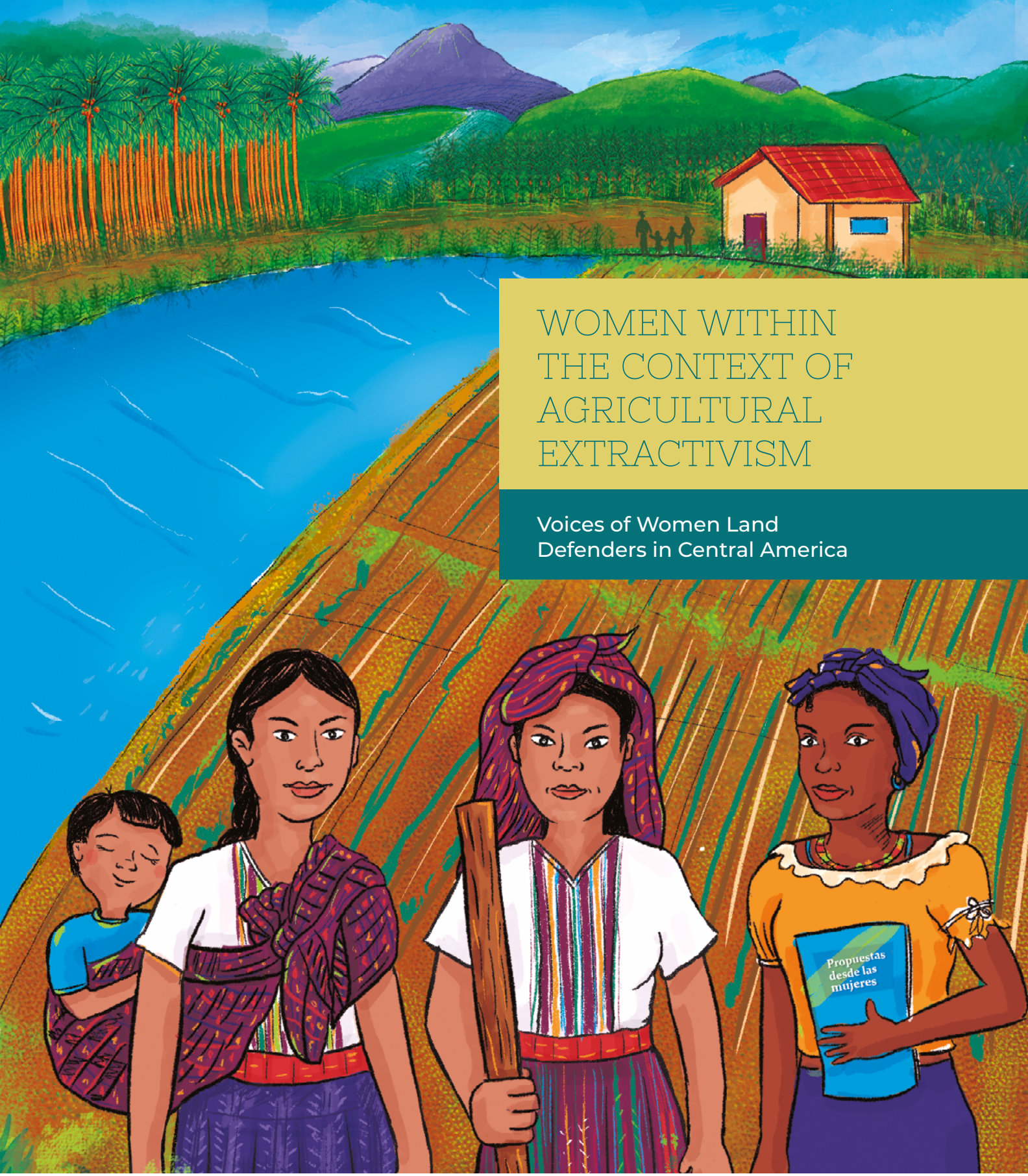


WOMEN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF AGRICULTURAL EXTRACTIVISM

Voices of Women Land Defenders in Central America

FCAM
FONDO CENTROAMERICANO DE MUJERES

GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR GREEN AND GENDER ACTION

Both ENDS

FONDO DE ACCIÓN URGENTE

tierra viva

CREDITS

Sanchez Monge, Geisselle V.; Bonilla Anariba, Deivy J.; Cristal, Irma. Women within the Context of Agricultural Extractivism: Voices of Women Land Defenders in Central America

April, 2023

Editing and recommendations: Laura Mar Carvajal Echeverry

Design and layout: Katia Alejandra Pinto Vidal

Illustrations: Luis Armando Cruz Catú

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural extractivism in Central America tells us a story about how capitalism hides behind the veneer of sustainable energy and food alternatives, of transnational companies, investors, national elites, and corrupt governments. At the same time, it speaks to us about the living memory of the struggles for the defense of the commons and local communities' permanence in the territory, as they confront inequality, the impact of armed conflicts, organized crime, and agrarian counter-reforms. The stories we want to honor now are those that have been forcefully carved by women, who have transformed multiple injustices and sowed hope amid *green deserts*.

How do monocultures affect ecosystems, communities, and specifically women?

What are women defenders and their communities doing to stop the destruction of their territory?

Why is it imperative that we talk about this and do something about it?

These are some of the key questions that guided the collaborative report *Women within the Context of Agricultural Extractivism: Voices of Women Land Defenders in Central America*, which was executed by various Central American partner organizations of the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action, GAGGA. The report's objective is to make visible the gendered impacts of agricultural extractivism faced by women and to support actions against its expansion in Central America.

This report, which focuses on oil palm, pineapple, sugarcane, and banana plantations in Honduras and Guatemala, is based on the voices and perspectives of women who experience these contexts firsthand. In addition to depicting women's lived experiences, this publication also wishes to honor and relay the struggles women have led in defense of their territories, land, and water, and in the pursuit of the preservation of life, their cultural identity, and food sovereignty.

The first chapter provides an overview of monocultures in Central America, emphasizing four elements that characterize them: 1) their production is destined for the international market, placing the region as one of the main exporters of pineapple, banana, coffee, palm oil, and sugar worldwide; 2) companies dedicated to agricultural extractivism establish alliances with financial, political, and military authorities to control the territories; 3) the establishment of these monocultures generates serious impacts and problems in the territories at the socio-environmental level and; 4) there is a link between pandemics and monocultures, which is currently the subject of several discussions addressed in this document.

[1] The Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA) mobilizes the collective power of movements for women's rights and environmental justice around the world. Our vision is a world in which women's rights to water, food security and a clean, healthy and safe environment are recognized and respected. For more information visit our website GAGGA – Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (gaggaalliance.org)

In the following three chapters, we explore the gendered impacts of agricultural extractivism and the struggles for land waged by women via the cases of the communities of Santo Domingo Suchitepéquez in Guatemala and Marcovia and Bajo Aguán in Honduras—accounting for the particularities of each territory and the common elements in their contexts. It is in this context that we examine the mechanisms through which national governments have favored the expansion of these crops, violating the rights of women and the peasant and indigenous populations that have historically inhabited these territories.

The cases raised in this report exemplify the dynamics and profound changes in the territories and the lives of women that have emerged in the aftermath of the establishment and expansion of monocultures in Central America. In consequence, the case studies address the absence of an equitable distribution of care work, whose burdens continue to fall on women—which, in addition to other structural barriers, restricts women's access to decision-making spaces at the community and national level. The case studies also examine the loss of livelihoods, which reduces women's economic autonomy, and the violence against them, which takes various forms, from stigmatization to the femicide of activists and women human rights defenders.

The study also gives an account of the women's key contributions to the struggle for the defense of life, their communities, and their territories, for example, through agroecology, the recovery of cultural practices of care for natural resources, advocacy at the national and international level, and the promotion of women's participation in decision-making spaces at the community and municipal level.

As environmental and feminist organizations, we view with deep concern the serious impacts that industrial monocultures are having on communities, and specifically, on the rights of women and girls. Despite the actions of various actors at the international level, who seek to achieve the sustainability of the oil palm, sugarcane, pineapple, and banana sectors, the reality of the affected communities has not changed; in fact, their circumstances have deteriorated because the economic interests, the alliances, and the corruption that sustain this model remain intact.

However, we see with hope and admiration the resistance, alternatives, daily and long-term actions that women defenders and leaders, together with their organizations and movements, have implemented for years, and which require our support today. For this reason, we seek to raise awareness internationally about the implications of agricultural monocultures so that these reflections contribute to an increment in accompaniment and support for the demands and actions promoted by women defenders. The ultimate goal is to guarantee their rights and protect and preserve the territories and common goods that are in peril today.

METHODOLOGY

This idea to commission this report emerged from conversation that took place between 2016 and 2018 among the organizations that make up the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA) and the grassroots organizations with whom the Alliance works. In these discussions, we identified the need to provide information on the gendered impacts of agricultural extractivism as recounted by the voices of rural, peasant, indigenous, and Afro-descendant women, who have withstood their assault, while applying a feminist approach and a regional focus.

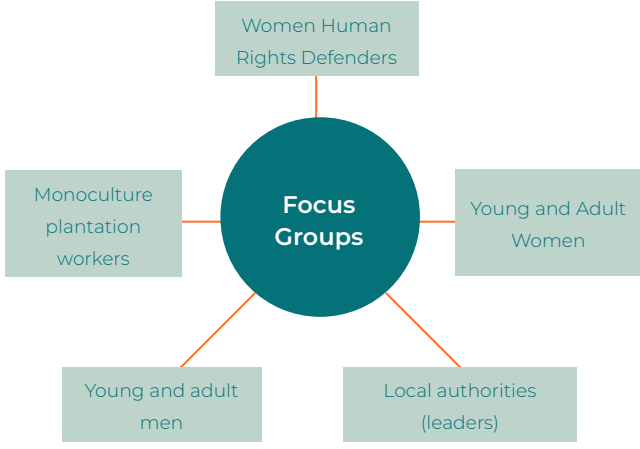
In addition to the perspectives of the grassroots organizations and members of GAGGA, the analysis of the cases tackled in this report is informed by the important contributions of Astrid Ulloa, a Colombian anthropologist who has delved into territorial feminism and extractivism. Astrid provided us with her perspective on the construction of identities and subjectivities of women, the allocation of space, and the transformations of daily practices on account of extractivist actions. We also incorporate the scholarship of Silvia Federici, an Italian feminist academic and activist who, like Ulloa, has examined the link between violence against women and extractivism, and the thinking of the Colectivo Feminista Miradas Críticas al Territorio, an organization based in Ecuador that has analyzed the "masculinization of the territories" in extractivist contexts.

The report's methodology is based on the review of bibliographic information—including the reports made by the local organizations that work with GAGGA—interviews and focus groups in which we listened to various key actors (Diagram 1), and conversations with local organizations that work with GAGGA.

The interviews and focus groups were carried out virtually, due to the confinement measures established by the governments of Guatemala and Honduras in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the circumstances, we conducted forty interviews with women defenders, adult women, women community leaders, adult men, and workers or former workers of monoculture plantations. Likewise, we held three focus groups with young women and two focus groups with young men, who provided a comprehensive view of the dynamics of the territory and the gendered impacts of agricultural extractivism. Instead of using [participants'] names, we assigned each interview a letter and a number to identify the different territories: the letter A represents the people from Santo Domingo, Suchitepéquez (Guatemala), and the letters B and C represent the people of Marcovia and Bajo Aguán (Honduras) respectively.

Finally, as a practice of co-responsibility and care toward the organizations, and with the purpose of maintaining this research as a collective construction exercise, we presented the results of the study to the local organizations and communities, who validated and enriched them with their contributions.

Diagram 1. Key people for interview/ focus group




THE LAND BELONGS TO THOSE THAT WORK IT.
STOP THE HARASSMENT OF CAMPESINOS IN BAJO AGUÁN.
WITHOUT AGRARIAN REFORM... THERE IS NO FOOD SOVEREIGNTY.

CHAPTER 1

CHARACTERIZING AGRICULTURAL EXTRACTIVISM IN CENTRAL AMERICA

"The goal of monocultures is not to solve the problem of world hunger but to enrich the few companies that control the market"[2].

In this chapter we present some features that characterize the kind of agricultural extractivism that operates in Central America, and we explain the reasons it has widened social inequality gaps and, specifically, the gender gaps for women.

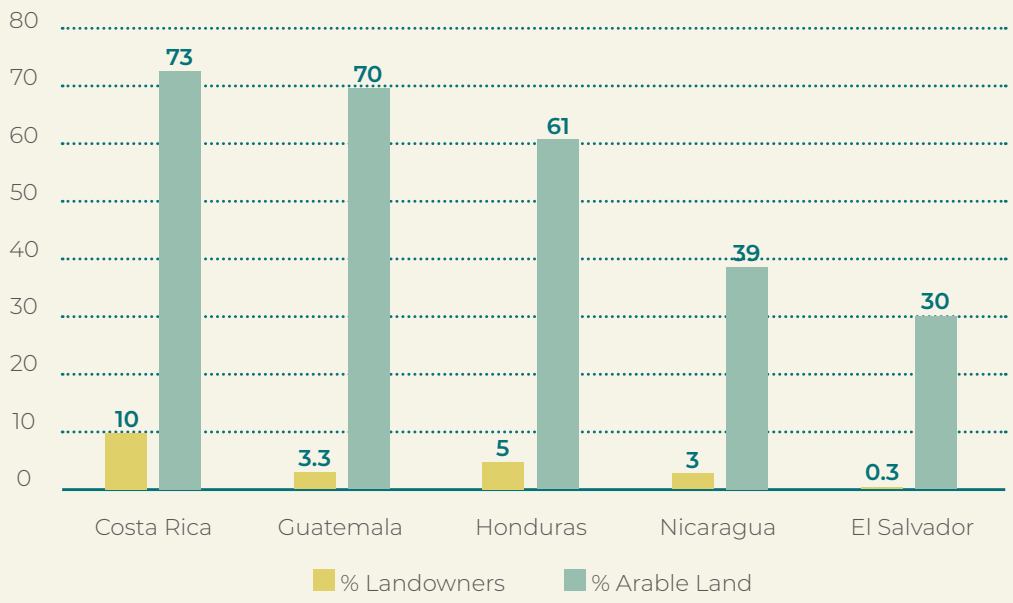
[2] Carvajal, L./ Urgent Action Fund for Latin America FAU-AL, 2016. Extractivism in Latin America: Impact on the lives of women and proposals for the defense of the territory. Available at: fondoaccionurgente.org.co/site/assets/files/1175/extractivismo_en_america_latina.pdf (01/03/2020)

The international market and the concentration of land ownership

Central America, which represents 1% of the world's surface area, is an important producer and exporter of non-traditional crops whose ultimate goal is to supply the international market, especially Europe and the United States. The region is the largest pineapple exporter, the second-largest banana exporter, the third-largest coffee and palm oil exporter, and the fourth-largest sugarcane exporter[5].

Due to the region's dependence on the international market, land and wealth concentration have increased, and the soil has been subject to addition pressure exerted by small landowners, a phenomenon that has come to the fore in recent decades (See Graph 1).

Graph 1. Percentage of farms and arable land [6]



Source: Parra, 2017

[3] Baumeister, E. 2019. Agrarian structures of Central America: Continuities and changes. Latin American Journal of Rural Studies. Dossier Ruralities in Latin America: Convergences, dispute and alternatives in the 21st century

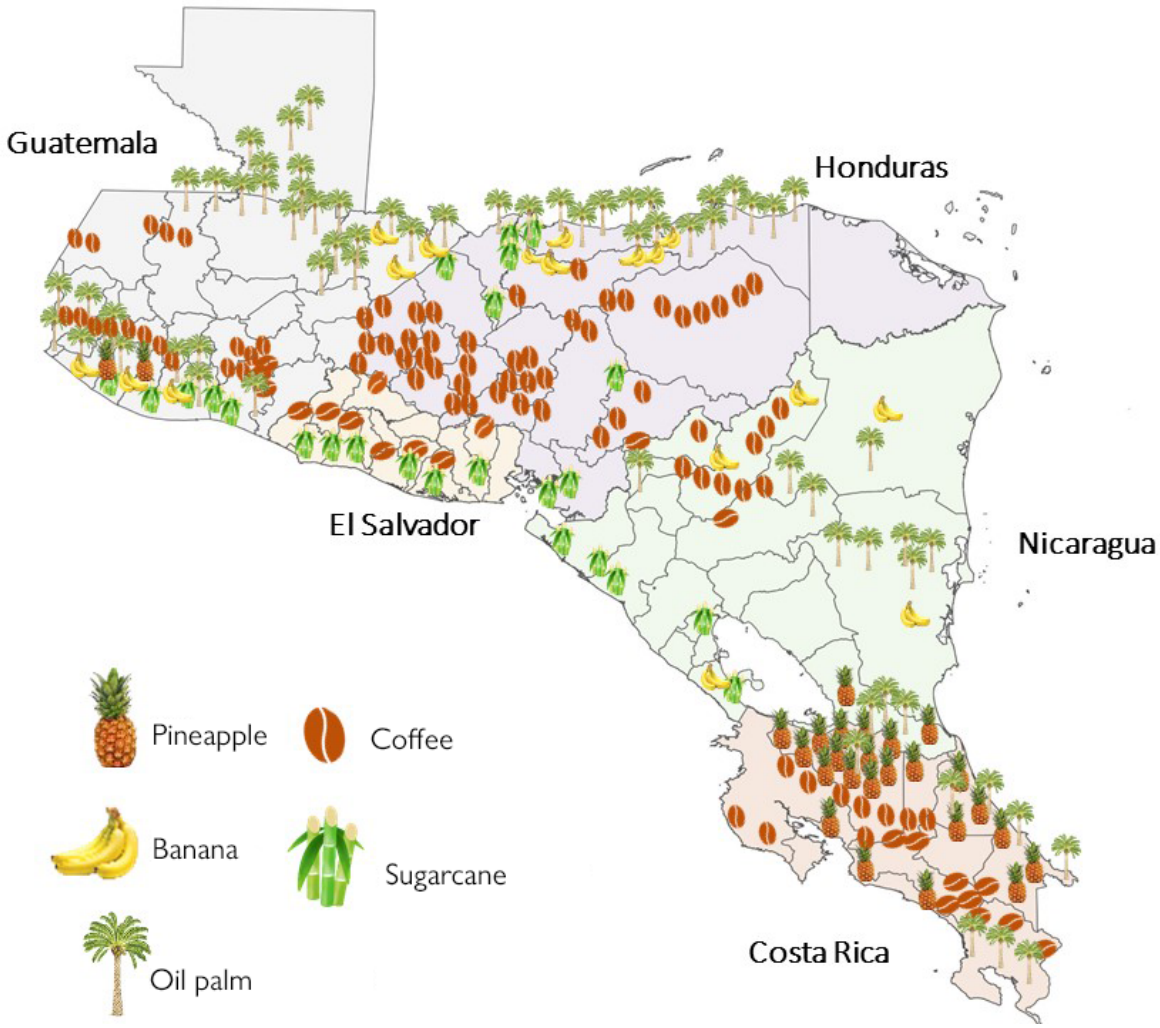
[4] GREPALMA, 2020. Statistical Yearbook 2018-2019. Available at https://www.grepalma.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Anuario_estadistico_2018_2019.pdf (20/04/2023)

[5] For example, sugarcane and oil palm monocultures expanded due to international demand for agrofuels.

[6] Nicaragua and El Salvador use different parameters to characterize farms. While in Honduras and Costa Rica, large farms are larger than 50 hectares, in Nicaragua they are larger than 140 hectares and in El Salvador larger than 70 hectares. If the same parameter were used, the percentages of land concentration would be similar in all the countries of the region. In El Salvador, because farms are generally smaller than 1.4 hectares, the difference in concentration is starker.

The expansion of monocultures has been a key factor when it comes to the increase of land concentration in this region. For example, between 1990 and 2010 the statistics reflect an accelerated expansion of pineapple crops in Costa Rica, of oil palm crops in Honduras and Guatemala, and of sugarcane crops in El Salvador and Nicaragua (See Map 1). It is important to mention that, in addition to large plantations, there are also small farms that exacerbate this expansion, as it happens in Honduras and Costa Rica, where there are a high number of independent farmers and oil palm cooperatives.

