

*Collection, summary  
and edition by Sam  
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# MINES & TERRITORY

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News comes and goes. With social media as the main outlet for civil society organizations in Colombia to get their stories heard, a story can be famous for a day after which it disappears in the mass information. Mines & Territory aims to **register and share these stories** for longer than just a viral thread. Mines & Territory collects the **most remarkable events** that have occurred in the past month regarding **extractivist matters in Colombia** and summarizes them in English so that the information is accessible to anyone interested and raises awareness internationally to the current eco-socio realities in Colombia.

## COLOMBIA'S LARGEST HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT, HIDROITUANGO, RUNS RIO CAUCA, THE COUNTRY'S SECOND LARGEST RIVER, DRY

Colombia is suffering one of the worst ecological disasters in decades after the level of the country's second most important river, the Cauca, was reduced to less than 10 percent of normal flow. The country's largest hydroelectric dam project Hidroituango took emergency measures and closed two of the dam's floodgates following concerns that the danger of a collapse and thus a deadly flood posed a risk to vulnerable communities along the Cauca river in Antioquia.

During three days, from the 5th to the 8th of February, the token measures reduced water flow from a normal dry-season 450 to 500 cubic meters per second (m<sup>3</sup>/s) to only 35 m<sup>3</sup>/s, according to climate monitoring authority IDEAM. The closing of the floodgates generated almost 60

thousand dead fish, plus shortage of water in the downstream communities, social and economic losses for the inhabitants that live on the riverside and an environmental impact that is yet to be known. According to Neyla Castillo, a professor at the Institute of Regional Studies of the University of Antioquia, in some of these towns, such as Sabanalarga for example, 90 percent of the population depends on revenues of the river.

"Cutting the flow of water in a river is similar to restricting oxygen to a human. There are irreparable consequences" explains Modesto Portilla, geo-science professor at the National University. He also explains that although the water will return to flow again through the river bed, it will take about half a year till the river reaches its regular flow again.

The hydroelectric dam Hidroituango was more than a prestige project by EPM, the electricity company owned by the governing authority of Antioquia. The project, which was planned to be completed in 2018, promised to provide 16% of Colombia's electricity needs and valued at around US\$4 billion.

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However, in April last year landslides in the region blocked a tunnel of the dam. The hydroelectric plant reservoir floods a surface of 11,120 acres. The area was supposed to be cleared of trees and vegetation but experts say the company failed to perform this task which led to the dam's partial collapse. As two of the exits in the engine room were blocked at that time, the reservoir began to fill. EPM was running a race against time to raise the level of the embankment to prevent a catastrophic flood. The company was successful in increasing the dam's height but the foregoing alert, however, displaced thousands of people in the low-lying regions in the river's path. According to Rios Vivos, an environmental activist group, at least 5 social leaders have already been killed as since the construction of the dam in 2010 local criminal groups have gained in influence in the region.

EPM proclaims to take the necessary measures to reduce the ecological impact as much as possible. The company also points out that despite the current situation of the project, the Hidroituango project is expected to generate energy from the year 2021. Rios Vivos however obtains for a dismantling of the dam to give the river back its natural stream. Other experts argue that it would be better to invest in smaller dams along small rivers to reduce the social and ecological impact.

The crisis and subsequent response has once again put EPM in the spotlight and has led to public outcry across social media. Posting under hashtags like #hidroituangocrimenambiental and #YoSoyRioCauca, many Colombians continue to question whether the project will be worth the human and environmental toll it has caused and will cause in the region.

ANLA, Colombia's environmental licensing authority, has already opened sanctions against EPM for failing to protect the ecological basin located below the dam.

*The Cauca River starts in the country's most important watershed known as the Colombian Massif. The river has a length of 1350 kilometers and separates two of the country's three major mountain ranges eventually passing through a massive wetlands area before it joins with the country's largest river La Magdalena.*

*Sources: PORTAFOLIO '¿Qué impactos socio-económicos deja la crisis en Hidroituango?'; MOVIMIENTO RÍOS VIVOS 'No en nuestro nombre'; RADIO NACIONAL DE COLOMBIA 'El río Cauca: un patrón agonizante'; EL ESPECTADOR 'Los enredos jurídicos tras la sequía del Cauca'; THE BOGOTA POST 'Cauca river recedes as Hidroituango dam closures threaten environmental catastrophe'; MONGABAY 'Colombia's disaster-ridden hydropower project runs second largest river dry'*

## START OF THE WEBINARS ON POST-EXTRACTIVISM IN LATIN AMERICA BY YES TO LIFE NO TO MINING

The first of YLNM's free 'Life After Mining' webinar series focused on the emergence of people-led resistance and alternatives to mining in Latin America.

*"What steps has the continent taken? What are some of the strategies being applied at a local level to declare mining-free territories? What are some of the alternatives being built bottom-up that tackle the extractive model?"* were only some of the few questions that were addressed during the first webinar with the contribution of Latin American experts and community leaders from Argentina, Ecuador and Colombia.

