poder y resistencias comunitarias*. Count Me In! [https://www.justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/detras\\_del\\_extractivismo.pdf](https://www.justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/detras_del_extractivismo.pdf)

Tzadik, Consejo del Pueblo Maya (2018). *Lo que la mina nos dejó*. [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFYPQGkVi2c>

Wachenje, Benjamin (29 de julio de 2020). Defender el mañana. *Global Witness*. <https://www.globalwitness.org/es/defending-tomorrow-es/>

War on Want, London Mining Network (2021). A material transition: Supply and Demand Solutions for Renewable Energy Minerals [Informe]. <http://www.minesandcommunities.org/article.php?a=14537>

*This text was prepared based on the work of our JASS research team and the contributions of land and territory defenders who have participated in different events, and particularly in the Feminist Alchemy School in Honduras and Guatemala. It has been greatly enriched by the contributions of Patricia Ardón, regional director of JASS Mesoamerica.*