Map 1. Monocultures in Central America[7]



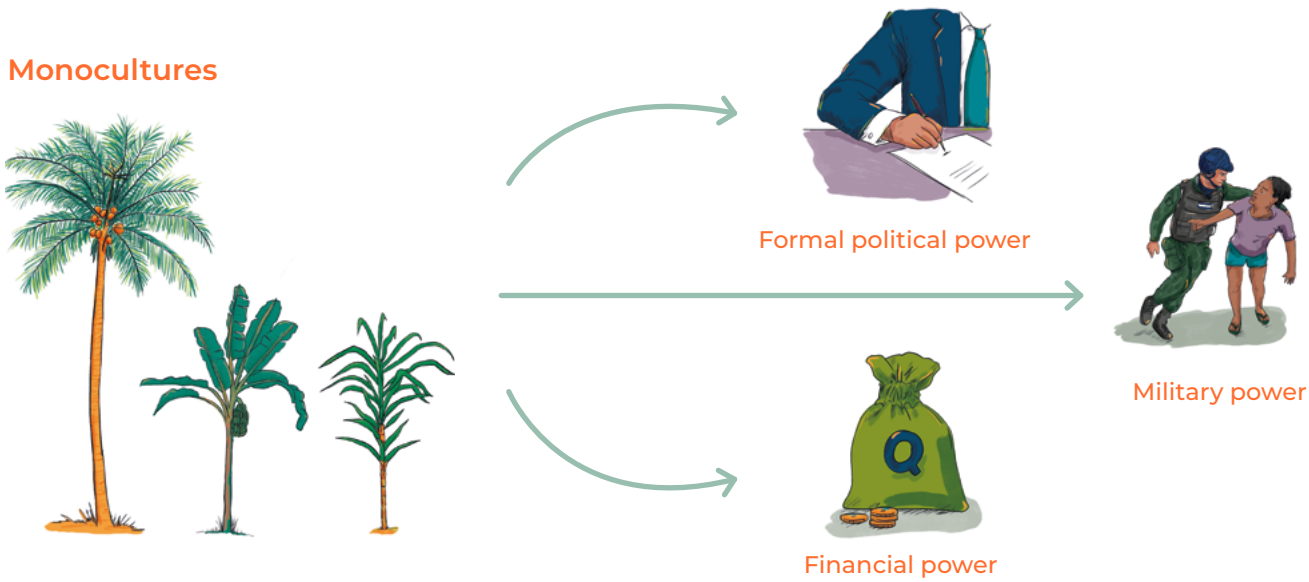
[7] Map of Land Cover and us in Central America, changes in land cover and use 1980–1990–2000–2010. Regional Program for the Reduction of Vulnerability and Environmental degradation PREVDA–2011; Grepalma I Statistical Yearbook 2016–2017; National Forestry and Land Cover Map. ICF 2018; Map of Potential Areas for the Cultivation of African Palm. SAG2015; Map of agricultural crops 2016–2017. MAG INTA; MARN, CATIE MBA, 2016; Distribution of Pineapple Crops in Costa Rica (CANAPEP, 2017).

Land concentration affects women especially due to historical discrimination and inequities, such as the fact that agrarian reforms and land titling processes have always excluded them. In the case of Central America, the gender gap in relation to access to [arable] land continues to widen. Currently, "women own barely 12% of agricultural production in Honduras, 15% in Guatemala, 13% in El Salvador, and 23% in Nicaragua; [percentages] that are significantly smaller than those controlled by men"[8].

On the other hand, the intensification of agricultural extractivism and the ensuing increase in land concentration have threatened the food sovereignty of families, communities, and peoples because fertile land has been used for monocultures and, therefore, producers no longer have the means to grow their own food or satisfy their local markets.

Studies on the import and export of food have concluded that Central American countries are net importers of basic grains (corn, rice and beans), oils, dairy products and meats.[9] This means that the availability of food has been reduced and its cost has increased. One of the consequences of this phenomenon is that it partially breaks "the classic model of functional dualism and erod[es] sources of foreign currency and employment as well as agricultural income."[10].

In summary, agricultural extractivism is a model that deepens social inequalities and generates poverty in biodiverse countries because, "even though it may seem scarcely credible at first glance, recent evidence and numerous accounts allow us to state that poverty in many countries of the world is linked to the existence of significant wealth in [their] natural resources. Countries rich in natural resources, whose economy is based primarily on their extraction and export, find it more difficult to grow [economically]"[11] .



[8] Central American Network of Rural Indigenous and Peasant Women (RECMURIC), 2015. "Land for Us: Political Proposals by Central American Rural Women to Access and. Available at: cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/426027/Oxfam-Website/oi-informes/informeTierraMujer.pdf

[9] Carrazón, J. Corleto, M. Sibrián, R. 2013. Central America in Numbers: Food and Nutrition Security Data 2013. Available at http://www.fao.org/3/a-at771s.pdf (September 27, 2020)

[10] Baumeister, E. 2019. Agrarian Structures in Central America: Continuities and Changes. *Latin American Journal of Rural Studies. Dossier Ruralities in Latin America: Convergences, Disputes, and Alternatives in the 21st Century.*

[11] Acosta, A. 2012. Extractivism and Neoextractivism: Two Faces of the Same Curse. Available at cronicon.net/paginas/Documentos/paq2/No.23.pdf (April 20, 2023)

Alliances between political, financial, and military powers

The agricultural extractivist model, and extractivism in general, is **sustained and promoted via its historical and hegemonic alliances with the private sector, politicians, and the military.**[12] The economic and political elites act in collusion with companies and investors, ensuring the ideal circumstances for their activities through various mechanisms: the creation, elimination, or relaxation of laws and regulations in favor of extractive activities, the use of the public force to guard private facilities and interests, the offer of commissions or benefits in the allocation of public spending, and the deployment of police and military forces for the repression of social protests. In exchange, companies and investors provide economic benefits and finance political campaigns, among other strategies.

In addition to destabilizing democracy and increasing the concentration of power, these alliances foster the systematic violation of human rights—both by public and private actors—especially those of indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, and women, while progressively increasing the number of irreversible impacts on the environment. For example, an investigation about political financing carried out by the **International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG)** states that it is "transnational Guatemalan companies and [other] transnational companies, businessmen organized in associations, State suppliers, the media, and people linked to criminal entities" that finance presidential candidates.[13]

In 2018, the CICIG proved that the private sector anonymously contributed, through the Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Financial Associations (CACIF), financial resources to Jimmy Morales during the 2015 presidential election (in both election rounds) in the amount of Q. 7,213,500 and US$ 15,000. They did this without reporting their contributions to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), as the law requires.[14] When questioned, the businessmen responsible confirmed they had donated money to Morales' political party and the candidate himself, who ultimately won the election.[15]

In the same year, the CICIG made public the case of the "Influence Peddlers,"[16] which involved the Superintendence of Tax Administration (SAT). SAT officials charged fees or received illegal commissions to expedite the processing tax refunds. One of their clients was Reforestadora de Palmas del Petén (REPSA), a company that grows oil palm and is part of the HAME GROUP, one of the largest palm growers in Guatemala.

In **Honduras**, the government issued Decree PCM-030-2020 within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which ordered the National Directorate of State Assets (DNBE) to make unused government-owned, national, and communal lands that were deemed suitable

[12] Camacho, K. 2018. *Commodification of the Territory and Reconfiguration of Violence against Women: The Case of Women Leaders in Environmental Movements against Pineapple Monocultures in Costa Rica.*
[13] International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). 2015. *Financing Politics in Guatemala* https://www.cicig.org/uploads/documents/2015/informe_financiamiento_politicagt.pdf (April 20, 2023)
[14] Álvarez, A. Dalmasso, S. 2018. *Illicit Electoral Financing: Bosch's Speech at Enade proves He Supports Jimmy Morales.* Available at https://www.plazapublica.com.gt/content/financiamiento-electoralilicito-el-discurso-de-bosch-en-el-enade-una-prueba-del-apoyo-jimmy (April 20, 2023)
[15] Cumes, W. 2018. *"We apologize to Guatemala," say Businessmen who Financed FCN-Nación.* Available at https://www.prensalibre.com/guatemala/justicia/empresarios-se-pronuncian-por-caso-de-financiamiento-electoral-ilicito-a-fcnnacion/ (April 20, 2023)
[16] International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). 2018. *The Influence Peddlers Case.* Available at: https://www.cicig.org/comunicados-2018-c/com-009-caso-traficantes-de-influencias/ (April 20, 2023)

for agricultural production to be made available to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock. The idea was to give them to national producers so they would supply the national food market, especially with basic grains.[17] This decree allows all uncultivated national or communal lands belonging to the State, peasants, or ethnic communities to be leased by the State to individuals for twenty years, a period that can be extended an additional ten years, for a yearly fee equivalent to 4 USD per manzana.

This is quite problematic, since the decree aims to reconfigure the country's current agrarian policy by granting benefits to the agrarian industry, which is promoted by private companies and planters. Some of the most controversial points of this decree are (a) agricultural programs and planning that exclude the peasant population, (b) the weakening of the institutions in charge of promoting and protecting the rights of the peasant population, (c) an increased concentration of land and wealth in private hands, and (d) agricultural programs that exacerbate discrimination based on gender and ethnic identity.[18]

Finally, in both countries the militarization of territories that are coveted for the expansion of monocultures has been documented. Bajo Aguán, one of the territories discussed in this report, has been a clear and thoroughly documented example of this phenomenon for over ten years.[19].

The socio-environmental impacts of monocultures

In Central America, as in other regions of the world, agricultural extractivism is imposed through the dispossession of the lands and common goods of peasant, Afro-descendant, and indigenous communities. As we will explore in the following chapters, monocultures lead to the contamination and extinction of water sources due to their high water demand; the use of pesticides in monocultures pollutes and deteriorates the soil and air; and deforestation and the introduction of transgenics that accompanies monocultures contribute to the loss of biodiversity and agrobiodiversity. Finally, we touch on the replacement of native crops with crops that are unsuitable for food consumption, which is why the areas where they have been planted are called "green deserts."[20]

Plantation workers face multiple violations of their labor rights. Many workers report conditions close to forms of modern slavery, such as working hours that far exceed the legally permitted working day, the lack of guarantees in matters of occupational and health risks, and the sexual harassment and violence women workers deal with routinely. As we will see later in the stories told by the interviewees, many suffer from chronic kidney failure and other serious illnesses after years of working on plantations.

[17] Official Gazette of the Republic of Honduras. "Executive Decree Number PCM-030-2020." Year CXLII, Tegucigalpa, M.D.C., Honduras, C.A. Thursday April 9, 2020. No. 35,222. Section A.

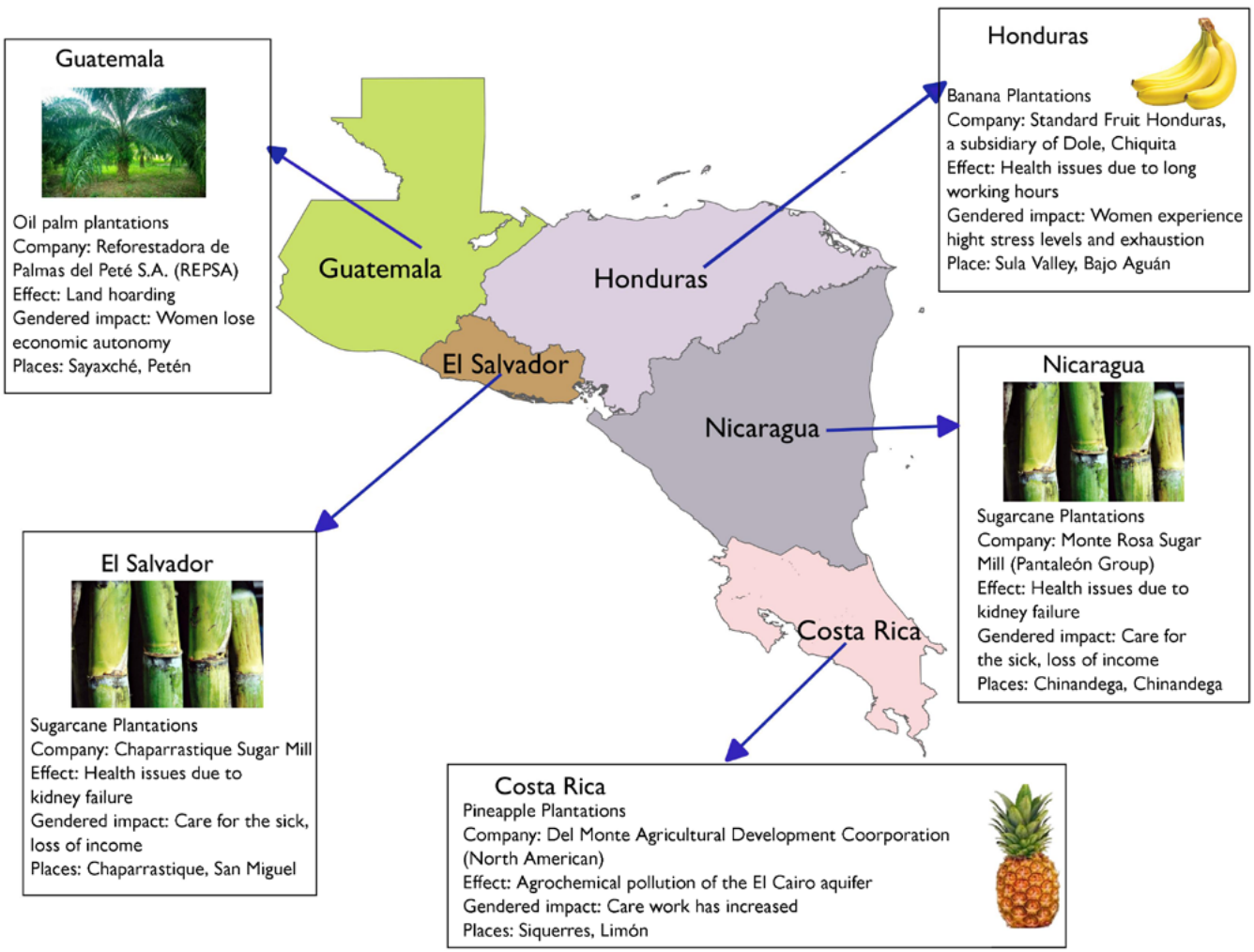
[18] CESPAD, 2020. *The Situation in the territories: PCM 030-2020 and the Worsening of the Food Crisis in Honduras.* https://v1.cespad.org.hn/2020/05/05/coyuntura-desde-los-territorios-el-pcm-030-2020-y-la-agudizacion-de-la-crisis-alimentaria-en-honduras/

[19] Castro, C. 2011. "Militarization, Fear, and Death in Bajo Aguán." Available at: https://connuestraamerica.blogspot.com/2011/08/honduras-militarizacion-miedo-y-muerte.html (April 20, 2023)

[20] Carvajal, Laura. / Urgent Action Fund for Latin America (FAU-AL), 2016. Extractivism in Latin America: Its Impact on the lives of women and proposals for the defense of the territory. Available at: https://fondoaccionurgente.org.co/site/assets/files/1175/extractivismo_en_america_latina.pdf (20/04/2023).

Monocultures, like any other form of extractivism, compound oppression based on gender, ethnic identity, and social class. As regards women, this model exacerbates all forms of violence against them whether at home with their family, at work in the plantations, or in their community. In addition to physical, sexual, and economic violence, women frequently deal with the loss of their livelihoods and the disproportionate burden of care, domestic, and productive work, which leads to extreme exhaustion and serious illnesses, such as cancer. In the following map we can see some of the most relevant impacts reported in some territories.

Map 2. Impacts of monocultures on women



Pandemic and monocultures

The COVID-19 pandemic has served to remind us of the deep injustices and social inequalities worldwide, and it has revived earlier conversations about the role of States in the economy, the structural crises in healthcare, xenophobia, classism, and gender gaps, among others. That said, a conversation that has been neglected is that around the socio-environmental causes of the pandemic, more specifically the link between the pandemic and monocultures. Svampa[21] states that a war-like discourse, which constructs COVID-19 as an invisible common enemy of society, has been consolidated; thus obscuring the environmental component in the virus' origins.

> In 2013, Wallace and Wallace[22], studied the underlying cause of the appearance of Ebola in West Africa and its link to oil palm monocultures. In their study, they stated that "this strain arose when oil palm production, which attracts Ebola-carrying fruit bats, underwent a classic process of consolidation, enclosure, and proletarianization in the Guinean jungle [...]. The transformation in agroforestry production restricted artisanal production and possibly expanded human–bat interaction, which made it easier for the virus to cross from one species to the other. Whatever the specific source, changes in the agroeconomic context seem to be one of the main causal factors.".

According to Silvia Ribeiro[23], there is a direct link between the appearance of cross-species infectious diseases and agro-industrial food systems, which calls us to question the production model responsible for deforestation and the loss of biodiversity. Indeed, Duch states that "the expansion of agricultural and livestock monocultures causes the destruction of biodiversity and favors the spread of viruses. The origin of the coronavirus is closely related to today's industrial agriculture and livestock formulas—specifically due to the expansion of monocultures (vegetal and animal) that cause the destruction of biodiversity in nature, making possible the appearance, proliferation, and virulence of new zoonoses."[24]. Studies on the subject conclude that, as long as the environmental roots of the problem are not addressed, epidemics will become more frequent and their impacts more powerful.

In addition to its effects on the general population, the pandemic has widened gender inequality gaps in the private and public spheres. The Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) points out that the confinements and measures adopted by governments in response to the pandemic put many women in an especially vulnerable position since they were forced to be confined with their abusers. Women also experienced increased physical and sexual violence, greater barriers to their access to justice, an increase in care workloads, and a reduction in income, which afforded them economic autonomy or at the very least met their basic needs.[25]

[21] Svampa, M. 2020. "Reflections for a Post-Coronavirus world." Available at: https://www.nuso.org/articulo/reflexiones-para-un-mundo-post-coronavirus/ (April 20, 2023)
[22] Wallace, R and Wallace, R. 2019. "Ebola Ecologies: Agroeconomics and Epidemiology in West Africa." Available at https://www.elsaltodiario.com/new-left-review-espanol/ecologias-ebola-agroeconomia-epidemiologia-africa-occidental (03/10/2020).
[23] Liaudat, S. (2020). Interview with Silvia Ribeiro "The pandemic is Directly Related to the Agro-Industrial Food System" Science, Technology and Politics, Volume 3. (Number 5). Available at https://revistas.unlp.edu.ar/CTyP/ article/view/10749/9640 (24/11/2020).
[24] Duch, D. 2020. "The Origin of Coronavirus? The Four Monocultures of the Apocalypse." Available at https://www.soberaniaalimentaria.info/ otros-documentos/covid-19/755-coronavirus- monocultivos (24/11/2020).
[25] Inter-American Commission of Women. 2020. "COVID-19 in Women's Lives: Reasons to Recognize its Gendered Impacts." Available at https://www.oas.org/es/cim/docs/ArgumentarioCOVID19-ES.pdf (20/04/2023).

Voices of Women from the Territories regarding the Impacts of the Pandemic

The women interviewed for this report stated that they lost the possibility to earn an income through the entrepreneurial and subsistence activities that they had been carrying out: "Women aren't spending time and energy on doing business anymore; they aren't even selling because the situation has gotten so bad. Sometimes they aren't able to sell a single thing, so they think it's better to not sell at all. If they aren't able to sell, then they lose [money] or their products go bad."[26] On the other hand, women know they are the ones who, "no matter the circumstances—for example COVID-19—make their resources available to their families so they can meet their needs."[27]

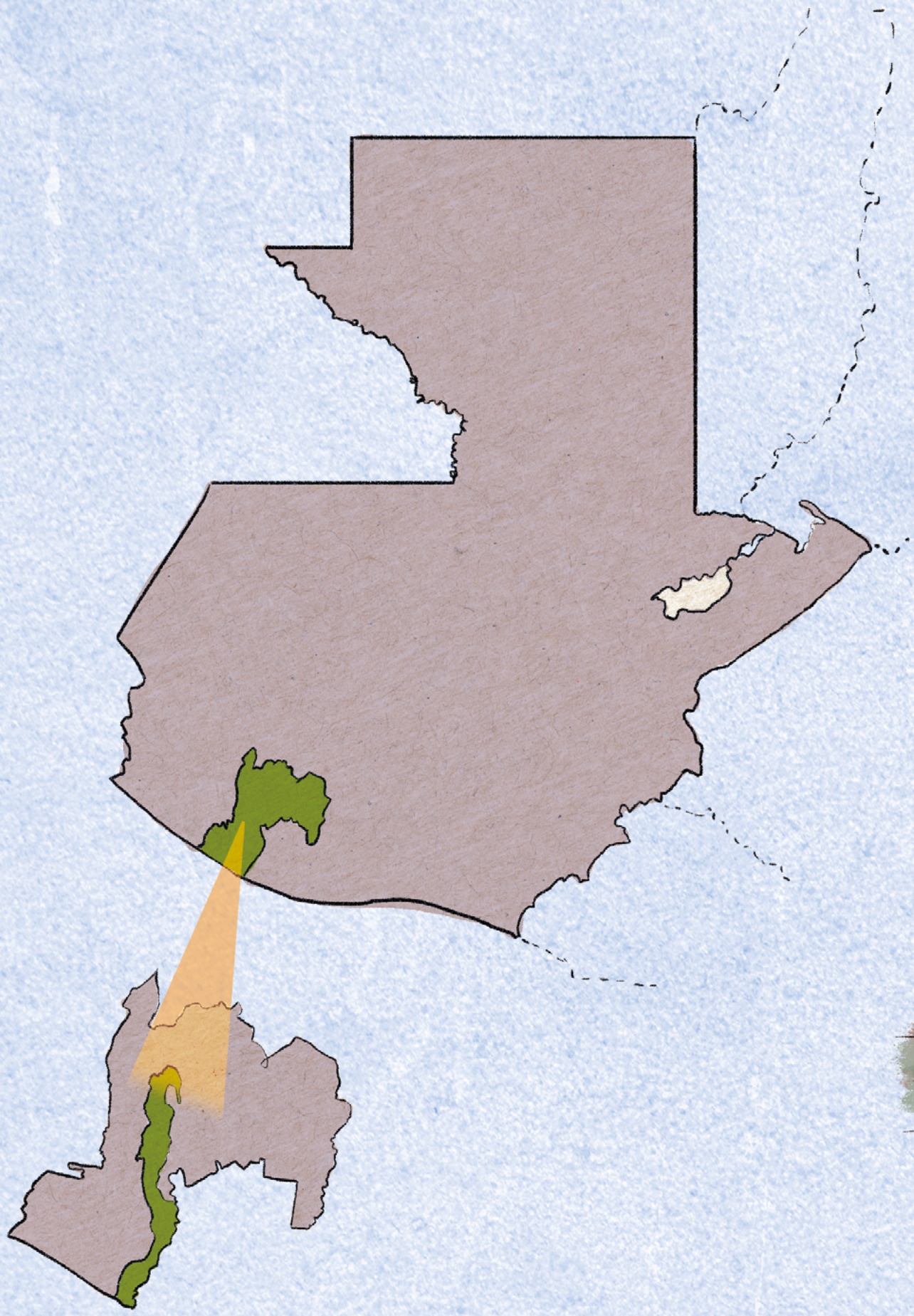
Likewise, the education programs to prevent and eradicate gender-based violence have been weakened: "[D]uring the pandemic, everyone was confined, […] [before] women were playing a big role […] and learning [how to deal with] violence. They knew where to go and they'd learned to file police reports, which is the most important thing. There had gained knowledge, and we were seeing the results because they were filing the reports, but [the pandemic] kind of screwed us."[28]

Advocacy efforts have likewise been hampered. In several territories, the women talked about how hard it is to follow up on advocacy actions—even though they have progressively adapted to the use of digital technologies "Because of the pandemic we haven't been able to meet. We communicate by phone or via Zoom. We have managed to get more training for some of our compañeras."[29]

In addition, the confinement measures that suspended constitutional guarantees further endangered human rights defenders because "it [gave] the police, the military, and the entire judicial apparatus a pass to do whatever they want[ed], for example, arresting women defenders to generate fear and maintain control of the territories."[30] Moreover, they infringed on the right to protest against extractive projects, which advanced during the quarantine period while the towns were paralyzed.