For more info about upcoming webinars surf to <http://www.yestolifenotomining.org/life-mining-register-2019-ynm-webinar-series/>

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## ANGLOGOLD ASHANTI PROLONGS A BUDGET OF \$ 75 MILLION US DOLLAR FOR ITS OPERATIONS IN COLOMBIA IN 2019

Felipe Márquez, president of AngloGold Ashanti Colombia, affirms that they will remain in Colombia even though their mining operation has been suspended by two municipalities, Cajamarca and Jerico.

Marquez informs that the company reserves an investment budget of between US \$ 70 and US \$ 75 million to continue exploration activities in the projects of Gramalote (gold) and Quebradona (copper) above all. "It is a year in which we hope to advance in both projects. In Gramalote the task is to continue with the resettlement phase and the consistency plan with the artisanal miners. And in Quebradona, we hope to settle first basement and to obtain the environmental license."

Regarding the mining prohibitions through the agreements by the municipal councils and the prior consultations set up by the communities, the businessman claims that anti-mining groups cannot put people against the wall and pressure them to choose between extractive activity and other activities. He condemns activist groups to have ties with politics (funny indignation though, as if AngloGold Ashanti has no ties with politics) and argues that they only seek to impose the false paradigm that if there is a mining operation, no other economic activity can be developed. "He argues that studies they've done have proved that the majority of the population in those cases wants a coexistence between mining and agricultural activities. "

He furthermore affirms that the national interest in mining and the support of the Constitutional Court luckily opens their way to further mining possibilities by judging "correctly" that municipalities are not allowed to prohibit mining activities. "Although, mining projects must be developed with dialogue and consensus, it is still a collective acceptance", according to the Márquez. He supports a debate with all stakeholders to put the points around impact and mitigation on the table for discussion.

As far as the Colosa project in Cajamarca is concerned, he says that there are no further plans on the table. "We do not yet have the required permits within reach. Moreover, the people of Cajamarca are not yet ready for our return. The consulta popular has left wounds, which we also have to learn from.

Although the decision of the Constitutional Court might possibly give us the green light to return, it is not yet time to do so."

*Source: PORTAFOLIO "Destinamos US\$75 millones para la operación en 2019"*

## PUBLICATION OF DUQUES NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

### Mining and agriculture

President Duques National Development Plan 2018-2022 confirms openly its neoliberal vision on economic growth. After reading chapters as "Farmland as progress: an alliance to boost the development and productivity of rural Colombia" and "Pact for mining-energy resources for sustainable growth and the expansion of opportunities" we can assure that Colombia is are facing another deepening of the extractive - and agroindustry.

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With an economy based on the exploitation of resources, Colombia was shaped as a pilgrimage country for big capital, which deepened an economic and political dependence on the countries that dominate markets and power relations worldwide. Nonetheless, it's exactly the importance of this same sector that is justified once again in the bases of the PND as one that attracts more foreign investment and promotes territorial development. Under the sophism of "a regulated and responsible use of the soil", the PND opens the doors to expand the mining frontier even more. Therefore, primary goods such as coal, gold, petroleum, palm oil, sugar cane and banana, particularly, are the most promoted.

Additionally, the extractive model is deepened and 'perfected', with the facility that mining-energy companies can cancel a mayor part (up to 50% according to some experts) of their taxations through the execution of social projects in the regions. This can be seen as a facilitation for extractive and polluting companies to improve their relations with the opposing communities.

In short: the construction of roads, potable water projects, construction of schools or health posts, which is supposed to be the responsibility of the State, will be more frequently executed under the direction of multinationals with their corporate logo.

The agrarian and rural development aspects in the PND are mainly resumed in the pact for entrepreneurship. The main core of the country's vision on agriculture can be defined as a pact of inequality for the peasantry and power for the big industries and landowners in the country.

### **Environmental management**

Another consequence of the NDP seems to be the militarization of environmental management. This measure does not seem to focus on ecological protection but rather on replacing illegal mining activities with others that are legal in the sense of being granted by the State. The measures in national security and defense of natural resources will be in hands of a force called "Integral Environmental Protection" formed by military and police forces, coordinating with the environmental authorities. In this way, police and soldiers are supposed to be the new protectors of "biodiversity".

Summarized, the new PND fails to straighten the economy, does not attack structural problems or accelerate the transition to clean energies. This only predicts more years of mining, industrial soil-exhausting agriculture and huge profits for large companies.

*Source: BLOGS EL ESPECTADOR 'Gudynas Eduardo' - Se militariza la gestion ambiental y territorial?; LA SILLALLENA 'El Plan Nacional de Desarrollo no es un "pacto por Colombia" sino por el extractivismo'; RADIO MACONDO 'El campo en el Plan Nacional de Desarrollo: Se institucionaliza el atraso'*

### **ANGLOGOLD ASHANTI'S ILLEGAL MINING CONTINUES IN JERICÓ**

On the 26th of January, the Town Hall of Jericó suspended the mining activities of the Quebradona Mining Company. The daughter company of AngloGold Ashanti previously ignored the 010 Agreement from the Municipality Council, which prohibited all metal mining activities since December, 2018.

