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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.

FIRES IN THE SIERRA NEVADA DE SANTA MARTA: NATURE DESTRUCTION AND COMMUNITY DISPLACEMENT

The Sierra Nevada, a protected reserve in the Colombian Caribbean, home to more than 1000 of animal species, including 44 endemic ones, and to numerous indigenous communities (Arhuaco, Wiwa, Kogui and Kankuamo), was deeply threatened by continuous fires during March 2020.

Since March 20, hellish flames have hit the Sierra Nevada, a place where an incredible diversity of ecosystems can be found, including glaciers, páramos, dry forests and crystal-clear beaches. Several indigenous communities living in these protected areas were forced to move elsewhere. The Wiwa people are particularly affected by this natural disaster, as parts of their homes and sacred sites were reduced to ashes, and more than 30 families had to shelter in higher parts of the mountains.



photography by RegionCaribe.com

In addition, they are very concerned about crops, animals and the most vulnerable members of their communities, especially children and the elderly.

In the face of these events, the inhabitants of the Sierra are calling for urgent action by the national, departmental and local Government to respond to the shortage of food, medicines and toiletries.

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Under current conditions, indigenous leaders are also asking for help from firefighters and various agencies to control the fire whose advance is increasingly contributing to the disappearance of other parts of the Sierra. Unfortunately, the government has not yet responded to these demands.

The flames swept away parts of protected reserves such as the famous Piedra del Indio. The Wiwa people declared a state of emergency and complained about the lack of response and coordination of institutions to their requests. Apart from the destructive fires, the Wiwa community also points out that drought and illegal mining have been causing irreparable damage in the Colombian Caribbean: displaced communities, polluted rivers and countless trees cut down. All of this leaves many indigenous farming communities unemployed and with no way to feed themselves. Malnutrition is already threatening the lives of children and the elderly.



As a reaction to this emergency, a group of social and environmental organizations from the territory of Minca requested, through a communiqué, the immediate implementation of actions to guarantee the comprehensive protection of the affected communities and their territory. The communiqué is addressed to the national government, the Ministry of the Environment, the Government of Magdalena, the National Unit for Risk and Disaster Management, and the military forces. The only response to these demands was the presence of helicopters to take care of emergencies.

sources:

<https://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/incendios-en-la-sierra-nevada-ya-hay-desplazamiento-de-indigenas/660386>

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MINING COMPANIES ARE PARTLY ACCOUNTABLE FOR THE KILLING OF SOCIAL LEADERS AND HUMAN RIGHT DEFENDERS

The fact that human rights defenders are systematically threatened, attacked or killed is nothing new in Colombia. Between January 2015 and October 2019, Colombia received the title of the second most dangerous country in the world in terms of attacks on human rights defenders working on company-related issues. An investigation by the Information Centre on Companies and Human Rights (Centro de Información sobre Empresas y Derechos Humanos) has corroborated these facts with a study that identifies the actors responsible for these violations.

The report of the Information Centre shows a link between the activities of companies, such as the mining company AngloGold Ashanti, and human rights violations. The study shows that multiple companies contribute to the repression of activists, leaders and members of communities, trade unionists and people of indigenous or Afro-Colombian origin. In addition to the 181 reported attacks (threats, beatings, etc.) against people who have expressed concerns about companies' activities, mainly in mining, fossil fuels, agriculture, livestock, hydroelectric plants and dams, 72 leaders have lost their lives, only for raising their voices.

Among the companies most related with crimes against human rights defenders are AngloGold Ashanti, Big Group Salinas (BG Salinas), Cerrejón Coal (a joint venture not operated by Anglo American, BHP and Glencore), Ecopetrol, EPM and Frontera Energy (formerly Pacific Rubiales).

Their presence can result in the torture and murder of activists engaged in the defense of human rights. In some cases, companies have contributed to the attacks, but in others the dirty work was carried out by individuals who were not directly linked to the company.



Often, these companies neglect prior consultation with communities and do not guarantee complaints or participation mechanisms, leaving communities without legal and fundamental spaces to defend their interests. There is also evidence showing that the government and companies cooperate to criminalize social leaders and their protests, who end up in prison and this, of course, leaves the doors wide open for hydrocarbon and mining companies. However, it does not mean that companies are the only culprits of the attacks on activists who denounce their activities. But companies should certainly be more proactive, addressing concerns and raising their voices, protecting human rights defenders and preventing or mitigating attacks on them.

sources <https://www.minuto30.com/portmarcar/investigacion-anglogold-ashanti-vinculada-en-colombia-con-otras-empresas-en-violacion-de-derechos-humanos/981687/>

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AGROECOLOGY IN TIMES OF COVID-19

Most of our global problems - energy and water shortages, environmental degradation, climate change, economic inequality, food insecurity and others - cannot be addressed separately, as these problems are interconnected and interdependent. When one problem worsens, the effects spread throughout the system, exacerbating the other problems.