Finally, the women noted that the pandemic had a positive impact on the revaluation of family farming and local production. They mentioned, for example, that in the case of small oil palm armers in Honduras "there are people who no longer think of that palm as the last lemonade in the desert."[31] They agreed that in all the territories, when faced with the food crisis, families resumed vegetable gardens on their backyards and even on lands where palm was previously grown, to make way for beans and corn.

[26] Interview BNer_2 Quotes have been edited for clarity and length.
[27] Interview A2
[28] Interview BL1
[29] Interview COrv_1
[30] Interview CAdi_2
[31] Interview D1.

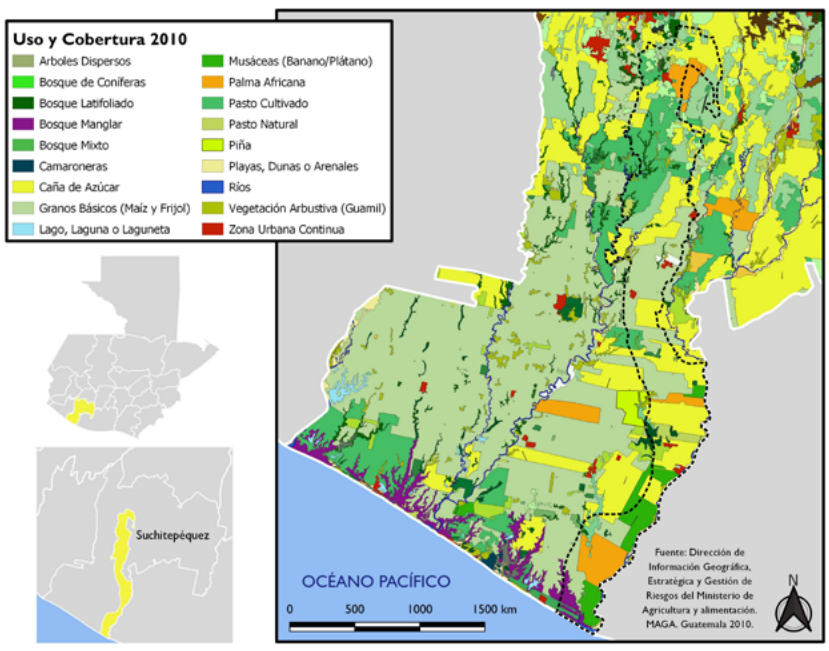


CHAPTER 2

SANTO DOMINGO SUCHITEPÉQUEZ: FROM A DESERT TO A LANDSCAPE OF RESISTANCE AND HOPE

The municipality of Santo Domingo Suchitepéquez (hereafter Santo Domingo) is located in the southern part of the Department of Suchitepéquez, on the South Coast of Guatemala, a region characterized by high levels of land concentration and agricultural extractivism. Santo Domingo is made up of fifty-one settlements, including communities, hamlets, agricultural parcels, and villages that are distributed among four sub-regions. Many of the communities that comprise Santo Domingo were established after 1995, following the signing of the Peace Accords, thanks to the newly-gained access to credit programs for purchasing land. Most of these communities are made up of families that had migrated to Mexico as a result of Guatemala's internal armed conflict. In this municipality, there are at least five types of monocultures: oil palm, banana, plantain, sugarcane, and pineapple (See Map 3).[32]

Map 3. Land use and coverage in Santo Domingo Suchitepéquez[33]



[32] Directorate of Geographical, Strategic Information, and Risk Management of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MAGA). Guatemala 2010. Available at http://ideg.segeplan.gob.gt/geoportal/

[33] Ibid.

Companies in Santo Domingo Suchitepéquez

OMLECA Agroindustrial Corporation / Producers of Palm

Made up by the MEME and HAME groups.* Las Palmas belongs to the MEME Group; Santa Rosa S.A, Olmeca S.A., and UNIPALMA belong to the HAME Group—both belong to the Molina family. Reforestadora de Palma de Peten S.A. (REPSA), UNIACEITE, and Palmas del Horizonte, among other companies, are also members of the HAME Group. The Molina family is one of the largest oil palm producers in Guatemala. In 2016, there were at least 46,000 hectares of monocultures, close to 30% of the total palm area, owned by this corporation.

* The HAME Group is made up of several banana companies in Costa Rica and Guatemala, such as San Marcos (Tecún Umán and Ocós) and Escuintla (Tiquisate and La Gomera), and oil palm in Mexico and Guatemala: San Marcos (Tecún Umán), Quetzaltenango (Coatepeque), Escuintla, (Tiquisate), and Petén (Sayaxché) (Grupo Hame,, 2018).

Magdalena Sugar Mill

It is the second largest sugar producer in Guatemala and has the largest ethanol distillery. It is part of the Leal Group of the Leal Pivaral and Leal Toledo* family of sugar producers.

* Reina, C. "What happened to the liberation of rivers and the struggles for water?" Enfoque Magazine. Year 9. No.47. January 24, 2017.

Agro Popoyán*

Founded in 1975 in Guatemala, this fruit trader is dedicated to the production and export of papaya, pineapple, and other fruits to Central America and more recently to the United States and Europe. In Suchitepéquez, Popoyán owns pineapple plantations that are close to the communities that participated in this study; they are known as the Sol de Campo communities.

* http://www.popoyan.com/

YARA Corporation *

Founded and based in in Europe since 1905, YARA has offices in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. It defines itself as a global company dedicated to finding solutions to improve and increase world food production through fertilizers and plant nutrition. In Santo Domingo Suchitepéquez, it operates through the Tolimán banana plantation.**

* https://www.yara.com/
** Duque, A. 2019. *Evaluation of the effect of four levels of a nutrition program on the development and yield of the banana crop (Musa sapientum L.), in a mollisol soil, belonging to Finca Tolimán, diagnosis and services performed in the Farms,* Bellamar 1 and Tolimán, Tiquisate, Escuintla, Guatemala. AC

Timeline: The Introduction of Monocultures to Costa Sur

1910
Sugar production reaches a modest level. In Esquintla, production has been modernized in 4 mills: Pantaleón, Concepción, El Salto, and San Diego.

1928
The Guatemalan Agricultural Company (CAG) is created; it becomes a subsidiary of the United Fruit Company (UFCO).

1952
The Agrarian Reform Law, also known as Decree 900, is enacted by the government of Colonel Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán.

1954
US-backed military invasion overthrows the government of Jacobo Árbenz.

1962
Beginning of the Internal Armed Conflict that would last thirty-six years.

1974-1980
The union movement grows on the South Coast.

1978- 1986
Within the context of the armed conflict, the Guatemalan government and local militias commit genocide against the Maya peoples at the behest of American fruit companies. The genocide is justified.

1975
Chiquita Brands compra las acciones de United Brands, anteriormente la United Fruit Company (UFCO).

1980
The Great Sugar Cane Strike takes place. The Pantaleón Sugar Mill Union plays an important role elevating workers' demands.

1983
Previously displaced peasants begin to return to the country; they either go back to their places of origin or they go to other territories.

1996
Signing of the Peace Accords in Guatemala.

* Original content created using the following sources: El Faro, 2017. The Sugar Cartel in Guatemala. Retrieved from: elfaro.net/es/201704/centroamerica/20091/El-cartel-del-azúcar-de-Guatemala.htm Fuentes C, 2008. The Socioeconomic Development of the "La Lupita" Community of Returnees in Santo Domingo, Suchitepéquez. University of San Carlos of Guatemala Gonzales L. 2019. Land, Exiled, and Disinherited during Guatemala's State-Building Process: The Case of Suchitepéquez, 1825–170 Herrera F, 2003.

** PIR Quick Impact Projects as Instruments to Develop Rural Communities: The Case of the "La Lupita" Community in Santo Domingo, Suchitepéquez; Loras E, 2006.

1998
OLMECA Santa Rosa opens their processing plant, which can process 35 tons of oil palm fruit per hour.

1999
According to CEAR's records, 41,500 asylum seekers in Mexico have returned to Guatemala.

2005
Signing of the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

2008
Pantaleón Holdings acquires the La Grecia Sugar Cane Mill in Honduras.

2009
The National Rural Development Policy is created.

2012
The Family Farming Program for the Strengthening of the Peasant Economy begins.

2016
HAME–MEME Las Palmas receives a certification for 3,021 hectares.

2016
The Panama Papers reveal that owners, administrators, and directors of ten sugar mills in Guatemala appear as CEOs in tax havens. The Campollo Group, owner of the Madre Tierra Sugar Mill, created 121 offshore companies through the firm Mossack Fonseca. This reveals the links between the sugar sector and political actors in the country with the lowest tax collection rate in Latin America.

2018
Pantaleón holdings sells the La Grecia Sugar Cane Mill.

*** Women Returnees during the Conflict and the Peace Process in Guatemala (1980-2005): Fight to Return! Return to fight! Complutense University of Madrid; Pantaleón 2018. Report Report on Responsible Development Winkler K, 2016. Pesticides in the cultivation of Sugar Cane and Its Impacts on Human Health. Causes and Origins of Mesoamerican Nephropathy in Guatemala Winkler K, 2013. The Expansion of Sugarcane in Suchitepéquez and Its Impact on the Livelihoods of the Population of the Guatemalan Highlands: A Local Case of Land Hoarding.

What happens to the women who resist monocultures in Santo Domingo?

Monocultures and cattle ranching were established in the lower part of Santo Domingo a few decades before the arrival of the communities that participated in this study. The population remembers that, before returning from Mexico or the other departments in Guatemala, the area was occupied by cattle ranching and cotton plantations. As a result, the soil was degraded and deserted, and growing food was difficult. Later, sugarcane, banana, pineapple, and oil palm plantations sprung up, and social inequalities deepened, as did the gendered impacts for women.

In this section, we will delve deeper into the situations women face in these contexts. We will explore the importance of their contributions in sustaining the lives of their families through care work, their different experiences according to their age, the transformation of their day-to-day dynamics due to the reduction of natural assets, and finally we will focus on their identities and subjectivities, especially those of monoculture workers and human rights and territory defenders.

Increase in Care Workload

As previously mentioned, in contexts of extractivism, care work increases for women, which brings about changes in their day-to-day dynamics. In the case of Santo Domingo, women are burdened with the procurement of firewood and water, among other tasks.[34] The availability of drinking water has been reduced in recent years due to the agrochemical pollution of water sources and the proliferation of companies' mechanical wells, which draw huge amounts of water to irrigate, especially, oil palm crops.[35] The women state that they "are the ones who suffer, for example, when the water pump breaks down. It is women who go around looking for water to wash, to bring home. And if there is no firewood, it is women who have to go looking for firewood because men don't have time. Even if she's caring for her children, she'll strap them to her back, and she'll go looking for firewood; being a woman is hard.[36] Because of this, women must travel greater distances when nearby sources of water and firewood fall into private hands, whether by appropriation or contamination. This increases their physical exhaustion, leaves them less time for other activities, and it even increases the risks to which they are exposed on the roads they travel.

The communities have identified health problems—especially with their kidneys—suffered by the people that work in the crops. Because workers don't have effective health services and because women have been made to bear the responsibility of care work, they assume the responsibility of being their partners' caretakers. What's more, in addition to direct assistance, they must deal with the activities their partners can no longer assume and look for strategies to survive: "Women not only have to take care of their husbands but also do all the house chores, work on their plot of land, and even do paid work outside the home to earn an income."[37]. In some cases, families must obtain loans to treat the husbands' ailments, so the women must also temporarily assume that debt.

[34] S/A. 2017. "Study on the Causes and Effects of Environmental Pollution and Degradation and Climate Change in the Lowland Communities of Santo Domingo, Suchitepéquez."
[35] In its first three years, a palm tree requires between 150 and 200 liters of water in winter and up to 300 liters in summer.
[36] Interview A1
[37] Interview A2

How many hours a day do Ana and Gabriel have to work to survive with their family?

Ana[38], 32 years old, lives in Santo Domingo. Her day, paradoxically, begins at night: She gets up at 12:30 am to prepare food for her husband, who works on a pineapple farm. Ana goes back to bed once her husband has left around 2 AM. After resting for just a while, she gets up again at 5 AM to make breakfast for herself and her two children, ages 6 and 9, gets them ready for school, and takes them. When she returns, Ana cleans the house and makes lunch. In the afternoon, after helping her eldest son with her homework, she goes out to other houses to wash clothes and earn an income that helps cover the basic needs of her family. When she returns home, her days is not over. Ana is in charge of dinner and attends to her husband and her children.

Gabriel[39], Ana's husband, is originally from Huehuetenango and came to Santo Domingo Suchitepéquez in search of work. He started working at the pineapple plantation more than a decade ago. After walking half an hour from his community, Gabriel officially begins his working day at 2 AM and collects seeds until 3 AM. After his long workday, Gabriel always talks to his children and advises them to not work at the plantation; it is very hard work with an unfair pay, between Q600 and Q700 (76 dollars) every two weeks, and they'd have to put up with the scorching sun while not earning enough to feed themselves. Gabriel wants his children to go to school so that one day they become teachers; he dreams of seeing them grow and enjoy a better life, with food, housing, and health.

A few weeks ago, Gabriel got sick. The doctor gave him several diagnoses, and one of them was potassium deficiency. Gabriel felt very tired, and on several occasions he felt that he was about to die. He shares this condition, which makes it impossible for him to work, with at least five other colleagues from the pineapple plantation.

In order to support her family during Gabriel's illness, Ana does laundry for her neighbors and earns between Q30 and Q40 (less than US$4) a day, and she also works on other people's plots, especially cutting mangoes. Anna is always on top of Gabriel's medicine and his special diet. In order to supplement the family's diet, Ana's parents give them corn.

This is the story of many families in this territory. It is crucial to highlight that the Ana's excessive workload is rendered invisible. When asked what new responsibilities Ana has taken on since her husband got sick, the couple only mentions her work in the fields—whenever she can find any. However, at no time is there any mention of caring for Gabriel or other tasks, such as caring for her eldest son, who has a disability, or the heavy domestic and care activities that she carries out on a daily basis.

[38] Interview A3. All interviewees' names have been changed to protect their identity.
[39] Interview A4.

Daughters and Grandmothers Become Mothers

In both pineapple and banana plantations, the work that women do during their long and arduous day requires a lot of energy. On many occasions, when mothers go to work on the plantations, the care work falls on the eldest daughter, who is usually an adolescent between fourteen and sixteen years of age. She is in charge of "mothering" her siblings and doing the housework. Almost invariably, these young women are forced to quit school as a result. According to the women interviewed, it is common for there to be "young girls who don't even study anymore because they have to take care of their brothers; that's why they stop studying.[40] For this reason, we can reliably state that these are not isolated cases but rather a constant among peasant families in the area.

Grueling days at the packinghouse and at home

Milagros is a thirty-three-year-old worker and an autonomous mother of four children. Her sixteen-year-old daughter dropped out of school to take care of her three younger siblings while Milagros works in the packing plant on the banana plantation. From Monday to Friday, Milagros gets up at 2 AM to get ready, leaves her house at 2:30 AM and walks 25 minutes to the station where the bus stops to pick her up to be at the packing plant at 5 AM. At the plantation, finishing work has nothing to do with the eight-hour workday but rather with the closing of the container, which sometimes happens at 4 PM but can run as late as 8 PM. On those days, Milagros arrives at her house at 11:30 PM. Every hour that the company misappropriates from Milagros is another hour that her daughter must work at home.

The situation repeats itself with older adult women because "[care] work shifts onto grandmothers, who then take care of their grandchildren because the daughters have to go to work, so their workload increases."[41] In addition to the distribution of care work crisis, the absence of rights' guarantees, and the systematic exploitation of companies, women plantation workers also face gender-based violence perpetrated by their partners.

Rubiela's Courage and Breaking the Cycle of Violence

Rubiela is thirty-seven years old, who has a boy and two girls. To protect herself and put a stop to the physical violence exerted against her by her ex-husband, she decided to leave him and go live with her mother. To contribute financially to the house, she began working on the banana farm. While Rubiela works at the packing plant from Monday to Friday, her mother, Aura, takes care of her son and her daughters.

On Saturdays Rubiela does not rest. To feed her family, she cleans the same plantation where she works during weekdays. In addition to being admired for her courage and her strength, Rubiela is known in her job as the person who drinks the most Raptor, since only this energy drink allows her to maintain her inordinate pace of work.

These stories tell us about the shift in care work from one woman to another and the way they sustain life. This has a great impact on young and older women as it limits their options and makes it difficult for them to go through the different stages of their lives in dignified conditions. As regards young women, it hinders access to education, which means they will have fewer opportunities and will likely be forced to work

[40] Interview A1
[41] Interview A1

on plantations, where they will be exploited. For older women, the burden of caring for their grandchildren and the additional housework it implies prevents them from resting and, in many cases, attending to their health issues.

The voices of women testify to how gendered expectations and inequality configure and perpetuate the agricultural extractivist model. Absent and/or violent fathers who force women to single-handedly support their families, the lack of work and education opportunities for women in rural contexts, and the unfair disregard for care work and other kinds of work carried out by women are all elements that put women in positions of extreme vulnerability and dependence on exploitative plantation jobs, which leads to the systematic violation of their rights as a negligent State looks on and continues to benefit the private sector.

The Loss of Livelihoods for Women

As in many other territories, the women of Santo Domingo have historically fought for the right to land. Their first battle was about being recognized as co-owners of their land since many of them had no choice but to accept whenever their husbands sold their land. The establishment of monocultures compounded gendered inequalities in the access and use of the land and intensified the pollution and seizure of water sources due to the use of agrochemicals, as we mentioned in the previous section.

As sugarcane, oil palm, pineapple, and bananas plantations became commonplace, women faced even greater difficulties in trying to access land. Before these monocultures were established, "people rented land [from cattle ranchers] to plant corn, but landowners began renting [their lands] to oil palm producers, and ordinary people were left without land for their harvest. Now, they just rent the corners of their remaining land [...] and people plant there."[42] Arable land has been significantly reduced. In one community, for example, thirty-five women reported no longer being able to rent land; in another, it was sixty women who had completely lost access to arable land. This loss affects their economic and food autonomy, and it puts them at risk by eliminating the possibility of deriving an income from the sale of corn and chili or using them for self-consumption. At the same time, the lack of access to land has implied the loss of spaces where women can interact with each other: "We often talk about how much we miss all of that [...]. Before we used to work up there, but now we don't, so this has been a difficult situation for us."[43]

In addition to the loss of land, water scarcity is the problem that has hit communities the hardest recently, aggravating poverty and injustice for women. Many families get their water from shallow artisanal wells, which, unlike the deeper mechanical wells used by companies, do not allow them to have water at all times. Because they can no longer rent land for their crops, women began planting in their own yards, turning them into grain, fruit, and vegetable gardens; however, "the time came when they could no longer have water, not even to fill a tank, because we could barely get half a vat of water [...]. For nearly three years, we've been unable to keep a beautiful garden to feed ourselves."[44]

[42] Interview A2
[43] Interview A1
[44] Interview A7

To make matters worse, these gardens have been severely affected by the agrochemicals used on plantations. Women report that pests have increased, including whitefly and other pests that damage small crops. Finally, they raised the alarm about the impacts of agrochemicals that accelerate crop growth and are applied aerially in sugarcane plantations since these reach their crops and cause them to lose their flowers or even fruit if they haven't reached their full size.[45]

Dreams polluted by pesticides

Dana, together with her husband José, dreamed of having a papaya grove that would help them survive. They worked hard and managed to get a loan from the bank to start the project; however, the agrochemical used by the nearby monoculture plantation to accelerate growth completely damaged their crops. In addition to seeing their dream destroyed, now Dana and José had an additional financial burden. A lot of hard work went into paying off the debt to the bank, which also meant selling some of their animals, for example, a goat or a cow.[46]

Food sovereignty and economic autonomy are not the only ones that have been affected; many communities' recreational spaces have become inaccessible because the surface water that used to be for common use has been contaminated: "Before we used to bathe in that channel around this time, but now it's turned black and full of foam."[47]

Stigmatization and other forms of violence against women

The communities of the lower part of Santo Domingo have built various imaginaries and stereotypes around women, which operate as the basis of numerous forms of violence against them and which, unfortunately, are widespread and normalized. Those who dedicate themselves to the physical and emotional care of the family and even those who have started economic ventures from their homes, such as tortilla shops or preparing food for sale, are "well regarded", considering that they perpetuate traditional gender roles. On the other hand, plantation workers and women and human rights defenders are stigmatized, because their role is considered to break into the "public sphere", which questions said traditional roles. Who are these women who work in monocultures? Why, how and who stigmatizes them?