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The Mayor passed the suspension order to the environmental authority that is in charge of sanctions and regulations of concerning issues: the Autonomous Regional Corporation- Corantioquia. The Corporation received the order, studied the situation and decided that the mining company was using the water through legitimate concession. Therefore, it did not find any merit on taking any sanctioning decisions against the company so they ended up ignoring the decision of the Mayor.

The position of Corantioquia has been questioned as they ignored the Municipality's decision oriented towards the protection of ecological and cultural patrimony of Jericó. Additionally, the O10 Agreement has not been invalidated by the only competent authority that could do so: the Administrative Court of Antioquia. However, AngloGold Ashanti, shielded by the Corporation and its questionable decision-making, has continued with the illegal mining activities.

*Sources: YES TO LIFE NO TO MINING 'Anglogold Ashanti's illegal mining continues in Jericó, Colombia'; EL TIEMPO 'Corantioquia levantó medida preventiva que suspende minería en Jericó'*

## PIPE LEAK RESULTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCY IN ACACIAS, META PROVINCE

The communities of Acacias, Meta denounced an environmental emergency after the rupture of a pouring pipe from the oil company Ecopetrol in the village of La Unión, where the leak contaminated at least 900 m<sup>2</sup> of wetlands.

Local farmers blamed Ecopetrol's delay in its reaction to the environmental emergency given that the oil company waited more than nine hours to start repairing the pipeline after the owner of the property informed the company. The facts were reported to the Corporation for environmental issues in the area (Cormacarena), however, the farmer corporations did not receive a response from the environmental authority.

It's not the first time a leak provokes environmental damage in the area. According to the fishermen, there is proof of a raised fish mortality due to contamination with crude oil.

*Source: CONTAGIRADIO 'Ruptura de tubo de ecopetrol generó emergencia ambiental en Acacias, Meta'*

## FOREST-FIRE DESTROYS 2.000 HECTARES IN 'EL NEVADO DEL COCUY'

The fire remained four days, from Tuesday 7th of February till Sunday 10th. Firefighters, peasants and indigenous tribes made efforts to extinguish the forest fire that occurred in the village of Tabor, municipality of Güicán, Boyacá.

The access to the burning area was only possible in vehicle until a certain part. The firefighters had to walk the rest of the passage, a mountain range which delayed them 10 to 12 hours.

According to preliminary reports, the estimated loose of about 2,129 hectares of Paramo vegetation due to the fire would be classified as the worst and largest natural disaster in the Cocuy Natural Park. The area that was affected is part of the U'wa indigenous tribe settlement and authorities presume that an individual started the fire as a result of a "controlled burning" in order to prepare the crop season.

*Source: EL TIEMPO 'Incendio afectó 2.000 hectáreas el Nevado del Cocuy'*

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## THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT PERSISTS: POPULAR CONSULTATIONS CANNOT VETO MINING ACTIVITIES

On Wednesday February 13th, environmentalists and NGO's lost the battle they undertook to return the power of community referendums (*consultas populares*) related to mining and hydrocarbon projects.

Unanimously, the magistrates of the high court knocked down article 33 of the norm that establishes the rules of operation of municipalities (Law 36 of 1994). That article established that when the development of projects of a tourist, mining or other entity threatens the use of the land by significant changes leading to a transformation in the traditional activities of a municipality, a referendum (*consulta popular*) should be carried out in accordance with the law. By declaring this measures unenforceable, the high court upholds the position it expressed in October 2018, when the results of a consultation held in Cumaral (Meta) were not recognized by its judges.

The high court ratified its position in the sense that although the Constitution recognizes the competences of the territorial entities to establish land use, this proper function must be exercised in a coordinated manner with the competences of the Nation. Therefore, the high court decided to drop down the cornering article for "defects of procedure".

It is anyhow worth remembering that in the verdict of October 2018, the Court ordered the Congress to define one or several mechanisms of citizen participation and instruments of nation-

territory coordination and concurrence as soon as possible...

...nothing perceived yet.

*Sources: SEMANA 'Corte se mantiene: consultas populares no pueden vetar la minería'; EL ESPECTADOR 'Proyectos mineros podrán hacerse sin consultas populares previas'; CANAL 1 'Imponen restricciones a consultas populares en municipios y departamentos'*

### About CATAPA

CATAPA is a volunteering organization (°2005) that works around sustainable development and alternative globalisation, with a focus on the mining issues and Latin America.

To contribute concretely to a sustainable solution for the ecological and climate crisis, we encourage a fairer mining industry and a more sustainable use of metals. We do this through awareness raising, networking, research, lobbying, exchange

programs and supporting farming communities that are threatened by multinational mining companies in our partner countries Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. CATAPA also follows some open-pit mining cases in Europe, especially in Romania and Greece.

CATAPA is short for *Comité Académico Técnico de Asesoramiento a Problemas Ambientales*, literally *Technical Academic Committee for Assistance in Environmental Issues*.

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