As never before, the coronavirus pandemic reveals to us the systemic nature of our world: human, animal and ecological health are closely linked.

Without a doubt, COVID-19 is a wake-up call for humanity to rethink our capitalist and highly consumerist way of development and the ways in which we relate to nature. The times demand a comprehensive response to the current crisis, where the root causes behind the already apparent fragility and socio-ecological vulnerability of our world are addressed.

Agroecology represents an inspiring example of a powerful systemic approach and, at this time of the coronavirus pandemic, agroecology can help explore the links between agriculture and health, demonstrating that the way agriculture is practiced can on one hand to promote health or, on the contrary, if it is poorly practiced, acting as industrial agriculture does: cause great risks to health.

Agroecology has the potential to locally produce much of the food needed for rural and urban communities, particularly in a world threatened by climate change and other disturbances such as disease pandemics. What is needed is support to amplify agroecology in order to optimize, restore and improve the productive capacities of small local and urban farmers.

To harness that potential, successful local agroecological initiatives must be widely disseminated through farmer-to-farmer pedagogical strategies, the creation of agroecological beacons, the revival of traditional systems, and the reconfiguration of entire territories under agroecological management.

To improve the economic viability of such efforts, equitable local and regional market opportunities must also be developed, governed by the principles of the solidarity economy. At this point, the role of consumers is key if they understand that eating is an ecological and political act, comprehending that when they support local farmers, rather than the corporate food chain, they create sustainability and socio-ecological resilience. The transition of agriculture through government policy will take time, but each of us can accelerate the process by making daily choices to help small farmers, the planet, and ultimately our own health.

The transition to agroecology for a more socially just, economically viable, environmentally sound and healthy agriculture will be the result of the confluence between rural and urban social movements, which in a coordinated way work for the radical transformation of the globalized food system that is collapsing.

It is wise these days to reflect on the fact that ecosystems support economies (and health); economies do not support ecosystems. COVID-19 reminds us that disrespectful treatment of nature - including plant and animal biodiversity - has consequences, and when they are ultimately harmed, so are humans. Hopefully this current crisis brought on by COVID-19 will help illuminate humanity to lay the foundations for a new world and for gentler ways of interacting with nature.

Sources <http://cauceecologico.org>

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6TH INTERNATIONAL FORUM OF NON- VIOLENCE

Between the 25th and 27th of February, an international forum took place to develop and formulate non-violent solutions to the political, socio-economic and ecological problems that Colombia faces. For three days, guests from Canada, Chile, Venezuela and other countries debated together with their Colombian colleagues about organization strategies and sustainable transitions.

The first sessions quickly set the tone for the rest of the conference, and although the panelists disagreed on several topics, the message that all of them wanted to convey, was that there is not just one model of development, but there are many; and that they strongly oppose the anthropocentric perspective that the current (Western) model of development is based on.

The first sessions were aimed at changing the dominant perception of humanity and its relationship towards nature and the environment. A speaker mentioned that “an environmental approach does not mean that we have to ‘conserve’ nature, that we cannot touch it. We too are nature and we have to find ways to visibilize different types of knowledge that offer new perspectives on our position with regards to the existing ecosystems.” We as humans are too centered on our individuality and forget that we are not superior to other species, but that we depend on nature for our survival.

Working as a collective is crucial for defending life on our planet.

Not just the life of nature, but also our own lives, as we inherently belong to nature.

All of our actions are situated in a broader economic system, capitalism. In this system, certain elements of nature are given a monetary value, the value of exchange that these elements are worth in the market once they are extracted. Proponents of this model often mention ‘possibility’ and ‘opportunity’ when analysing it, but they cannot imagine a person or a community would want to escape or ‘be free from’ the system.

The first key speaker of the conference spoke about the struggle of the (indigenous) community she belonged to and how it had been able to ‘liberate’ itself from the market. The coercive aspect of capitalism as a system is often forgotten and this was an important talking point during the entire conference.

Speakers were also keen on emphasizing the potential and wealth that Colombia possesses. Because in the interaction with globalized capitalism, people are made to believe that a ‘poor’ community is determined by its monetary affluence.

Instead, speakers of this conference stressed that wealth comes from water, biodiversity, cultural diversity, etc. Wealth is not, as we are told, determined by a single monetary value, but by a plurality of values which have no relation to the exchange value that they are given by their integration in the globalized markets.