"Good and Bad Women"

Most women monoculture workers are either single or autonomous mothers, who did not have access to basic education. They are the head of the family and must single-handedly support their families, which include their children and sometimes their parents. In their own words: "It is pure necessity that has made men and women work on the plantation."[48]

[45] S/A. 2017. "Study on the Causes and Effects of Environmental Pollution and Degradation and Climate Change in the Lowland Communities of Santo Domingo, Suchitepéquez."
[46] Interview A1
[47] Interview A8
[48] Interview A7

Women who work on the plantations "have a bad reputation around here. People think that women who work on the plantation are bad women. They like to lead wicked lives, drinking and making trouble."[49] In other words, women who decide to no longer confine themselves to the private sphere and choose to seek paid work outside face these judgments and stigmas derived from what is "expected from a good woman."

On the other hand, the income obtained by women through their multiple jobs allows them to gain a degree of autonomy and make certain decisions about their lives—although these decisions can also become the target of public scrutiny. One of the interviews carried out contains the story of a banana plantation worker who had become ill and consequently had to stop working on the plantation for at least five months. During that period, she had no income from her job, and although she could have sued the father of her three daughters—ages four, six, and ten—for alimony or child support, she decided not to. Her rationale was, "if I sue him, he'll want to get back together. Because in exchange for the alimony, he'll want me to go back to him, and I don't want to go back to him. I'd rather get over this [illness] and get back to work."[50]

Workplace Exploitation and Harassment

Despite the autonomy employment grants women, the time, work, bodies, and lives of women who work on monoculture plantations are controlled by the company. As mentioned before, workdays begin at 5:00 AM, but their workday does not end until they have completed all the tasks assigned by the company. "The latest you're allowed to punch in is 5:20 AM; any later and they'll tell you to go home. Work begins as soon as you arrive. You arrive, punch in, and begin to clean, wash trays, the nylon, fill the tanks, sweep. At 6 in the morning, you go eat. They say you have ten minutes to eat, but you're lucky if you can get five because after ten minutes they begin calling the groups up. If they call you five times, and you're not at the post they assigned to you, they'll give you a written warning; they'll scold you; they'll send you home. They can also refuse to pay you for the work you've done that day, and they can garnish two days' worth of wages."[51]

"Sex objects at the mercy of their bosses"

As it happens in the community and family settings, there is a gendered division of labor and space in the plantations, which is marked by the different types of violence that women face. For example, in banana plantations, women work exclusively in the packing plant because it is believed "they are more careful when handling the fruit while packing." They used to work directly on the fields; however, the company forbade them from working there due to the sexual violence they suffered, instead of undertaking other kinds of preventive or reparation actions.[52] Regarding pineapple plantations, women interviewees state they primarily work retrieving the fruit.

On plantations and packing plants, women are seen as cheap labor and sexual objects. One of the workers mentioned that "the young women who work, well [...] sometimes their boss in the banana plantation harasses them until they give in to his needs, or until they're under his thumb or can make decisions for them."[53]

A former worker stated: "Sexual harassment, that's the challenge [...] even in the place I worked before, there was a lot of sexual harassment against women and nobody said anything."[54]

[49] Interview A6
[50] Interview A6
[51] Interview A6
[52] Interview A5
[53] Interview A9
[54] Interview A10

The testimonies of the men highlight the fact that the bodies of the women, especially young women, are perceived as being property of the boss, and he gets decide over them. For this reason, women are required to avoid harassment while their boss is exempt from any responsibility since he is exercising a legitimate right.

Health and Life at Risk

The life and health of women workers are in the companies' hands. To be able to perform during their exhausting work days, the women drink "what they call the bombshell. They buy [the ingredients] together—some of them even buy them the day before—because that's the only way they can work. They [mix] half a litter of coke, sixteen ounces of *Adrenaline*, one ounce of *Raptor*, two tramadol pills [an opiate], and a Sleepless pill. That's what the women drink. It's very sad; when they drink it, you can see their gaze change. It's very strong. It immediately makes them more active, and they begin to sweat."[55] The interviewees frequently said that many workers fell ill or died because "their kidneys dried up" due to these drinks and other performance enhancers.

The Stigmatization of Women Human Rights Defenders

As in other territories, women in Santo Domingo are essential for their communities to stick together, and they are at the forefront of the protection and defense of rights for the common good. As a result, the work of women defenders undermines the interests of various actors. Some men—especially monoculture workers, young men who are in favor of agricultural extractivism, and those who aspire to public office and seek support from the private sector—argue that the work of women defenders instigates violence, breeds conflict, and endangers monocultures, which they consider their way to make a living.[56]

Women defenders are also branded as "gossips" and accused of promoting social struggles because it is a way for them "to waste time." These are ideas expressed especially by men who have led community organizations, and who are opposed to the participation of women in these spaces. This has caused several women to quit community organizations due to the pressure exerted by their husbands or partners. In this regard, we have been told that "some women are forbidden [by their husbands] from attending [these spaces] because they say it is a waste of time [...]. Some women have begun attending, but they end up leaving because they are criticized for engaging in this kind of work and for the time investment it represents—because very often there are meetings, field trips or follow-up visits to the communities."[57]

The stigmatization and discrimination against women not only intensify confrontations and divisions within the community, it also seeks to maintain the status quo in terms of the power relations among genders. Those who question the work of women defenders either defend the presence of monocultures or, even if they question the imposition of agricultural extractivism, refuse to give up their privileges because they want to maintain control over women's lives: "Some time ago, many [men] took their wives out of the organization because they said the organization was a tool to open women's minds, because it taught them their rights."[58] Whether on the plantation, within their families, or in the community organization, women continue to be perceived as men's property, no autonomy and no rights.

[55] Interview A6
[56] Interview A2
[57] Interview A11
[58] Interview A1

Barriers to the Effective Participation and Instrumentalization of Women

The monoculture model widens gender gaps, and it takes advantage of the culture of discrimination still present within local authorities and the widespread incompetence of state authorities in terms of regulating the private sector and protecting the human rights of affected communities. This is evidenced by the fact that municipal authorities, for example, consider women's organizations allies, as long as their work focuses on agricultural production or the search for economic alternatives for local families. However, when it comes to making decisions about the defense of the territory and people's rights, authorities ignore women's demands and prevent them from participating or getting involved in decision-making spaces while including the men only.

Murders and feminicides against women defenders

On top of stigmatization, exclusion, and permanent persecution, women who defend life, the commons, and their territory also run the risk of being assassinated.

> Diana Isabel Hernández Juárez, a thirty-five-year-old teacher, a courageous leader and coordinator of the Creation Pastoral Group of the Parish of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Suchitepéquez, was murdered on Saturday, September 7, 2019. On that day, she was participating in a Bible Day meeting in the community of Monte Gloria when she was attacked by two people who shot her and fled.
>
> Diana Isabel Hernández Juárez "was one of the compañeras who spoke out against many of the injustices [that are consequences of] monocultures, plantations, and the environmental problems experienced [by the community].
>
> This is what being a defender means: We are committed to our natural assets, no matter what may happen. [Diana's murder] came as a shock to all of us because it was unprecedented. Her organization has been fighting for twenty-five years, and compañera Diana got deeply and directly involved in the environmental struggle. Unfortunately, they murdered her because of her demands and her outspokenness [...]. Yes, there are security risks if you're a woman defender, and it's getting worse, as we are experiencing now".[59]

Recently, Jonathan Villagran, from Aldea Santa Rita, and Dominga Saloj, from Caserío Canales, were assassinated to stop their work in defense of the territory.

Attempts on the lives of women defenders is the most extreme way to intimidate those who assume the struggle; the idea is to use fear and punishment to neutralize their actions. The lack of support for their work, in addition to gender stereotypes and the fear this kind of violence has instilled in the communities, contributes to the atmosphere of impunity that characterizes these cases. According to one of the women defenders we interviewed, even the families of the leaders themselves say that "they asked for it" and object to their participation in these spaces. One of them states: "Our own families question our reasons to be here. Ultimately, we gain nothing, we pay a high price, and well, we can be killed. Look at what happened to Diana, a young woman who had her entire life ahead of her [...]. One day you are alive and [...] the next there's no one around to defend you."[60]

[59] Interview A8
[60] Interview A7

The Struggles, Resistance, and Demands of the Women of Santo Domingo Suchitepéquez

The women of Santo Domingo fight for dignity, for their territory, and for the sustainability of life in all its forms. For this reason, their actions do not seek "only women's wellbeing but rather the wellbeing of their families and communities."[61] Their struggle happens every day—within their communities, community organizations, and women's organizations—and it challenges the oppressions they face and that are perpetrated by the model of agricultural extractivism.

The women fight for access to land, and they defend their territory with initiatives that allow the continuity of life, including agroecological practices and crop diversification in order to have food sovereignty; the recovery of ancestral knowledge and practices such as the moon cycle and the conservation of native seeds so as to not depend on market dynamics; preservation of the environment and nature for future generations; recovery of soil quality and water sources; and finally advocacy work toward State investment in their initiatives.

Land for women

Women have fought for the right to land ownership and to make decisions over it because it enables them to have a greater degree of autonomy. Indeed, it has been one of their goals since before they arrived in the lowlands of Santo Domingo Suchitepéquez. Women have worked to be taken into account in negotiations with the government and to be respected by the men of the communities in these spaces. Although each community has its own history, it has always been a great challenge for women to be considered co-owners of the negotiation table. This can be the result of the type of community figure (cooperative) the women belong t, or it can happen because institutions are uninterested in recognizing them in these roles.

Although progress has been made, and some women have managed to be recognized as co-owners of the land, very few have been able to enjoy effective participation in decision-making regarding the use of the land because this "depended a lot on the leadership and on the strength that women had in the community. And well, it was also about actually being able to exercise that right. It is one thing to have your name on a paper and quite another to be able to exercise your right to the land. So, the compañeras always said, *Yes, my name is on the deed, but my husband is still the one who makes decisions; I can't because he says [my name being there] has nothing to do with the price of tea. He's selling the land, and he's forcing me to sign the sale papers."*[62] Of course, women must also contend with historical violence and discrimination on top of having the community acknowledge their role as co-owners so they can exercise their right to land.

Agroecology, ancestral knowledge, and caring for nature

Historically, these three terms have been closely related, and it has been mostly women who have promoted these practices, despite the adverse socio-environmental conditions they have had to face.

Women are committed to agroecology as a strategy to defend their territory, care for nature, and guarantee food sovereignty and a better quality of life for their families. Agroecological practices reduce dependence on the logic and fluctuations of the market, ensure better nutrition at a lower

[61] Interview A1
[62] Interview A2

cost, and allow the conservation and improvement of the soil.[63] This is achieved by using organic fertilizers and diversifying of crops so they take different nutrients from the soil. Moreover, these practices foster the recovery of cultural practices and ancestral knowledge that have been set aside or are at risk of being forgotten.

"One piece of knowledge women and men are recovering [...] is working with the moon cycle, observing its phases, in order to sow, harvest, and carry out all sorts of agricultural tasks. The observation of the moon is also connected with other aspects of daily life, such as fertility and the pregnancy cycle [...]. With the recovery of this knowledge come reflections about listening to nature, as our ancestress and ancestors had, and about understanding [nature] as a living entity." [64] For this reason, both the studies carried out in this territory and the women interviewed state that the recovery of ancestral knowledge allows a more respectful relationship with nature and reconnects agriculture with a variety of worldviews.

After encountering a desert when they arrived in Santo Domingo, local communities promoted practices for the recovery of the soil: "the immediate reaction was to start planting trees so we could have some shade and firewood for our homes. Over time, we began to reflect on the need to carry out forest-grazing activities for production; this was our first experience with forest diversification that also generated an income."[65]

Young people interviewees relate this story thus: "Before, this was more like a cattle ranch. There were no trees, just a settlement, but they changed it [...]. They divided up the land and began to sow, and now there are no more pasture lands but rather agricultural ones."[66] Many families bet on reforestation, particularly on fruit trees, and now the community landscape has been transformed. Women have not only brought back practices that improve environmental conditions; they have also worked to raise awareness among young people in their communities about the need to bolster respect and the preservation of nature.

Political participation and advocacy

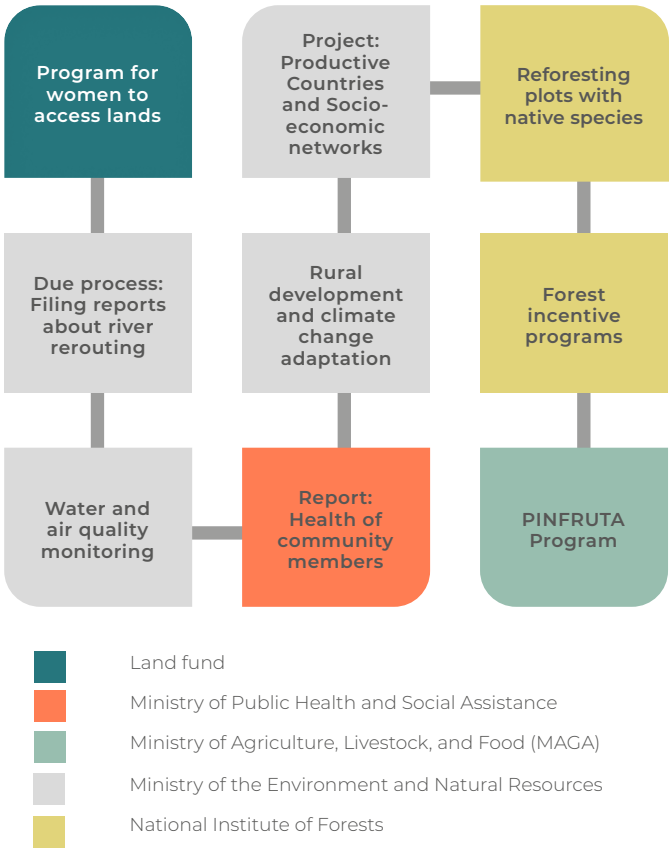
Women have led political actions to denounce the impacts of monocultures while presenting their demands to guarantee their rights and putting forth proposals to improve the lives of the communities. In their role as leaders, they have looked for allied actors whether they are locals or the community authorities with whom they have coordinated and written the documents containing their demands. However, they say that "when it is really time to stand up and be counted, it's us women who are left standing alone, so that's quite difficult for us."[67] Even so, the women continue the fight.

At the territorial level, the women established an alliance with RedSur, which brings together organizations from the southern coast of Guatemala and carries out advocacy work to render visible and speak out against actions that harm the environment and local communities: "Some time ago, we went to the [Central] Park in Mazatenango. We were there to bring attention to everything that affects us [in our communities]. We brought big photos, and we invited the Santo Domingo and Mazatenango authorities [and other] government institutions, but they didn't come."[68]

[63] S/A. 2017. "Study on the Causes and Effects of Environmental Pollution and Degradation and Climate Change in the Lowland Communities of Santo Domingo, Suchitepéquez."
[64] Ibid.
[65] Interview A2
[66] Interview A12
[67] Interview A2
[68] Interview A1

The women have also met with the business sector, especially with sugarcane and oil palm companies, to present their demands concerning aerial fumigation, particularly its impacts on their health and the environment. In these conversations, the women have discussed the water scarcity that results from monocultures' high demand and the burning of sugarcane crops, which put nearby communities at risk.

In addition to these conversations, the women have built an advocacy agenda targeting the State. It contemplates at least five agencies and focuses on effective responses to environmental problems and human rights violations caused by monoculture companies. For example, it includes demands for compliance with labor rights and for quality healthcare for people who have gotten ill as a result of aerial fumigation. It also encompasses follow-ups on complaints filed due to the rerouting of rivers, which affects the water availability in the communities.

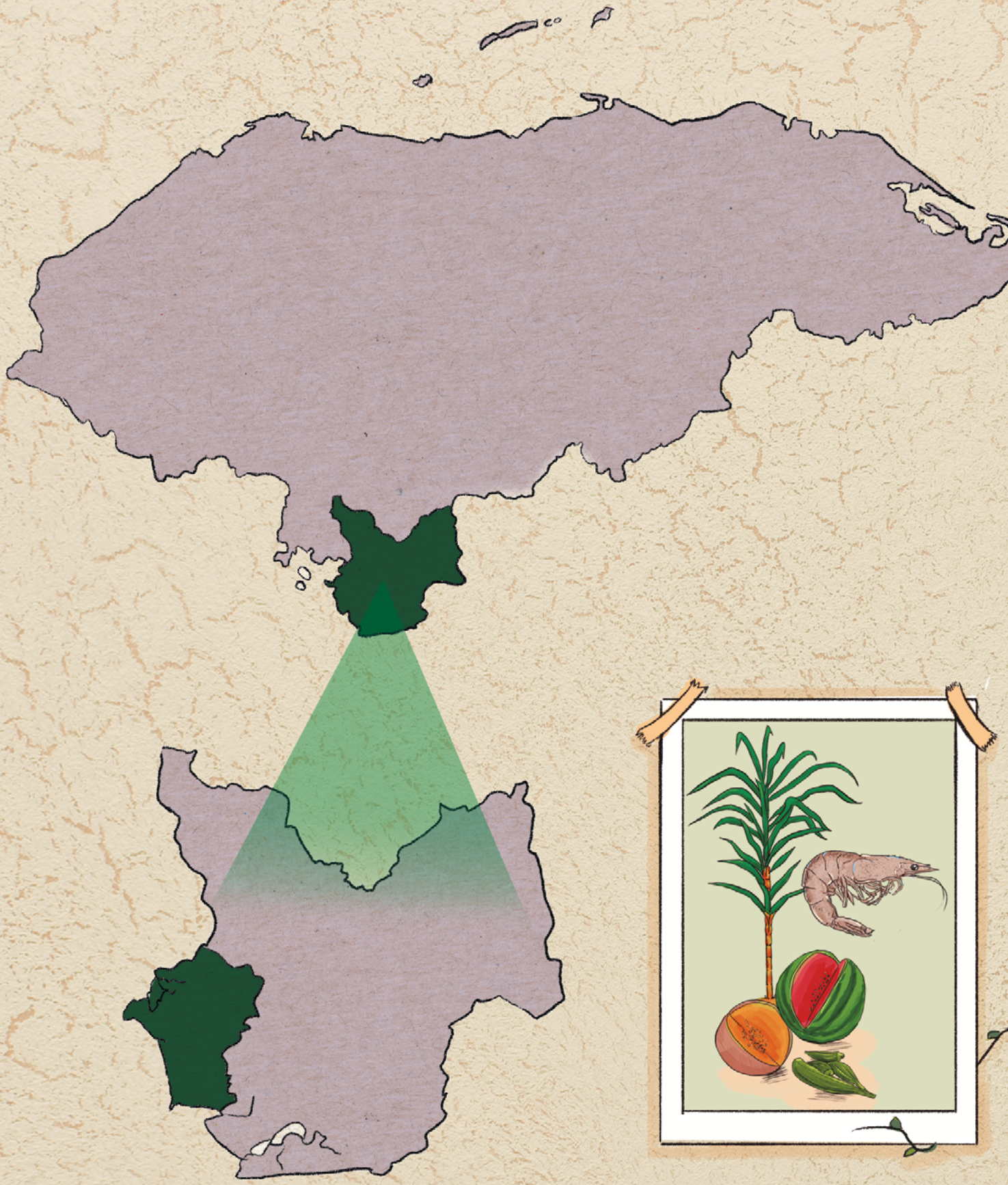


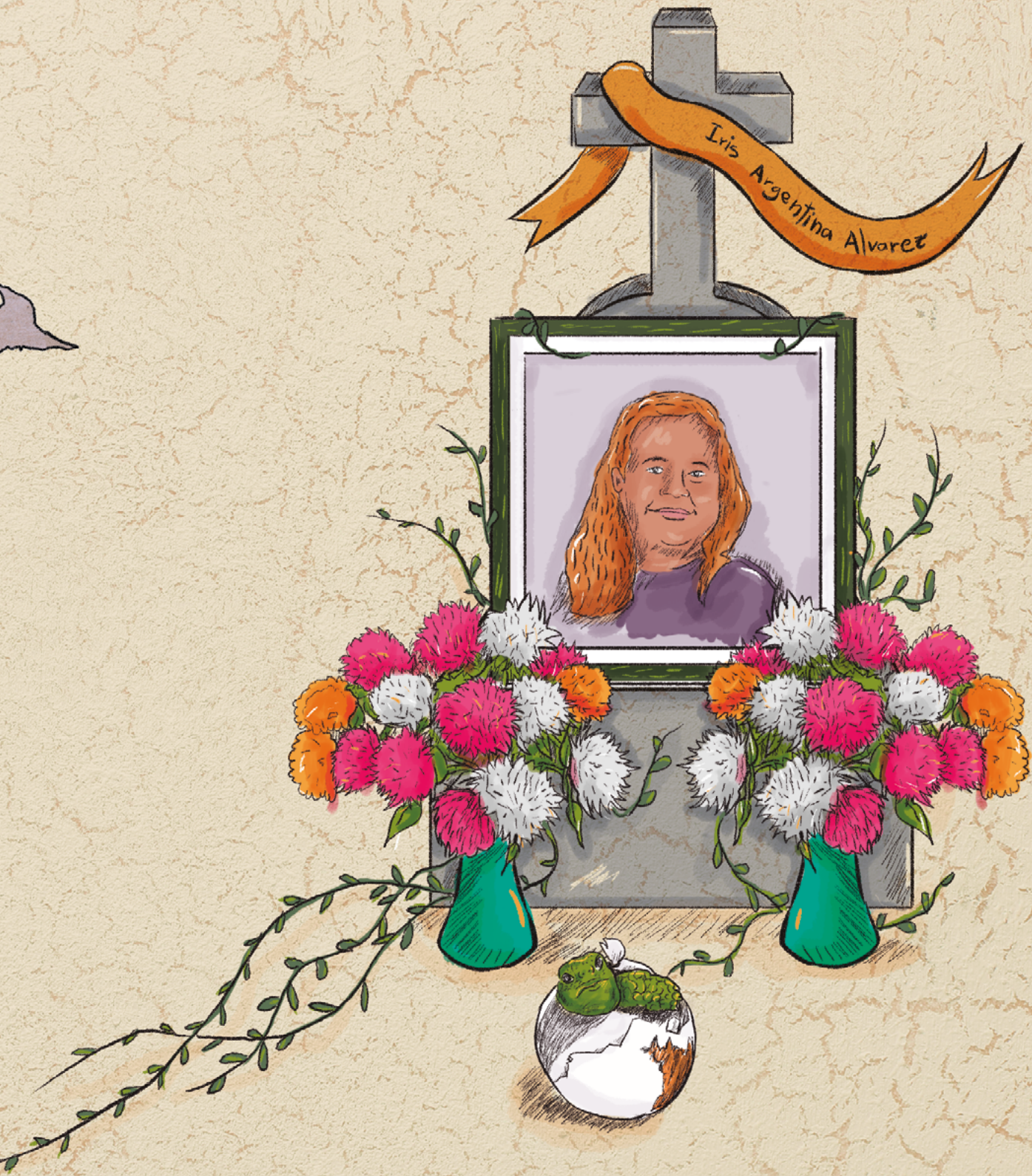
The women are also demanding that the State see to the approval of Initiative 5452, Law for the Economic Development for Women (LEY DEM, in Spanish), which rose to prominence in 2018 and sparked the creation of the Women's Platform in support of the Law of Economic Development for Women. This is a representative space for rural, indigenous, urban, peasant, feminist, Mayan, and a variety of Guatemalan women who contribute to the national economy. On May 15, 2018, the Platform presented the law to the legislature and continued its advocacy work until November 25, 2019 when the Women's Commission issued an official opinion in its favor.

> Initiative 5452–LEY DEM proposes the allocation of public resources for the needs and initiatives of women: "the State must strengthen women-run businesses because they are the ones who assume family burdens whenever there is a crisis, for example, as a result of monocultures, natural disasters, or what we are now experiencing with COVID. Let's say that women's resources are invariably the first to be expended to meet the needs of their family."[69]

This initiative addressed structural problems; however, in order to be accepted by Congress, some of the women's fundamental demands were excluded; for example, the article regarding women's right to access land ownership was eliminated; the incorporation of a gender perspective in the work of the National Institute of Statistics (INE) was omitted; and the article about the eradication of violence was modified. As a result, the law focuses solely on women's economic development, and, when approved, it will compel the Ministry of Economy (MINECO) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Food (MAGA) to invest resources in the productive activities of women via three financial and technical/technological programs. [70]

[69] Interview A2
[70] Sandra Morán Interview. October 2020.



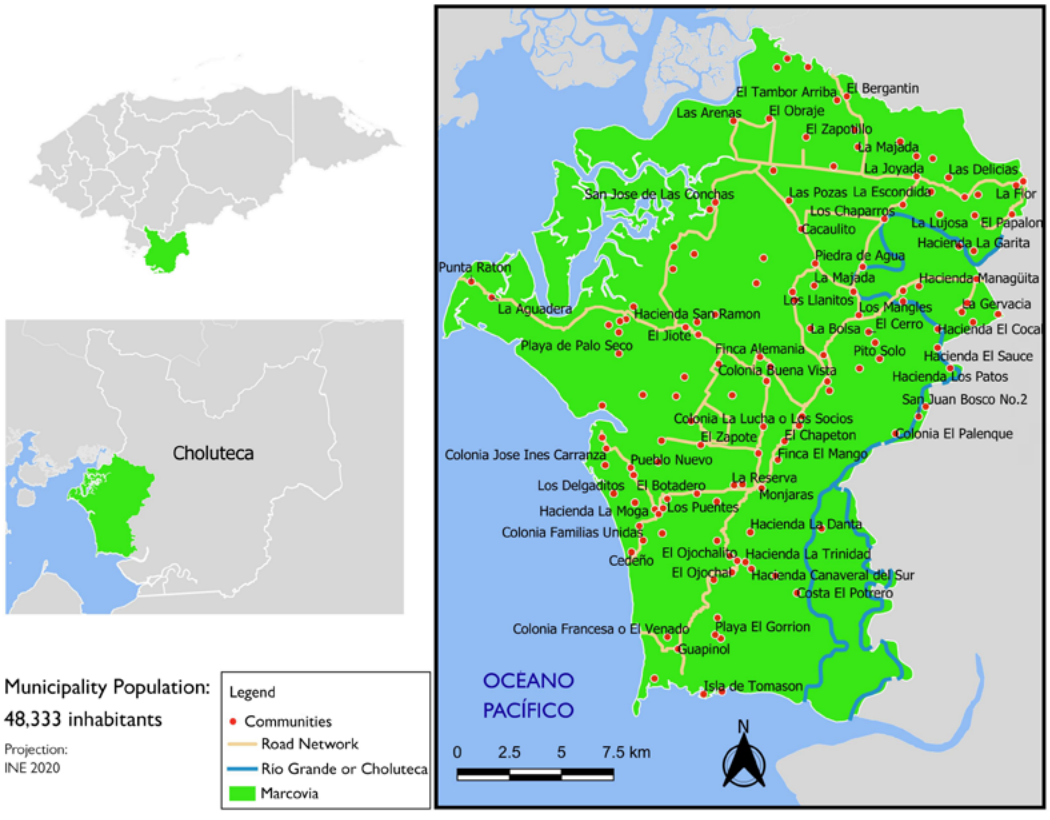


CHAPTER 3

MARCOVIA: THE BRAVE WOMEN RESISTING THE DISPOSSESSION OF THEIR LANDS

Now that we have learned about the stories and demands of the Guatemalan women of Santo Domingo Suchitepéquez, we will delve into the context of Marcovia, a municipality in Choluteca, southern Honduras. Marcovia is 482 Km2, and it is organized into 21 villages, 166 hamlets, and 21 barrios in its urban area. Its coast is approximately 100 km along the Pacific coast of the Gulf of Fonseca. There are more than 52 legally constituted boards of trustees[71] sworn in by the mayor's office.[72]

Map 4. Communities in Marcovia, Choluteca[73]



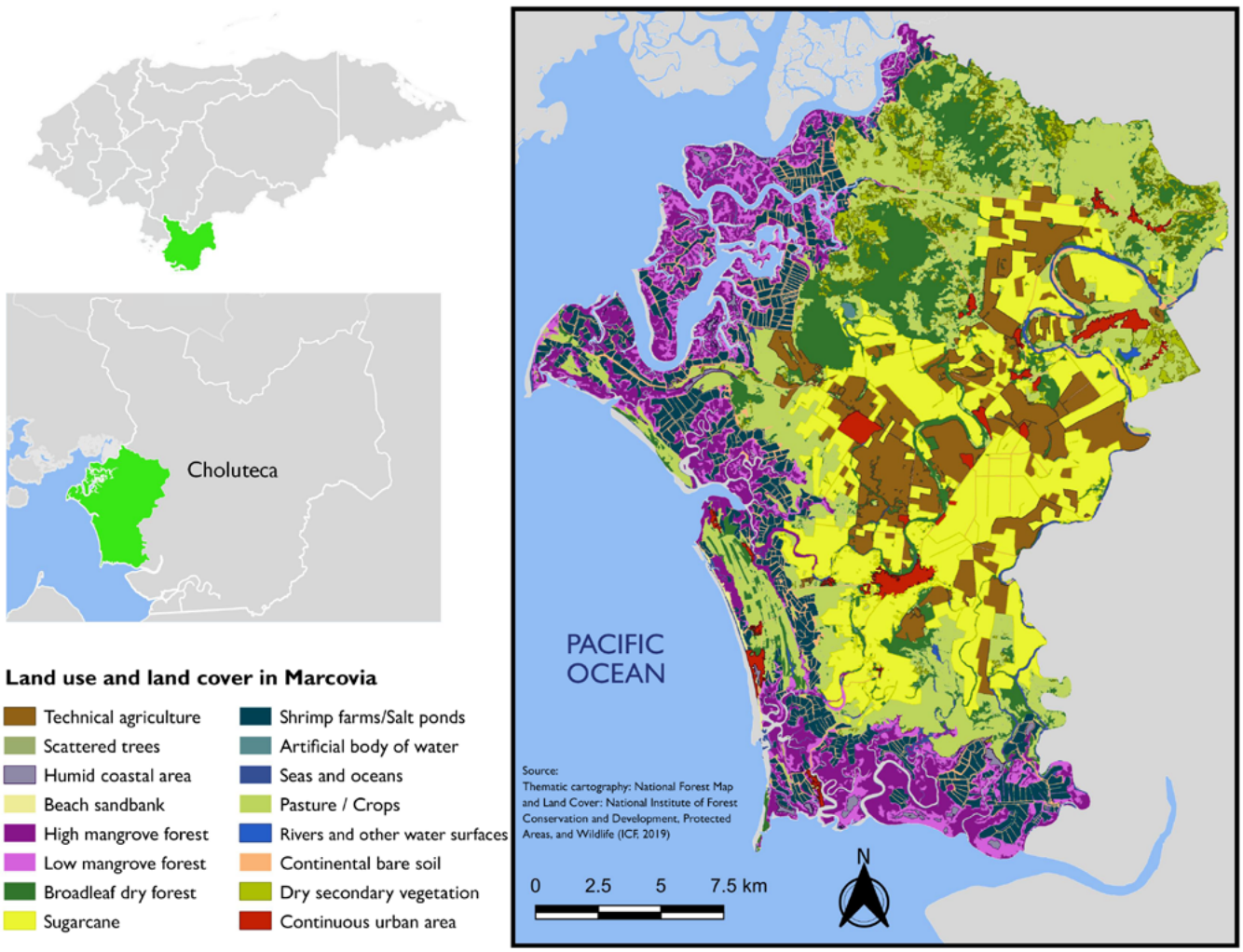
[71] Boards are associations made up of members or residents of a community settled in a specific physical space, whose aim is to pursue of the common good, to achieve self-management to overcome the community's needs, and the defense of the community's interests in order to promote the conditions for the comprehensive and sustainable development of society.

[72] National Forestry and Land Cover Map. Institute for Forest Conservation and Development, Protected Areas and Wildlife. ICF 2018. Available at: http://geoportal.icf.gob.hn/geoportal/main

[73] Ibid.

Regarding the use and coverage of the land in Marcovia, pastures and crops cover 20.61% while technical agriculture covers 13.63% and is concentrated in the alluvial lands of the Choluteca River delta. Export crops such as cantaloupe, watermelon, and sugar-cane are prevalent and use 9,129 hectares, or 18.93% of municipal land. The shrimp and salt industries, for their part, occupy 4,300 hectares (See Map 5).[74]

Map 5. Land use and land cover in Marcovia



[74] Institute for Forest Conservation and Development, Protected Areas and Wildlife. ICF 2018.

Companies in Marcovia

Choluteca Sugar Cane Mill S.A. ACHSA

Founded in 1968, it currently has a capacity to process 6,000 tons of cane per day, equivalent to 8,500 manzanas of cane.*

La Grecia Sugar Cane Mill

Established in 1976, initially under the name of Azucarera Central S.A. ACENSA, 45% of its capital came from the Mitsubishi Corporation, 33% from the National Investment Corporation (CONADI), and 22% from Honduran businessmen. In 1992 it became the La Grecia Sugar Cane Mill. Between 2008 and 2018, it was managed by Pantaleon Sugar Holding. It currently belongs to national investors.

* PAH, 2019. Union Report on Sustainability. Association of Sugar Planters in Honduras. Global Reporting Initiative. 47 pp
** Pantaleón, 2018. Report on Responsible Development. 61pp

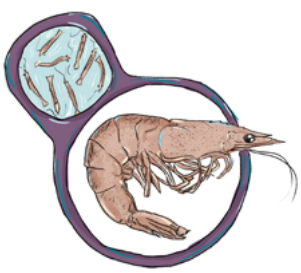
Sur Agrícola de Honduras SURAGROH, a subsidiary of Fyffes/ Sumitomo

In 2008, the company was part of Empresas Honduras Export HONDEX, Cultivos Vegetales del Sur—CUVESUR ,and The Sol Group Marketing. Funded by U.S. capital, SURAGROH operated in the department of El Paraíso and in the southeastern region of Guatemala.* Currently, it belongs to the Irish company Fyffes, a subsidiary of the Japanese Sumitomo Corporation.**

Costa Sur EXCOSUR

This exporter began operations in 1997 as a public limited company, with foreign capital from Guatemala and Spain. It was part of the Fresh Quest group, a U.S. company dedicated to the production, import and marketing of fruit from Central America.***

* Ketelhöhn N, Cordero A, 2011. Agricultural Company Monte Líbano: Strategy in Times of Crisis. Academia, Latin American Magazine of Administration
** FESTAGRO http://festagro.org/
*** Ketelhöhn N, Cordero A, 2011. Agricultural Company Monte Líbano: Strategy in Times of Crisis. Academia, Latin American Magazine of Administration



Shrimp Farms

Shrimp Farm Criaderos del Sur S.A. CRISUR; Marine Riverbank S of RL "RIVERMAR"; Shrimp Farm Cultivator S.A. CULCAMAR.

Laboratories

ACUARIUS, UNIFINCA, PALMESI, OROLARVA, BIOMASUR; Shrimp Farm Aquacultivos de Honduras AQH; Shellfish Production and Reforestation Cooperative Ltda. COPROMARE; Fishermen and Producers' Cooperative El Obraje Ltda.; Fishermen and Producers' Cooperative La Aguadera Ltda.; Shellfish Fishermen and Producers' Cooperative Las Gaviotas Ltda.; Shellfish Production Cooperative Jordán Ltda.*

* MiAmbiente, 2019. Report: Perspectives on Urban Environment. City of Marcovia, Choluteca. National Climate Change Observatory for Sustainable Development (ONCCDS). 145pp.

Timeline: The Introduction of Monocultures to Marcovia

1958
Creation of Agricultural Colonies: OLA and Monjarás are divided into lots in Marcovia. 325 lots of 20 hectares each were created and distributed. In 1959, Monjarás added 172 lots of 10 hectares each.

1960
Pastures, livestock, and cotton, sesame, and sugar cane crops are widespread in the South. Cottonseed is the second biggest source of vegetable oil and fat in the country.

1962
The Agrarian Reform Law is enacted.

1968
The Choluteca Sugar Foundation (ACHSA) is created.

1973
Sea Farms, a shrimp farm company, kickstarts the industry in El Jicarito.

1980
Cotton production falls into crisis in this decade. Cantaloupe production, for its part, emerges with the aim of becoming an export product. The same happens with foreign vegetables, such as okra.

1992
The Law of Modernization for the Development of the Agricultural Sector (LMDSA) is enacted.

1997
La Grecia, a sugar cane mill ran by Guillermo Lippmann and the export company Costa Sur (EXCOSUR) (part of the Fresh Quest Group), arrives in Marcovia.

2005
Signing of the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

2008
Pantaleón Sugar Holding begins to manage the La Grecia Sugar Cane Mill.

2008
SURAGROH becomes part of an international group that includes HONDEX, CUVESUR, and THE SOL GROUP & MARKETING.

2013
The Irish company Fyffes purchased SOL MELONS, thereby securing ownership of the SURAGROH and Melon Export farms.

2014
PCM-017-2014 CHAPTER V: National Program for the Social and Community Development of Families that Grow Sugar Cane.

2018
Pantaleón sells the La Grecia Sugar Cane Mill to a group of Honduran investors.

2018
Fair Trade revokes the certification it had previously granted to SURAGROH, a subsidiary of the Irish-Japanese fruit company Fyffes/Sumitomo.

2018
Land occupation at La Lujosa Experimental Station.

2019
Ten peasant groups occupy 2,455 manzanas. They are part of Las Piletas Associative Company, Cerro Escondido, Nuevo Amanecer, El Tulito 1 and 2, Grupo Campesino Manos Unidas, and La Paz del Tulito. They argue the lands belong to the State.

2020
Approximately 62 families were violently evicted from a peasant settlement in the community of Chacos. Monjarás. Iris Argentina Álvarez is assassinated and three men are injured.

2020
Executive Decrees: PCM-030-2020, PCM-041-2020

What happens to women in the context of monocultures in Marcovia?

For communities in Marcovia, monocultures are not new; indeed, current inhabitants' earliest memories include sugarcane crops near their community. However, they have noticed that the production methods have changed over time, compounding the social and environmental impacts of monocultures. In this section, we will focus on identifying how these changes, whose objective was to increase productivity and crop yields, have generated gendered impacts, affecting women's work, their livelihood, and the possibility to protect and claim their rights.

Long Workdays and their Impact on Women's Health

In addition to enduring long hours on the plantations, women who live in extractivist contexts come home to even more domestic and care work. We are talking about endless shifts since there are no breaks between the various tasks that women undertake to support their families. According to one of the women we interviewed, "[women] who don't have a steady job aside from [domestic] work may be able to find a side job to make money, a little side hustle like selling candy on the street. On top of that, like I said, they have to become their own psychologists so they can juggle all of those responsibilities, which isn't easy, but as always, women try to take on all the burden."[75]

Women who have organized state there has been some improvement in the distribution of domestic chores at home; however, they say unorganized women bear 100% of the responsibilities, many of which multiply at certain times of the year; for example, during sugarcane burning season, the cleaning work intensifies because the ashes make their way into the house. Moreover, burning sugarcane and using chemicals, both applied aerially and on the plantations, pollutes water sources and causes respiratory diseases, cancer, and kidney failure. All of this leads to an increase in women's workload because, as is the case in Santo Domingo in Guatemala, they are the ones who care for sick people and travel long distances to collect water.

Vilma's Day[76]

Vilma, a woman from Marcovia, lives with her husband Leonel, who worked for many years in sugarcane plantations. They owned a house together with their family, but Leonel's health has deteriorated due to kidney failure, which is a consequence of having worked on the plantations. Since Leonel got sick, Vilma has taken become his caretaker.

Caring for her husband's health is expensive. A few years ago, to cover medical and domestic expenses, they had to sell their home. Now, to be able to afford housing, Leonel's medical treatment, and food, Vilma must go out every day and work as a peddler in her community, all the while making sure Leonel takes his medicine three times a day.

Vilma's day is an endless cycle of housework, caring for her husband, making money, and being her family's emotional support.

[75] Interview B1
[76] Interview B2

Fishing, a traditional source of food, has suffered under the extractivist model, which has increased the women's workload: "You know, women never get to rest at home; they never rest. And on top of that, they also have another job: After washing [their and their family's] clothes, making food, taking care of the children and the sick, they also have another job washing clothes [for other households]. [...] Every single woman works so they can contribute to [their family's] nutrition. If there is no fishing, they have to make food for the children. A child doesn't understand [poverty]; they always ask for food."[77]

Getting external support, especially through cooperation programs that finance economic entrepreneurship activities, has been a victory for women. It has been a great achievement to have organizations giving them the attention they deserve and believe in their capabilities and commitments. The support they have received very often has gone hand in hand with accompaniment and training programs that strengthen their self-esteem.

However, the women say these projects mean more work for them, and the money they make is used exclusively to meet their family's needs. Moreover, although many cooperation organizations require that a certain number of women be involved before approving a project, their participation often depends on getting their husbands' permission. As one of them said, "it was his decision that I rejoined [the organization],"[78] or in the words of one man, "[as long as] she doesn't neglect our home, she can join the organization, no problem."[79]

In addition to domestic work and the care family members, women have to carry out emotional work to maintain harmony within the family: "Like any good housewife, you try to maintain a balance and live, so to say. You try to seize those moments when you can see the balance and not worry about the now. You also kind of assume the role of a psychologist to help [your family], on top of all the other hats you have to wear. You try to lead a healthy family life."[80]

The burden of care that falls on women and intensifies as a result of extractivism continues to be ignored because it has been normalized for women to be responsible for the family's physical and emotional well-being and its economic stability. Generally speaking, the impacts of extractivism on environmental assets have been more easily acknowledged than its impact on women's workload; indeed, the increase in their working hours continues to go unnoticed. For example, a woman interviewed said that "[women] who work in the shrimp farm have to get up earlier to take care of the food, and [the women] who don't; well, they still get up early because they have to do something to sustain themselves. I don't think it makes much of a difference. They don't really do different activities."[81]

Lengthy work days, emotional work, and the constant anxiety about providing for their families have resulted in high levels of emotional and physical fatigue for women, which has had a detrimental effect on their health and is evident throughout the communities. According to one of the women interviewed, "These are diseases that we get as women. Sometimes it seems these diseases arrive because of the circumstances that we live in [...]. We're losing women to cancer, kidney failure, arthritis, and [other] diseases, which we see in most households."[82]

77 Interview B3
78 Interview B5
79 Interview B6
80 Interview B1
81 Interview B1
82 Interview B2

Land Dispossession Strategies and Women's Livelihoods

Monocultures such as cotton, sesame, and sugarcane have been present in Marcovia since 1960, resulting in **decades accumulated toxic agents** and other impacts on the region's natural assets. Since their emergence, the production methods and technology used in monocultures have changed; indeed, one of the first changes locals noticed was the mechanization of agriculture. For example, men were initially employed to cut the sugarcane; however, an increase in automation displaced much of the labor force. The company policies that accompanied their displacement resulted in women no longer being able to sell food at the plantations.[83]

Moreover, since the signing of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States in 1990, the private sector implemented **strategies to seize the lands of peasants,** who at the time were organized into cooperatives and collectively owned much of the land. In the words of one of the interviewees: "one [of their strategies] was to sink the peasants so they couldn't sow."[84] This quote refers to the loans and bonds that were offered to peasants who worked the land but were losing their crops because of crop dusting. As a result, it became impossible for them to pay these loans, and their lands were eventually taken from them. This strategy continues to be effective, according to the testimonials we heard.