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In order to create solutions and alternative models of development, inclusive participation is crucial. The struggle against extractivist projects is a struggle against a certain model of development and for this struggle to be successful, it must create spaces of horizontal democracy, respect and free speech.



Photography by Jonas Adriaensens

Diversity is a strength and change is possible through dialogue and the construction of participative processes of resistance. It is crucial that these processes not only question the extractivist model, but also the oppressive structures that keep it in place.

Sexism and the oppression of women through a patriarchal society, racism and the oppression of indigenous and afro-colombian communities through economic and social exclusion and forced displacements, the oppression of activists through assassinations, to name a few.



Photography by Jonas Adriaensens

A resistance against these structures thus needs to be comprehensive in the different struggles it encompasses and inclusive in the way it is organized. The conference itself reflected this in the way it was set up, as the last day thematic panels were organized to discuss different aspects of the environmental, political and socio-economic struggles that Colombia faces today. The results of these different panels were presented at the end of the conference and all speakers agreed that the conference had been a step in the right direction and had been meaningful in identifying the main threats and challenges, contemplating new forms of organization and formulating possible solutions to these challenges. The conference left people with many questions and doubts, but also with the hope and knowledge that the organized struggle against structures of oppression in Colombia had just taken a big leap forward.

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COLOMBIA, A COUNTRY INFECTED BY CORRUPTION AND EXTRACTIVISM

The news about embezzlement of resources that were destined for markets and subsidies for the most vulnerable did not wait; social networks showed how goods that did not cost more than \$10 were quoted by government officials for about \$45.

A supposed inconvenience in the (virtual) system of the Colombian National Planning Department led to anyone being able to enter numbers at random in the forms submitted, leading to names and numbers that do not correspond to reality. These were given the cash which was destined for subsidies for the COVID crisis. So no more than 20 days of confinement had elapsed and the scandal over the alteration in what would be called "Solidarity Income" had not waited long either.



tweet from @Minesa_Col

Christmas also came early for the companies that go after Colombian gold in Santander. MINESA SAS, from the MUBADALA subsidiary of Abu Dhabi, has "donated" about 1,000 million Colombian pesos (approx. 250,000 US) to act during the crisis.

The problem remains the same, the capture of government autonomy, under the guise

of solidarity or corporate social responsibility.

The company announced its donation of 1,000 million pesos, an issue that has been celebrated by the mining associations and of course also the chamber of commerce of the city of Bucaramanga.

The critical point is that the head of the Santander department, Governor Mauricio Aguilar, has announced that they will start, a program for corporate donations called #DeEstaSalimosJuntos, a program that would deliver 1,200 million pesos in solidarity aid, so the calculations are a bit ambiguous.

The money would not come from the government but from the contribution made by the same company that seeks to exploit the Páramo de Santurbán. The department head announced the program as a departmental government official. Just as the company celebrates with each market it conquers, affirming that this time they would bring development to the region that they intend to exploit. The same method as always, assistance in times of need for the most vulnerable.

How is it then thinkable that the head of the departmental government would say NO to extractivism in the Colombian high mountains afterwards?

There is still much to see in regards to the crisis caused by COVID-19 in Colombia, companies will not budge, much less when gold today is trading at around \$ 1,730 an ounce. When they go for more than 9 million ounces of gold, 1,000 million pesos in aid appears to be the hair of a very furry cat in the Santander governor's chair.

Written by Dayana Corzo

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COLOMBIA: RED RAGS ON WINDOWS TO PROTEST AMID QUARANTINE

"We're not going to die of coronavirus but starvation,"

is the phrase summarizing the situation. Colombians are displaying red cloths on windows to express their dissatisfaction with President Duque administration's inability to manage the COVID-19 pandemic.

This signal was initially aimed at warning that a vulnerable family had an urgent and unmet need. "Red rags are seen in cities like Bogota, Barranquilla, and Medellin.



Photography by El País, Cali

People have waited patiently for government aid..." local outlet MC explained. Protests throughout the country occurred mid-April and it has been reported that banners said "We are not going to die of coronavirus but starvation."

This new form of social protest is accompanied by calls to bang empty saucepans at certain times of the day against President Duque and his officials, replacing the applauses on balconies in honor of health workers.

<https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Colombia-Red-Rags-on-Windows-to-Protest-Amid-Quarantine-20200416-0005.html>

The administration's subsidy is insufficient and is not reaching its beneficiaries, and even with initiatives such as the distribution of 170,000 food aid vouchers to families by the mayor of Medellin, the problem is far from solved.

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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