Owners without autonomy

"Our family orchards are very frail; having an orchard has become a problem. Just look at how we struggle; we have to cover them when a plane flies by so [the chemicals] don't fall on them. Our fruit trees are beautiful, but as soon as a plane flies by, they begin to dry up."[85]

The private sector, sugarcane companies especially, has taken not only the women's partners but also their land: "They've truly made us desperate. Those who didn't sell [their lands] now lease them to [the same companies]. The women end up leasing because selling hasn't work; they're always in debt. These women became widows after their husbands got sick as a result of the chemicals. In this area, we all have high rates of kidney failure."[86]

Currently, 50% of the cane produced by the La Grecia, a cane monoculture company, comes from land leased from small farmers. According to the contract they sign, the lands are leased to the company for a period of five years. The owners receive yearly 400 USD per acre. The company assumes control over and uses the land while the owner loses autonomy and decision-making power. These stipulations are non-negotiable since the company has the power to set the terms, and small landowners have little choice but to comply.

The cantaloupe monoculture company behaves similarly: They lease the land and pay 450 USD a year per hectare. The difference is that the women are allowed to grow maize on their land for a period of 6 months; for the remaining six months, the company is allowed to do the same.

[83] Interview B8
[84] Interview B2
[85] Interview B2
[86] Interview B5

Polluting the water sources that supply the communities of Marcovia is another form of systematic dispossession. The issue first became public when the Andar Association conducted a survey of water quality and detected three types of iron in it; they estimated that in fifteen years the population would no longer be able to drink from these sources.[87] In 2014, the National Commissioner for Human Rights (CONADEH), in its annual report, highlighted the severity of the pollution affecting said water sources.[88] More recently, the Committee for the Defense and Development of the Gulf of Fonseca Flora and Fauna has carried out studies that have revealed an alarming amount of agrochemicals in the soil and water.

In addition to its irreversible impacts on nature, the pollution of water sources affects the economy and the health of the communities. Local women have taken note of this and expressed their concern: "Water here in the community has become undrinkable […]. We buy a package of twenty-five water bags for 16 lempiras, if you have more money, you can buy a plastic jug, but that water is only used for drinking. If we want to wash our clothes or shower, we use water from the well—although they've told us we shouldn't even use it for that. But we don't have a choice. We can't get water elsewhere. It's become evident that this is what's making people sick."[89]

Fishing, one of the most important economic activities in the municipality, has also been seriously affected by water pollution. In our conversations with the inhabitants of Marcovia, phrases such as "years ago, fishing had a great yield", "fishing isn't what it used to be; it isn't as abundant as it used to be," and "fishing is pointless" were ubiquitous. People attribute the issue to the "chemical waste that the cantaloupe and sugarcane companies produce. It all ends up in the sea, and it affects our fishing grounds. Why? We see tides of dead fish, and I think they're the result of the chemicals used in the sugarcane plantations. When it rains, all that water makes its way to the sea."[90]

CONADEH confirms Marcovians' lived experience. Fishing grounds are not yielding as much due to "the severe water pollution caused by the use of pesticides in commercial export crops—watermelon, cantaloupe, bananas, and sugarcane—and the deforestation of mangroves as a consequence of companies rerouting sea channels to build shrimp farming ponds."[91] Regarding the latter, an interviewee stated that shrimp farming "harms the community because the ponds introduce salt water, by means of engines or pipes, into what used to be arable lands and fresh water bodies […]. Currently, our drinking wells are filled with salt water […]. Then they come to our communities and sell us water, but before we could drink water from the well, and it was healthier."[92]

87 Interview B2
88 National Commissioner for Human Rights (CONADEH). 2014. Report to the Honorable National Congress of the Republic. https://www.conadeh.hn/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/CONADEH_2014.pdf
89 Interview B2
90 Interview B9
91 CONADEH. Op. Cit.
92 Interview B3

Lethal violence as a strategy to dismantle resistance

> "Violence against women destroys the community's capacity to resist."[93]

The systematic exertion of multiple forms of violence has allowed companies and States to maintain control over territories, natural assets, and people's bodies, especially women, who are at the forefront of the struggle for the defense of rights and nature. In Marcovia, the last violent incident against a defender happened in April 2020. Iris Álvarez was murdered,[94] and the culprits remain at large.

Iris Álvarez, a fighter for land repossession and a dignified life

Those who knew Iris Argentina Álvarez remember her as a fighter. She was a defender of life and the territory who sought the common good of peasant families in the South so they could enjoy decent living conditions.[95]

Up until the night when she was murdered, Iris fought alongside the Cerro Escondido Peasant Cooperative to repossess 20 manzanas of public land, which had been inhabited by the families that made up the Cooperative since 2017.[96] The idea was to grow crops to meet the community's basic needs.

On April 2, 2020, as the country entered a state of national emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic, persons identified as private security agents of La Grecia Sugar Company and CRAE'S, a security firm, carried out the violent eviction of the inhabitants of Los Chanchos, in Marcovia, Choluteca. They did not have an eviction warrant. The raid occurred while the families were still asleep; more than sixty homes were destroyed; several people were injured; and Iris was cruelly shot in the face and killed.

Federici asserts that violence fractures and weakens resistance. In Marcovia, as in many other places, violence, including murder, against women leaders and defenders serves to paralyze communities through fear. According to the interviewees, this affected the investigation into Iris's murder because "the problem is that they can't find [people who want to give a statement]. They just don't want to; they say, 'what if they kill me? I'm not getting myself mixed up in this. A life is only worth 500 pesos nowadays.' It's a very difficult situation. People are scared, and they're not going to give any information about anything."[97]

Unfortunately, the repression, persecution, and lethal violence against women defenders have heavily impacted women's organizations, which, out of fear of being attacked, have focused on finding technical solutions. For example, they want to guarantee access to drinking water by working with people or organizations from other countries that can provide technical support, but they have moved away from advocacy work and demanding rights because that puts them at greater risk.

93 Silvia Federici, 2016. *Reflections on Extractivism and Women.*
94 Interview B8
95 "Iris Argentina Álvarez: Honduran Peasant Murdered for Land Struggle in the South" | Land Portal. April 2020.
96 National Network of Human Rights Defenders in Honduras. Alerta Defensoras HONDURAS / "Woman defender is murdered by security agents in a violent and illegal eviction in Marcovia, Choluteca." April 3, 2020. Available at: im-defensoras.org/2020/04/defensora-es-asesinada-por-agentes-de-seguridad-en-violento-ilegal-desalojo/ (April 20, 2023)
97 Interview B2

Women are forced to migrate

Due to structural inequalities, precarious living conditions, and high rates of violence, in 2018, a number of Honduran emigrants decided to organize and travel as a group to the United States. Their goal, in addition to seeking new opportunities, was to render visible their family's alarming situation. A Marcovian woman stated: "People weren't lying when they said they were fleeing danger, unemployment, the kind of life people have here [...]. Here, we are adrift, 'save yourself if you can, or put up with all of this.' Our lives right now are filled with so much suffering—you really have no idea."[98]

Many women and men from Marcovia, especially young people, joined this group of migrants, but they were not the first to migrate. Years ago, people began to move to the United States to work in construction jobs, or Spain to work as caretakers for the elderly, or Costa Rica to work in agriculture since in these countries offer better working conditions than Honduras. The lack of opportunities at the local and national level forces many young people, even minors, to "venture into other countries and hope for the best. Because of the situation, [both migrants] and the few that stay risk falling prey to vices, drugs, alcohol, and unemployment."[99] Moreover, parents are frequently forced to migrate so they can provide for their families, leaving their children in the care of their grandmothers.[100] This not only separates families; it increases the care workload for elderly people, women in particular.

The stories presented in this section give an account of the "emptying" of the territory,[101] especially of young people, and how its defense and people's resistance is being left in the hands of the adult population.

The Struggles of the Women of Marcovia and their Proposals

In recent years, the women of Marcovia have organized to promote their political participation in decision-making spaces, strengthen their autonomy and economic empowerment, and continue their environmental care practices.

Political participation of women

Organized women are committed to strengthening their political leadership, with the aim of, among other things, assuming public office in State agencies, both at the local and municipal level, and thus promote the free exercise of their rights and their specific demands as women. Currently, there are some women holding councilor positions in the municipality, but their work is not focused on women's rights, and it has no gender perspective. For this reason, organized women are strengthening training processes that allow the compañeras who become deputies, mayors, or councilors to continue their work with grassroots organizations and to keep up and prioritize the demands for women's rights, emphasizing the free exercise of the right to effective participation and to a life free of violence as well as access to programs that support their entrepreneurial ventures.

Economic empowerment

As one of their strategies to counteract the absence of job opportunities and other activities that generate an income, local organizations have prioritized economic ventures led by women. To that end, they have promoted training programs that teach technical and administrative skills to manage both agricultural enterprises, especially family orchards, and non-agricultural ones, such as bakeries, consumer stores, cafeterias,

[98] Interview B1
[99] Interview B5
[100] Interview B3
[101] In this section, our aim is to state a problem that must be dealt with in greater depth so as to better understand the mechanisms that are promoting the depopulation of areas of interest for agricultural extractivism in this region.

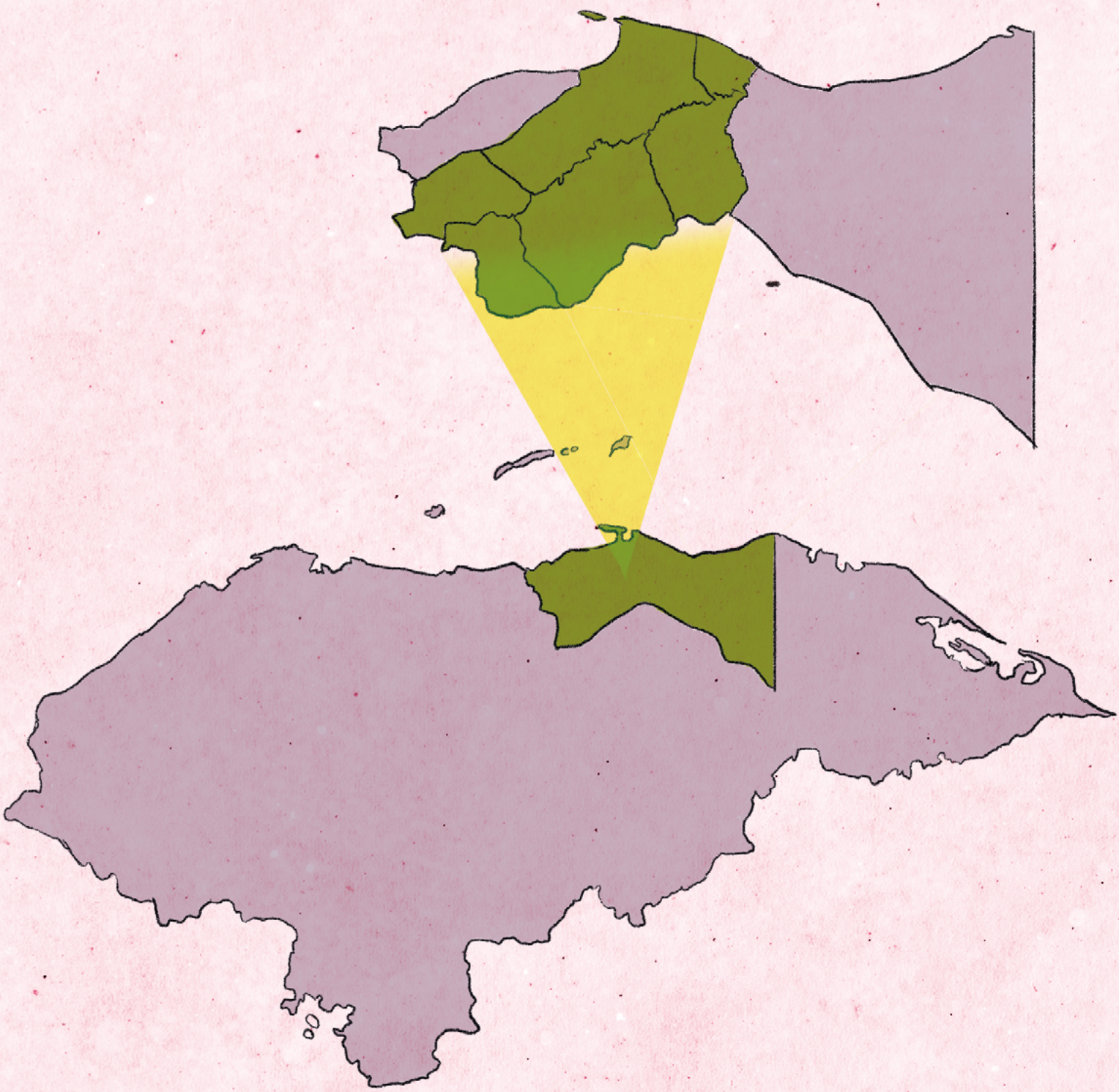
etc. They have likewise promoted the creation of community savings and credit banks to strengthen the sustainability of these ventures.

Caring for nature

In addition to the pollution emitted by monocultures, shrimp farms, fishing, and tourism in Marcovia, the population is being affected by excess waste. In response, organized women have carried out awareness actions for the protection and care of the environment. For example, at the beginning of 2020, they held a forum to propose banning disposable containers, which harm water sources and wildlife, especially the Pacific ridley sea turtles. The women managed to involve the Municipal Corporation and other municipal and departmental authorities in the activity; however, the initiative came to halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the use of disposable products increased due to the measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

Local organizations have also implemented a project to collect and care for Pacific ridley sea turtle eggs. The project is monitored by the Institute for Forest Conservation and Development, Protected Areas, and Wildlife and the Ministry of Energy, Natural Resources, Environment, and Mines, with the support of the United Nations Development Program, the Central American Commission for the Environment and Development, and the Swiss Agency for Development, among other entities. The project runs for 3 months and aims to protect and foster the region's economic revitalization by gainfully employing 113 women and 95 men to collect and care for the turtle eggs and execute actions to restore the mangrove forest.[102]

[102] The My Environment Ministry oversees the collection and care of the reptile eggs. this year, they hope to increase the number of sea turtles released in the Gulf of Fonseca. Available at http://www.miambiente.gob.hn/blog/view/ministro-de-mi-ambiente-supervisa-recoleccion-y-cuido-de-huevos-del-reptil-esperan-incrementar-este-ano-el-numero-de-tortugas-marinas-liberadas-en-el-golfo-de-fonseca (Accessed on April 20, 2023)

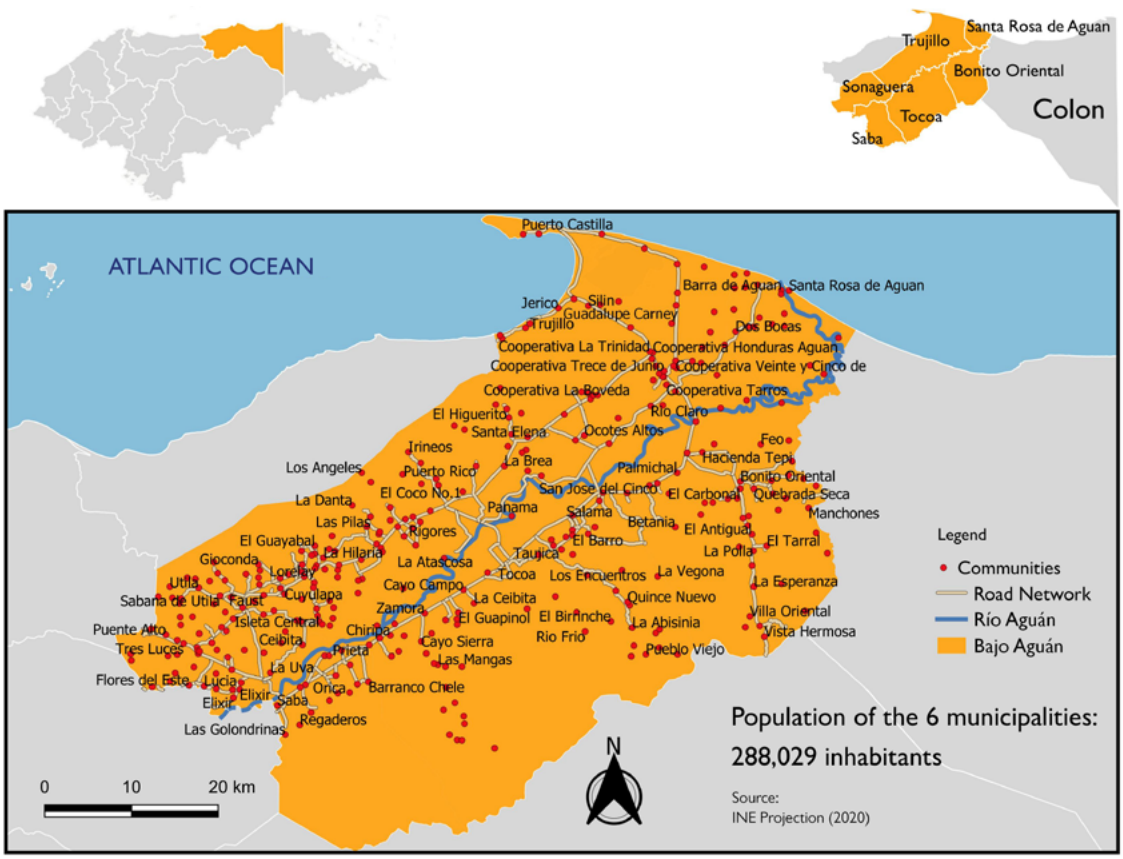


CHAPTER 4

BAJO AGUÁN: WOMEN FIGHT AND TRANSFORM MACHISMO INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THEIR MOVEMENTS

After discussing the reality of the communities and women of Marcovia, we will go into our last case study. The Bajo Aguán region of Honduras is located on the lower Aguán River, in the department of Colón, northwest of the Yoro department. Covering a surface area of 200,000 hectares, the Aguán Valley comprises 91 villages, 722 hamlets, and the municipalities of Sonaguera, Sabá, Tocoa, Trujillo, Santa Rosa de Aguán, and Bonito Oriental.[103]

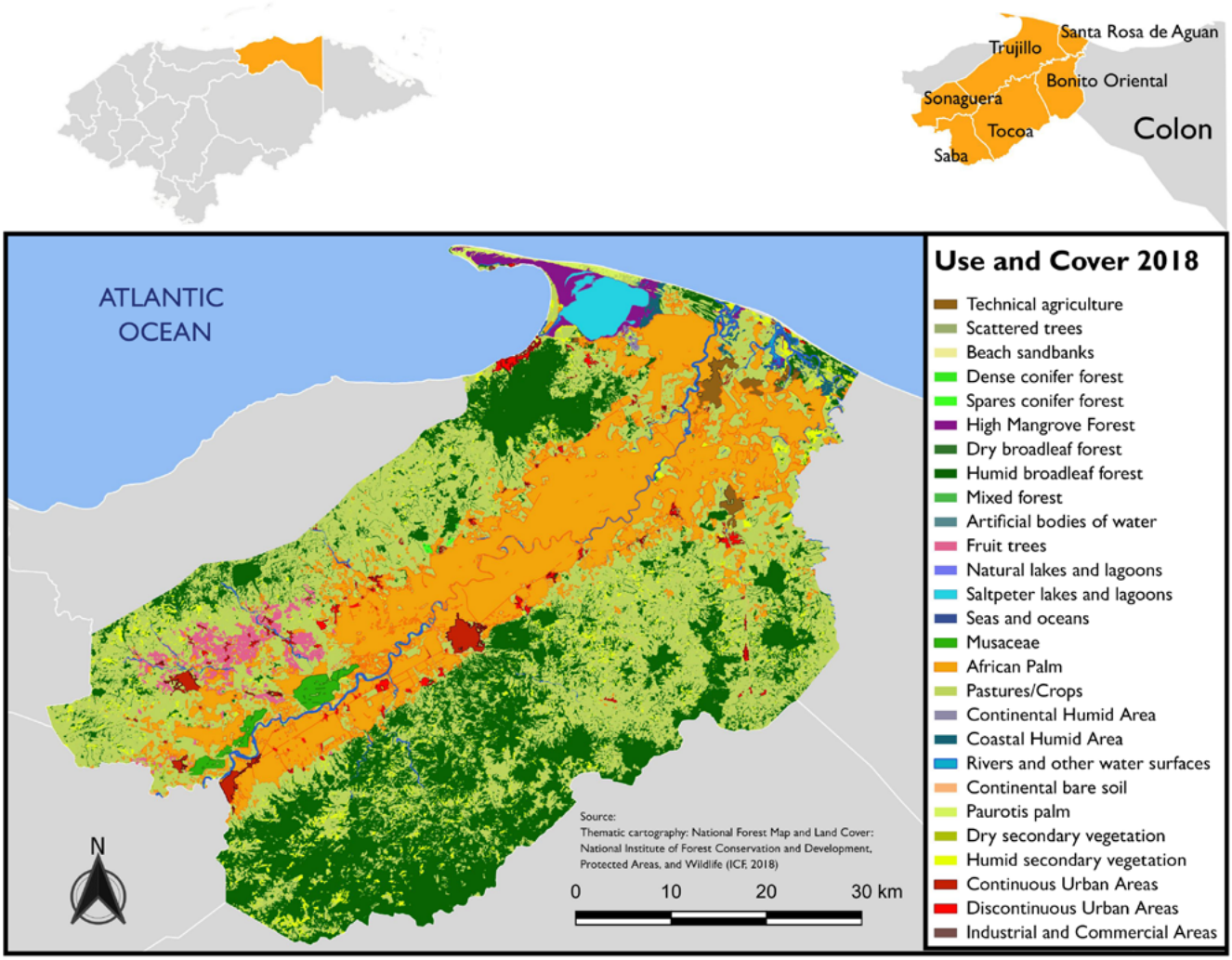
Map 6. The communities of Bajo Aguán



[103] Institute for Forest Conservation and Development, Protected Areas and Wildlife. ICF 2018.

Bajo Aguán is home to various types of forests, most of which grow on the highlands or belong to protected areas in the region. However, oil palm crops utilize 71,364 hectares, which represent 22.76% of the land; citrus fruit trees are a distant second in terms of surface area at 5,174 hectares; Musaceae take up 2,287 hectares; and crops sustained by technical agriculture use 2,093 hectares.

Map 7. Land use and land cover in Bajo Aguán[104]



[104] Institute for Forest Conservation and Development, Protected Areas and Wildlife. ICF 2018.

DINANT Corporation

Founded in 1960, in 2004 it acquired the Mazola brand. It has 13,300 hectares of oil palm plantations in the Aguán and León valleys. It buys the fruit that grows on more than 28,000 hectares belonging to independent producers. Dinant develops new crops with them and provides them with technical and financial assistance. It owns two palm oil extraction plants with an installed fruit processing capacity of 300 TM/HR*

*https://www.dinant.com/estandares-y-certificaciones/

JAREMAR Group

Founded in 1994 by two companies: Mercaribe (JARE Group) and NUMAR (Chiquita Group). It operates in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. It is one of the largest Honduran companies with more than 15,000 cultivated hectares in the departments of Atlántida, Yoro, Cortés, and Colón. In 2003, Grupo JAREMAR acquired 100% of DOLE's shares, which include companies such as Fábrica de Manteca and Jabón Atlántida, S.A. of C.V. (LA BLANQUITA), Compañía Agrícola Ceibeña, S.A. of C.V. (CAICESA), and Industria Aceitera Hondureña, S.A. of C.V. (IAHSA)*

* https://jaremar.com/historia/

ACEYDESA

It began operations in 1999, and today it has the capacity to process 250,000 tons of fresh fruit per year. It sells its products on the domestic market and in Germany and the Netherlands.

Standard Fruit Honduras

Empresa agrícola dedicada a la producción y exportación de banano fresco, con sede en La Ceiba, Atlántida, Honduras. Fundada en 1899 como una división de Dole Tropical Products, una subsidiaria de Dole Food Company Inc. Posee más de 1.800 hectáreas, parte de ellas ubicadas en el Bajo Aguán.

Timeline: The Introduction of Monocultures to Bajo Aguán

1927
First documented introduction of oil palm trees from Indonesia, planted in the Lancetilla Botanical Garden in Tela.

1943
First commercial oil palm plantations on the north coast of Honduras, promoted by the United Fruit Company (UFCO).

1954
Banana strike, fight for labor rights.

1955
Creation of the El Aguán Agricultural Colony, with a surface area of 500 hectares, which were divided into 49 lots of 10 hectares each.

1962
The Agrarian Reform Law is promulgated.

1965
Standard Fruit Co, becomes a subsidiary of Castle & Cook Inc., which also owns DOLE

1971
After the failure of the agricultural colonies in the 1950s, the lands are transferred to the National Agrarian Institute and redistributed to peasant families organized in cooperatives. In 1971, these farms began growing oil palm.

1974
After Hurricane Fifi, the Bajo Aguán Comprehensive Development Project is launched. It is financed by the OAS and suspended in the late 1960s, which highlights the link between both projects.*

1975
The Honduran government begins building oil extraction plants.

1977
There is an increase in the number of migrants arriving in Bajo Aguán at the Honduran government's behest.

1982
The African Palm Agroindustrial Cooperative (COAPALMA) is created.

1984
The Association of Citrus Growers of Sonaguera (ACISON) is founded.

1990- 1994
The agrarian counter-reform process takes place. As a result, peasants are dispossessed and robbed of almost 74% of the lands that had been allotted to them as part of the agrarian reform.

* Araya, Andres Leon. "Taming Dispossession: African Palm, Land Grabbing, and Gender in Bajo Aguán, Honduras." Colombian Journal of Anthropology. vol.53 no.1 Bogotá January–June 2017.

1992
The Law for the Modernization and Development of the Agricultural Sector (LMDSA) is promulgated

1998
Beginning in 1998, cooperatives' members that had sold their assets begin to investigate the true motivations and legal framework for land sales.

In the **1990s**, the agro-industrial sector became fully established as more companies settled in the territory. That same year, DINANT ventured into palm cultivation; in 1994, JAREMAR is founded; COFRUTCO is founded in 1994; and in 1999 ACEYDESA emerges.

2000
The Unified Peasant Movement of Aguán demands an explanation concerning the purchase and sale of lands.

2002
The National Federation of African Palm Products of Honduras (FENAPALMAH) is created.

2009
The coup compounds the levels of inequality and violence in the country. The land conflict continues escalate after the general election. Twenty-six farms are occupied by 5,000 peasants who claim ownership of 11,000 hectares of oil palm officially owned by large agricultural exporters.

2010
The Inter-institutional Technical Committee for Alternative Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Bajo Aguán is created to promote dialogue.

2013
In the context of the land conflict, the Permanent Observatory for Human Rights in Aguán (OPDHA) presents a statistical report concerned with 123 violent deaths, 6 forced disappearances, and hundreds of people injured during multiple confrontations that took place between 2008 and 2013.

2013
The World Bank Ombudsman audits a DINANT investment project worth 30 million USD amd financed by the International Finance Corporation.

2014
Decreto PCM-017-2014 Reactivación del agro. Mining concession to EMCO MINING COMPANY

2015
The IACHR requests the adoption of precautionary measures in favor of 123 members of the organizations MOCRA, MCRGC, MUCA, and MARCA.

2018
Communities in Guapinol set up a camp to protest the activities of the Los Pinares mining company. The police and the army carry out a violent eviction.

2019
Approval of a trust fund of 4,800 million lempiras to finance the oil palm sector.

2020
Executive decrees: PCM-030-2020 y PCM-041-2020

What happens to women in Bajo Aguán in the context of monocultures?

Around 190,000 hectares in Honduras have been used to grow oil palm.[105] As a result, Bajo Aguán is one of the territories in Central American that most clearly exemplifies the degree of injustice and lethal violence that the industrial monoculture model can generate. In the interviews we conducted, women identified three key elements that structure the context in which they are forced to live: 1) the increase in care work, which goes unacknowledged; 2) the violence against them and lack of bodily autonomy; 3) the strategies implemented by the government and the private sector to dispossess their territories.

The exercise of systematic and lethal violence is "an inherent element of extractivism, a quintessentially predatory model."[106] Indeed, violence has been crucial for the consolidation of extractivism in Bajo Aguán, and it becomes manifest through the militarization of the territories, the forced evictions, and the criminalization, disappearance, and murder of defenders. Bajo Aguán evidences that, in addition to attacks perpetrated by external agents, women have to face several kinds of violence, including the instrumentalization of their bodies within peasant organizations and movements.

Overburdened with care work, women's labor goes unacknowledged

> "Sometimes as rural women, we feel we have a job, but it comes with many expectations. We put up with it because we have a family. We have children to feed and to send off to school. [But] in the end, it's women who suffer... so we can give them an education, so we can afford to send them to school. Women can be single moms too, which is very common in Honduras. [As single moms], we have to be the sole breadwinner and take on the roles of mother and father."[107]

As in previous cases, the increase in care work is a certainty in the lives of women in extractivist contexts. Most of them are forced to invest their time performing countless domestic tasks, caring for the sick, and ensuring basic resources such as water and food to guarantee their family's well-being. Despite this, women find ways around the privatization of natural assets; they learn to navigate life risks; and they endure the loss of their lands and of stable and sufficient sources of income.

[105] Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, available at https://es.mongabay.com/2020/07/cinco-claves-palma-africana-america-latina/
[106] Alberto Acosta, 2011. "The curse of Violence: Extractivism Bared." Available at http://extractivismo.com/2011/10/la-maldicion-de-la-violencia-extractivismo-al-desnudo/
[107] Interview C3

As regards adolescent women, they tend to assume many responsibilities, such as caring for their relatives, while building and sustaining their own families; indeed, many become adolescent mothers due to the lack of education services and sexual and reproductive health care. As regards older women, most take care of their grandchildren either because their children work on the fields or because they had to migrate in search of opportunities.

In Bajo Aguán, as it happens in Santo Domingo and Marcovia, the absence of an equitable distribution of care work within families and communities further widens the gender gap in terms of participation in decision-making spaces.

"As long as we can't find a solution, things will continue to be very difficult."

"I think there are limitations that are still real for women, and they invariably put us at a disadvantage when it comes to decision-making and participating in key spaces. As women, we are forced to grapple with these limitations: We may lack economic resources; we may have to care for the children; we may have many other responsibilities to attend to... As organizations, projects, and proposals evolve, we fall behind.

At times when women are supposed to move forward, we fall behind, because our burdens are so great that taking another step becomes impossible. Men, on the other hand, continue to advance because the conditions are always there for them to do so—a child won't tie them down, but it will a woman. As long as we can't find a solution for this, things will continue to be very difficult. These are weaknesses we endure, but which we know are also strengths. For example, being a mother is what drives me to defend the river and the mountain while demanding my rights. My rights are the rights I will hand down to my children, so they are my strength as well."[108]

Just as domestic and care work are not recognized as work, other economic activities carried out by women are considered marginal and therefore are unfairly remunerated, including selling food and household goods or running consumer stores. Access to productive resources is essential to achieve economic autonomy; however, despite working the land, most of the women of Bajo Aguán do not self-identify as farmers, nor are they acknowledged as such by their families, the private sector, or the State.

Excluded from the right to own land

A factor that prevents women from enjoying greater autonomy and fully exercising their rights in their homes, communities, and organizations is the fact that they have been historically discriminated against, which has precluded them from accessing their right to land. For example, with the exception of widowed women and single mothers, women were excluded from being direct beneficiaries of the agrarian reform of 1974. Furthermore, in 1992, the Law for the Modernization and Development of the Agricultural Sector granted them limited and confusing rights, such as joint land titles if they were in couples; however, in the end, these land-titling processes benefited men more often than not.

[108] Interview C1

Dangerous plantations

Usually, the activity carried out by women in the palm plantations is the collection of fruit that has fallen from the clusters, which implies various risks when the appropriate protective equipment and clothing is not used: lumbar belt, rubber boots, leather gloves for protect themselves from fungi, and clothing that protects them from agrochemical residues to avoid poisoning through the skin. This is one of the great concerns of women, since companies do not always provide these elements or have strict protocols that allow them to take care of their health.

Violence exercised by public and private actors

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has closely followed human rights violations in the context of land conflicts in Bajo Aguán. Since 2014, it has granted precautionary measures to 123 members of peasant movements, and it has stated its concern regarding the criminalization of defenders to the Honduran government. For example: "During its visit to the peasant community 'Panamá' [...], the IACHR has noted with great concern that, given the situation of serious violence as a result of the agrarian conflict in the area, human rights defenders are subject to protracted judicial processes, alternative measures, and arrest warrants."[109] Other data confirm that in recent years Bajo Aguán has registered the **highest homicide rate** per 100,000 inhabitants in the country.

The serious situation in Bajo Aguán, caused by the imposition and expansion of monocultures and mining projects,[110] accounts for the links between the private sector and the country's political and military powers as well as the use of violence to control territories, natural assets, and the population. Militarization has fostered the criminalization of women defenders of the environment, land, and territory, and it is one of the most common forms of violence faced by women in Bajo Aguán. Likewise, the disappearances, murders, and violent evictions executed by the police, military, and private security firms at the behest of the private sectors have constantly targeted women, organizations, and communities.

In addition to the lives that have been lost, the violence perpetrated by private and public actors has deeply affected the local population at the psychosocial level; for example, "women are traumatized; they live in fear, fear of talking, of the patrols, the military [...]. The children shiver all the time. They're afraid to go to school because [soldiers] tend to fire their guns during school hours [...]. The school was even closed for a while—there were no lessons—because children just weren't going. When classes resumed, the children would cry all the time because they said the military was going to come and kill them."[111]

For their part, women are exposed to specific risks in the context of this conflict and of their historical dispossession. Private security guards at the plantations have used sexual violence against them as a mechanism to intimidate them, their families, and communities and to weaken their resolve in the fight against extractivism.[112]

Violent evictions are tools to intimidate the population. Physical, economic, and sexual violence are par for the course during evictions, and death threats with total impunity.

[109] Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, IACHR, 2019. "Report on the Human Rights' Situation in Honduras." Available at http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/informes/pdfs/Honduras2019.pdf
[110] GAGGA, "The conflict in Bajo Aguán." Available at https://gaggaalliance.org/el-conflicto-en-bajo-aguan/
[111] Interview C4
[112] Honduras, a Free Land, July 2013. Honduras: Statement by the Women's Network for the Aguán Valley Development

Experiencing Eviction Firsthand[113]

"During the last eviction, we were victims of the military. They came every day for two months. Two commandos entered and stood on the street. They stood as if they were going to war, with their rifles positioned as if they were expecting a confrontation.

The children were victims as well. If they tried to go out, the soldiers would stop them and start asking them questions; they accused us of being a guerrilla group. We could hear the helicopters, carrying soldiers, flying overhead. Sometimes the troops would descend among our houses, our little nylon houses.

Military units would enter, and the helicopters would fly above us. They said we were armed, that we were a subversive group. They would march us up against the fence—a large group of soldiers in combat position. That's what life was like; both women and children endured their humiliations and psychological abuse. In fact, some women miscarried because they were abused by the soldiers.

Some people expressed solidarity and brought us food, but then the soldiers came, grabbed it, and said 'We're going to poison this food so you'll die,' and then they threw terrible insults at us. We lived through that, and so did our young. At one point, they round up the men and took them into custody, but they eventually let them go... [we've endured] so many things, so many rights violations."

In the course of this investigation, we were informed of **two acts of violence linked to the land conflict** and human rights defenders. The first one was against a young woman we interviewed; the second against a young man who was about to participate in the focus groups. These acts of violence were carried out despite the fact that both defenders were beneficiaries of the National Protection Mechanism.[114] Consequently, the IACHR has urged the Honduran State to reinforce the development and implementation of complementary measures beyond police protection, to commit to investigating the facts surrounding the case, and to act to reduce risk factors.

Violence against women within organizations and movements

Many of the peasant organizations and movements in Bajo Aguán are made up of small oil palm farmers who supply palm oil companies in the territory. In this context, women mentioned several forms of violence that they face within their organizations, especially at the hands of male leaders. The women talked about barriers that result in their exclusion from decision-making structures. If they are included in these spaces, they are denied the opportunity voice their opinions and vote: "Yes, a woman is the president, but the men obstruct our leadership; they don't let us lead. If we try to raise our voices, they work to silence us."[115] Several interviewees also stated that, on occasion, male leaders invite women to participate in these spaces because they are interested in them sexually, which constitutes a form of sexual harassment. In fact, women have spoken out about the multiple instances of sexual assault perpetrated by male organization leaders against girls. Far from working to change this environment via care and prevention protocols, male leaders have resorted to revictimizing survivors and expelling the people who have raised the alarm.

[113] Interview C5
[114] The National Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists, Social Communicators, and Justice Operators includes protection measures that complement police protection, such as temporary relocation, prevention, and psychosocial care.
[115] Interview C6

Amanda's strength and conviction[116]

When Amanda was a child, she and her family returned to Bajo Aguán to reclaim their land. Her family had been tricked into signing away their estate, so she grew up watching her mother and father fight for their rights. Their resistance endured, despite being evicted several times, sometimes violently.

Ten years later, inspired by her parents, Amanda became a community organizer. She knows the agrarian conflict and its impacts firsthand. She is all too familiar with the fear, the uncertainty, the grief after seeing her compañeras and compañeros die. After a year of active participation, she was given the opportunity to lead the organization. This was a period of many obstacles and challenges, particularly because she had to come to face with her compañeros' machismo.

Amanda was invited to participate in a training program about human rights by an NGO. Since the topic is close to her heart because of her lived experience, she absorbed this knowledge and began to demand women's rights be respected both within the organization, the community, and the family domain.

Amanda undertook the task of documenting and recording many cases of sexual assault against girls. The legal process advanced and the arrest warrants were served. In a context of long-standing abuses, Amanda took on the challenge of involving more rural women and implementing training programs centered on rights so they could claim them.

The progress made by Amanda was perceived by organization leaders as "a betrayal." According to them, "we sent her on those trainings so she would bear fruit within the organization, not so she became a knife [that endangered] the organization." After threatening and harassing her, they finally decided to expel her.

Amanda refuses to capitulate. She firmly believes that "a human rights defender cannot be a light out on the street and darkness back in their house." That means human rights must be defended in all domains, starting at home and within the organizations.

The violence that is exercised against women within their organizations ranges from humiliations, mockery, coercion, false accusations, surveillance, badgering, sexual harassment (directed at them or other women in the community), threats of rape or death, and femicide. The targets often are those that refuse to participate in and speak out against their organizations' financial mismanagement and illegal actions. This pernicious environment provoked by the actions of their male colleagues is the result of the men's ambition to continue to wield power for their benefit at all costs.

The consequences for women defenders and their families are very serious: they lose their peace of mind, and some begin to think about emigrating, but they have nowhere to go. The impacts to their mental and emotional health are severe. Many report feeling as if they're drowning, suffocated, and trapped; they experience high levels of anxiety, depression, and constant fear. According to one of them, "the pressure, the nerves, the allergies, the despair, the crying, the bone pain are a torment. I feel it too. There are moments when I remember what I've been through, and then I can't stand up. And then I'm filled with anger and rage. Sometimes I can't even understand myself, and then I think, 'My God, why do I feel like this?"[117]

[116] Interview C6
[117] Interview C4

While participating in protests and demonstrations to reclaim their lands, women are at risk suffering bodily harm. Bruises and burns are par for the course, and so are respiratory issues, blurred vision, nausea, and skin irritation, among others, due to tear gas inhalation. Women activists reveal that they often march in the vanguard because "when [...] they send an eviction order, it is women—pregnant women, women with their children in arms—and children who are up front. If we do that, then the police are likely to show some restraint. So, we're up front when we're reclaiming our lands. But when they come to evict us, and we're on our lands, women are the last thing [police officers] notice. Truly, the situation here is desperate."[118]

The emptying of the territories

Women have identified various mechanisms implemented by companies in Bajo Aguán to force the population—especially the youth—to emigrate as part of a strategy known as the "emptying" the territory.

Given the systematic deprivation of local employment opportunities and the increase in poverty, violence, and insecurity experienced by the youth especially, migration is often perceived a promising alternative. Moreover, men and women experience migration in different ways, and the experience is further influenced by other factors, such as the number of children in the family, the size of the plots they own, among others.

Four decades ago, Bajo Aguán welcomed incoming migrants because of the ongoing agrarian colonization. Presently, as a result of precarity, violence, and drug trafficking, which are linked to the imposition of agricultural extractivism and other socio-environmental conflicts of various kinds, the region is in a state of social upheaval that has driven an alarming number of people to flee: "The youth's only focus is to find someone who can help them emigrate; their dream is to move to the United States. We are extremely concerned. Last year, enrollment in secondary education centers collapsed because there weren't enough young people."[119]

Migration in Honduras is the result of social inequality, corruption, the country's failure in governance, and the escalating violence perpetrated by organized crime. Many of the assassinations carried out by the hitmen hired by these organizations are connected to the land conflict; peasants, private security guards, police officers, and soldiers have lost their lives.

The massive exodus of young people is leaving a great void whose effects go beyond the economy. Generational renewal in peasant organizations and movements has been severely affected. Without the belligerence of the new generations, large agricultural exporters will uphold their hegemony while hoarding and dispossessing the territories.

[118] Interview C5
[119] Interview C1

The reality of migration in the voices of women

"Diverse actors have worked to center the issue of migration, and women in particular are pushing for solutions. The problem isn't really migration; it's poverty and the corruption that trickles down from government that is expelling [people from their homes]. We're worried because we believe this is deliberate, and the goal is to empty the territories. The end result is the massive displacement young people, and their absence has created a vacuum and weakened the region as far as our struggles are concerned. If our young emigrate, then where will the strength to fight for the territories come from? Their absence reaffirms these large companies' hegemony, and it allows them to continue their hoarding of an ever-increasing amount of land and resources."[120]

The struggles of the women of Bajo Aguán and their proposals

Despite the historical violence and the culture of abuse—manifested in acts of intimidation, persecution, sexual assault, and other misogynistic acts—that has taken root in the social movements, the women of Bajo Aguán are steadfast in their resistance and their commitment to a free territory where they, and everybody else, can feel safe and think of new ideas to be able to live a dignified life. Below, we will highlight some of the most relevant aspects of these struggles.

We want equality, acknowledgement, and respect[121]

"We demand to be respected. We demand equality and the recognition of organized women within and outside of the settlements. Some of the settlements don't want to acknowledge the organizing work carried out by our compañeras, even if it's as part of the very same organizations. We also want to transform the kind of labor we do [...]. We fight as hard as we do because we want a plot of land where we can produce."

Actions to achieve food security and sovereignty

As in the previous case studies, in Bajo Aguán women have made invaluable contributions to food security and sovereignty in their communities. They have guaranteed food on the table for their families; they have prepared the food itself; and they have transmitted traditions and knowledge that are vital to the continuance of life in the territories. Moreover, they have done awareness work with the men so that they understand that allocating all the land to monocultures not only increases environmental impacts but also puts their families at risk. This has not been an easy task.

From the beginning, women have participated in the processes to reclaim their lands from companies that use them exclusively to cultivate oil palm. These reclaimed lands have been used by some peasant groups to resume production of basic grains and other staple crops: "We're currently harvesting somewhere between 400 and 500 loads of corn, and we also grow beans, cassava, and plantains. Look, when we recovered our lands, there was only oil palm, but now we're producing a wide variety of foods. We own this food, and it's feeding us. Before it was difficult to run a milpa on these lands, but now we have the space."[122]

[120] Interview C7
[121] Interview C6
[122] Interview C8

Women have also promoted the construction and establishment of consumer stores as a strategy to feed their families and foster community solidarity. The stores' objective is to supply families in the cooperatives' settlements with groceries and basic grains. Based on their families' weekly needs, members get their provisions at the store. When it's time to pay, the store deduces the amount owed from their wages from the monoculture plantations and give them the remaining balance. The store is restocked weekly. Concerning the stores, an interviewee told us: "We're struggling to build the consumer store. Our contribution as women is making adobe bricks, the two of us, to build it and achieve our goal. We're keenly aware of the current situation, of the pandemic and the lack of financial resources, so we're trying to think of ways to make money."[123]

Advocacy and Training

The women defenders of Bajo Aguán have promoted **meetings, alliances, and synergies with women defenders** from other territories given the overlap in their struggles and the causes they support: "We started this when Berta Cáceres was still alive. We gathered at the demonstrations in Tegucigalpa, when we protested in front of Congress. Ever since, we have come together and fought side by side demanding justice. Ever since the 2011, when we marched to Tegucigalpa. We began making connections and participating in various events in other territories."[124]

We would also like to bring attention to the success that the **Training School for Citizenship and Politics**, an initiative of the Reflection, Research, and Communication Team, has had with the youth of Bajo Aguán. The school sends students on a journey of self-discovery to deconstruct the sexist patterns that are ubiquitous in a patriarchal society such as Honduras, and they learn about gender relations and new masculinities. Students have also learned to perceive the State's shortcomings and to recognize the need to rethink the public sphere as a space for demanding their rights. The training is made up of seven modules that address topics such as democracy and human rights, development models and natural assets, gender and new masculinities, interculturality, faith and politics, and the psychosocial aspect of the conflict. Graduates participate in agroecology projects, social works, solid waste management, among other actions in service of the community.

This training school emerged in response to the environmental devastation and precarity that accompany the agricultural export model. For this reason, it is committed to **agroecology**, which gives the community the chance to engage in political advocacy and social transformation: "We are interdependent links in a chain that was not made to feed itself. Instead, it uses vast swaths of the territory to grow oil palm [...]. [This chain] behaves in accordance the exploitation model that the country's main schools teach agronomists. They don't train social leaders to work the land with the goal of feeding the population."[125]

[123] Interview C2
[124] Interview C3
[125] Interview C16

CONCLUSIONS

1. The stories and reflections presented in this study allow us to conclude that. The three territories studied—Santo Domingo Suchitepéquez, in Guatemala, and Marcovia and Bajo Aguán in Honduras—show very similar patterns and evidence the dynamics and impacts of agricultural extractivism in central America. Among the patterns that emerged during our research we find: companies allying themselves with financial, political, and military power structures to control the territories; governments tailoring mechanisms, laws, and incentives to favor the expansion of monocultures; and the same extractive companies hoarding lands in various countries in the region.

2. The agribusiness model and monocultures are not new; this is as true in the case studies we examined, as it is in the rest of the Central American region. The longer they remain tied to the territories, the more intense their effects on the deterioration of the population's living conditions and the loss of spaces of autonomy for women will be.

3. Women are bearing the brunt of the havoc wreaked by agricultural extractivism. These gendered impacts include an increase in care work, the loss of livelihoods, the exacerbation of all forms of violence and discrimination by the State, companies, and even their own organizations, which stigmatize women for their work in defense of life and the territories.

4. Women have identified a strategy to empty the territories, whereby the private sector, in collusion with state actors, deploys mechanisms of violence and precarity. Communities face an increasing state of militarization, criminalization, and repression combined with the loss of livelihoods. Companies hoard their lands, pollute their water sources, and lay off workers thereby increasing unemployment and exacerbating poverty. These conditions force peasant families, especially their young, to seek opportunities elsewhere, leaving the territories more vulnerable to extractivism.

5. As it happens in the case studies we discussed, and in many other places in Latin America and the world, women lead resistance efforts against oppressive structures and the construction of alternative solutions to the issues that affect them. However, the increase in violence against women defenders has sowed fear among the population, undercutting the fight to safeguard the territories. This was clearly reflected in Marcovia, where women would not speak out against human rights violations or make any demands of the State in that regard. Some even feared reprisals for participating in this study. It was also evident in Bajo Aguán, where women leaders have been attacked by their colleagues and expelled for denouncing sexual violence within peasant organizations and movements.

6. As part of their struggle strategy, women have promoted the construction of alliances between various social movements, and they have promoted awareness-raising, public denunciations, and advocacy work to enlist governments and non-governmental organizations in their fight against the systemic violation of human rights and impress upon them the need to support their entrepreneurial ventures and alternative proposals.

7. In addition to carrying out actions within the formal political sphere, women continue to resist oppressive structures and promote land repossession. Likewise, they are working to reinstate and strengthen agroecological and ancestral peasant production practices geared toward the protection of natural assets and communities' food sovereignty. Women continue to resist inequality and historical violence while transforming their families, communities, and movements.

URGENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INVOLVED ACTORS

Taking into account the seriousness of the problems faced by women, the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action puts forth the following recommendations, which are addressed to the States of the Central American region, the companies and investors that promote monocultures, the philanthropic and donor community, international financial institutions, and bilateral and multilateral financing organizations that fund projects related to the environment, climate change, and women's rights in Central America.

1. For the States

As regards the affected communities and territories

- Refrain from promoting the expansion of the extractive frontier until monoculture companies provide guarantees that safeguard human rights, until crimes against the environment and the population are investigated and penalized, and until those affected receive reparations. This means no incentives, decrees, or other legislative measures that benefit agribusiness.
- Suspend alliances with organized crime; immediately demilitarize the territories; and support the development of effective, non-violent measures to protect the population affected by industrial monocultures by eradicating inequality in terms of land access and use.
- Refrain from getting involved in new projects and suspend current projects or other bilateral or multilateral financing mechanisms that finance or promote agro-industrial monocultures that violate human rights and fail to comply with international standards in terms of environmental protection.
- Recognize their responsibility, by action or omission and in collusion with private actors, in the dispossession and violence perpetrated against the peasant, indigenous, Afro-descendant, and Garifuna population; establish reparation measures, which must include the restoration of lands to those who have been stripped of them in the past, ensuring that women have equal access to land ownership.
- Guarantee fundamental rights, such as the right to land, water, sanitation, a healthy environment, food, education, and healthcare, for the communities affected by monocultures, taking into account the specific needs and challenges faced by women, girls, trans, and non-binary people. This would foster the right conditions for the communities to stay in the territories.
- Design detailed policies to guarantee the right to education—including sexual education—and healthcare as well as the sexual and (non-)reproductive rights of women, girls, adolescents, trans, intersex and non-binary people. In addition, develop detailed policies to allow elderly women to enjoy their old age with dignity, taking into account the alarming numbers of teenage pregnancies and the care burdens that fall on women, girls, adolescents, and elderly women in these territories.

- Build and strengthen public policies that protect environmental assets. These policies must respect and integrate the development models, worldviews, and ways of life of the communities, and they should adopt a gender and intersectional approach. They likewise must guarantee equity and historical reparations for women, who have been denied the right to own land and the autonomy to make decisions about its use. To that end, these policies must promote spaces for dialogue and co-construction by leaders, defenders, organizations, and the communities directly affected by monocultures, while ensuring the effective participation of women.
- Guarantee the equal participation of women in spaces for dialogue with peasant organizations and movements; establish ancillary mechanisms and dialogue spaces to address the specific demands of women workers, leaders, and human rights defenders that live in areas affected by monocultures.
- Design environmental policies to implement energy transition by executing real solutions to the environmental and climate crisis in the region and the world; exclude false solutions such as monocultures.

As regards companies and investors in agro-industrial monocultures

- Create, implement, and/or update laws and control mechanisms and urgent measures so that companies immediately cease aerial fumigation, crop burning, and pollution of water sources and soils since this violates the rights of the population and generates irreversible environmental damage.
- Investigate, penalize, and sentence companies that commit environmental crimes and human rights violations; force them to make timely and comprehensive reparations to communities and ecosystems.
- Ratify the International Labor Organization's Convention 190 on violence and harassment at the workplace; create effective mechanisms to monitor monoculture companies' compliance with labor rights and investigate and sanction those who engage in exploitation, harassment, and endangerment of workers' health and/or life.
- Require companies to create and monitor inclusive and non-discriminatory policies and mechanisms to guarantee the rights of women, trans, intersex, and non-binary people in order to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against them, inside and outside of their facilities.

As regards women defenders, community leaders, and their organizations

- Put a stop to all violations of the rights of defenders, especially women, trans, intersex, and non-binary people at the hands of state agents, including police officers, soldiers, and public officials, which would end criminalization, stigmatization, physical, psychological, and sexual violence immediately.
- Guarantee access to justice and put an end to impunity for crimes against defenders, ensuring prompt, transparent, and timely investigations as well as guarantees of non-repetition.

- In order to guarantee the above recommendations, it is essential to implement urgent measures to eliminate institutional racism and eradicate the misogynist and racist prejudices and stereotypes that influence justice and other state officials.
- Strengthen protection mechanisms for defenders in all Central American countries, and create them where they do not exist, as in the case of Guatemala,[126] ensuring that these are effective and comprehensive, that they have a gender and intersectional approach, and that they do not re-victimize or endanger women. It is essential to strengthen institutional articulation so these mechanisms are more effective. To that end, it is also of vital importance that all the countries in the region ratify the Escazú Agreement.
- Strengthen community initiatives and guarantee financing for their economic ventures, supporting particularly those led by women and respecting organizations' autonomy.
- Finance and strengthen by means of other tools community agroecological projects, family gardens, and other initiatives led by women that contribute to food sovereignty and the improvement of the communities' living conditions.
- Strengthen mechanisms, laws, institutions, and protocols with sufficient equipment, training programs, awareness raising, and tools to guide and address cases of violence against women and LGBTQI+ people in communities affected by monocultures, ensuring access to justice, psychosocial counseling, and financial support.

2. For monoculture companies and their investors

- Acknowledge and immediately suspend all human rights violations and the dispossession that have been carried out against the communities. This includes is not limited to direct attacks on communities; it includes crop dusting, agricultural burning, and polluting and hoarding water sources and lands.
- Comply quickly and transparently with all the measures imposed by international mechanisms and by national authorities to repair the environmental, economic, and psychosocial damage caused to the communities, in their own terms; to that end, they must facilitate listening and dialogue mechanisms without exercising any kind of retaliation. This includes the restoration of all public, collective, and small farmers' lands that were obtained through fraudulent or violent means.
- Respond socially and legally for these damages and for the crimes against human rights defenders who have stepped up to protect women's and communities' rights.
- If they remain in the territory or continue to finance projects, they must ensure compliance with international standards on environmental law, the rights of peasants, indigenous peoples, and Afro-descendants.[127]
- Ensure respect for the labor rights of all the people who work on their plantations, abiding by international standards on this issue. They must provide comprehensive reparations and compensation for any damage to their physical, mental, and emotional health.

[126] GUATEMALA: "Six Years of Inaction to support the Protection of Human Rights Defenders" (fidh.org)
[127] Monoculture companies and their investors must take into account agreed principles and criteria for sustainable production and the sourcing of agricultural commodities adopted by global certification schemes such as RSPO (Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil), BonSucro, and International Corporate Social Responsibility.

- Guarantee respect for private, collective, and communal property rights. This means respecting the right to free, prior, and informed consultation and reviewing land rental mechanisms so they abide by those rights. In this manner, communities and land owners will never lose autonomy over the use of their land.
- Urgently create and implement effective mechanisms to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women, trans, intersex, and non-binary people, both in their facilities and in community spaces where their workers (including managers and security guards) are present. They must guarantee that women have dignified working conditions and safe spaces in their facilities, which implies the creation of strict protocols to stop all forms of violence, including sexual violence, exercised within the workplace. These protocols must be designed from their point of view and address their needs.
- Acknowledge and respect community, social, and women's organizations, as well as women defenders and leaders, as key actors that watch over the rights and well-being of the communities.

3. For the philanthropic community and donors

- Increase the quantity and quality of support available to women's, trans, intersex, and non-binary organizations as well as feminist, community, peasant, Afro-descendant, Garifuna, and indigenous organizations that resist agricultural extractivism in Central America. Support must be flexible and long-term, and it must contribute to the sustainability of their actions and organizational structures. This support can be used for advocacy, communications campaigns, support for agroecological and reforestation alternatives, sustainable economic ventures led by women, training processes, strengthening alliances, and exchanges between organizations.
- Increase and promote flexible, comprehensive, and long-term funding to implement protection, security, and care strategies and practices for women defenders, leaders, and their organizations, which will contribute to their comprehensive strengthening. These resources will also allow them to bolster their security in the territories and ameliorate the emotional and physical effects of the attacks they endure as part of their work and the structural violence they face. Financial support can be complemented by making technical resources available to organizations, including supporting them in conducting risk assessments, designing protocols and protection strategies, and carrying out individual and collective protective actions for women defenders at risk, etc.
- Strengthen mechanisms and offer support that take into account the structures, dynamics, and limitations of the organizations in the territories, ensuring that women's participation is not instrumentalized, that resources and opportunities actually reach them, and that the projects developed do not increase endanger women leaders and the organizations.
- Continue and strengthen their support for regional and international environmental and feminist organizations, funds, and alliances that directly support and accompany grassroots organizations.

- Review, update, and comply with their financing and safeguard policies and principles to ensure they do not receive resources from companies and investors that profit from extractivism, and that in turn their donations are not granted to organizations that in any way promote monocultures. These policies must include an intersectional gender, feminist, and intersectional approach that integrates environmental justice and allocates resources to grassroots organizations and not just large or medium ones.

- Promote and articulate public denunciations, mobilization, and international solidarity, working in alignment with the affected communities. This includes exerting pressure on companies or investors and influencing their countries' embassies so they put a stop to human rights violations and cease funding companies that carry out crimes against nature and communities.

- Contribute to the visibility of the women's lived experience, actions, and demands via their platforms, campaigns on social media, meetings, forums, and other spaces. In addition, they can support, with financial and technical resources, research initiatives and the collective construction of knowledge to aid organizations in their advocacy efforts in connection to these companies' networks, socio-environmental impacts, and the search for energy and food alternatives to reduce the use and consumption of products derived from monocultures worldwide.

- Strengthen their theories of change, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, approaches, and funding programs so they (a) have a gender and feminist perspective, (b) integrate women's rights and environmental and climate justice, and (c) respond to the realities and demands of the organizations on the ground that work on these issues.

- Create and strengthen spaces for listening and receiving feedback with women's, feminist, environmental, and community organizations to collectively build advocacy strategies and other key actions. In addition, they can increase financial and technical support to broaden the participation of women and their organizations in international advocacy spaces, which are often inaccessible to those who are fighting in the territories.

- Work in alliance with and in support of international bodies and mechanisms for the defense of human rights to contribute to the work of women defenders and leaders.

- Transform their organizations and institutions' practices and internal mechanisms that increase women defenders', leaders', and their organizations' workloads or that cause stress and other emotional effects.

4. For bilateral and multilateral financing organizations and international financial institutions

- Guarantee transparency in the execution of their projects and their monitoring and accountability mechanisms, ensuring they are accessible, clear, and effective for organizations, communities, and defenders.

- Immediately suspend current financing to organizations, foundations, and companies that sow, promote, or protect large-scale industrial monocultures, which violate human rights and harm the environment and biodiversity.

- With the effective participation of women, civil society organizations, and communities, implement processes to periodically evaluate their funding and accountability mechanisms as well as their policies; publish the results.
- Increase in quantity and quality the donations and projects that they carry out with community and women's organizations, ensuring that the money effectively reaches grassroots organizations and does not remain only in large and intermediate organizations.
- Ensure compliance with their gender policies and the incorporation of a gender, feminist, and intersectional approach in connection to the programs and funds they implement or can influence in order to guarantee that a significant percentage of the funds reach women's organizations and women land defenders
- Implement consultation processes before, during, and after the execution of projects in compliance with the needs and desires of the communities that would be affected by said projects, while ensuring the effective participation of women. The communities must be previously informed about the projects, and they must approve them; otherwise, they must refrain from executing or financing any project.

From the GAGGA alliance, in coordination with the women's, feminist, and environmental organizations that continue to fight for life, territory, and the commons in Central America, we call on all the actors involved to commit to mobilizing support and accompaniment to the communities that work for justice and the construction of truly sustainable economic, energy, and food models that respect life.

INITIALS

ACHSA	Azucarera Choluteca Public Limited Company
ACENSA	Azucarera Central Limited Company
ACEYDESA	Oils and Derivatives Public Limited Company
ACISON	Sonaguera Citrus Growers Association
APAH	Association of Sugarcane Producers
WB	Banco Mundial
CACIF	Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Financial Associations
CBI	Consensus Building Institute
IFC	International Finance Corporation
CICIG	International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala
IACHR	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
CIM	Inter-American Commission of Women
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consultation
CMI	Multi Investment Corporation
COAPALMA	African Palm Agro-industrial Cooperative
COCOCH	Coordinating Council of Peasant Organizations of Honduras
CODDEFAGOLF	Committee for the Defense and Development of the Flora and Fauna of the Gulf of Fonseca
COFRUTCO	Colon Fruit Company
CONPAH	Confederation of Autochthonous Peoples of Honduras
CONADI	National Investment Corporation
COVID- 19	Pandemic derived from the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2-Coronavirus virus
COSIBAH	Coordinator of Banana and Agroindustry Unions of Honduras
CAFTA	Free Trade Agreement between Central America and the United States of America
EAC	Peasant Associative Company
ECARA	Agro-industrial Cooperative Company for Agrarian Reform
ERIC	Reflection, Research and Communication Team
EXCOSUR	South Coast Exporter
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FESTAGRO	Federation of Trade Unions of Agribusiness Workers
FENAPALMAH	National Federation of African Palm Associations of Honduras
FSAR	San Alonso Rodríguez Foundation
FONAC	National Convergence Forum
GREPALMA	Palm Growers Guild of Guatemala
HACCP	Hazard Analysis and Control Points
ICF	INational Institute for Forest Conservation and Development, Protected Areas and Wildlife
IFC	International Finance Corporation
INA	National Agrarian Institute
INAB	National Forest Institute
INE	National Statistics Institute
CRF	Chronic renal failure
ISCC	International Sustainability Carbon Certification
IUDPAS	University Institute for Democracy, Peace and Security
LGBT*IQAP+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, asexual, pansexual people, among other gender identities and sexual orientations dissident from the sex/gender system.
LMDSA	Law for the Modernization and Development of the Agricultural Sector
DEM LAW	Women's Economic Development Act

MAGA	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food
MARN	Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources
BRAND	Authentic Movement to Claim the Peasant of Aguán
MRGC	Gregorio Chávez Refoundation Movement
MSPAS	Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance
MOCRA	Peasant Movement Recovery of Aguán
MUCA	Unified Peasant Movement of Aguán
OAS	Organization of American States
ODECO	Community Ethnic Development Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OPDHA	Permanent Observatory of Human Rights of Aguán
CSO	Civil society organization
PALMASA	Palmeros del Aguán Public Limited Company
PBA	Bajo Aguán Project
PCM	President in Council of Ministers
RAMSAR	Convention Relating to Wetlands of International Importance
REPSA	Reforestadora de Palmas del Petén, S.A
RSPO	Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil
RECMURIC	Central American Network of Rural Indigenous and Peasant Women
SAG	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock
SAT	Superintendence of Tax Administration
SIC	Ministry of Industry and Commerce
SINIT	National Territorial Information System
SURAGROH	Agricultural South of Honduras
UFCO	United Fruit Company
UEDESAMAR	Union of Companies of the Social Sector of the Environmental Economy of Marcovia
UNAH	National Autonomous University of Honduras
UMA	Municipal Environmental Unit
ZEDE	Employment and Economic Development Zone