

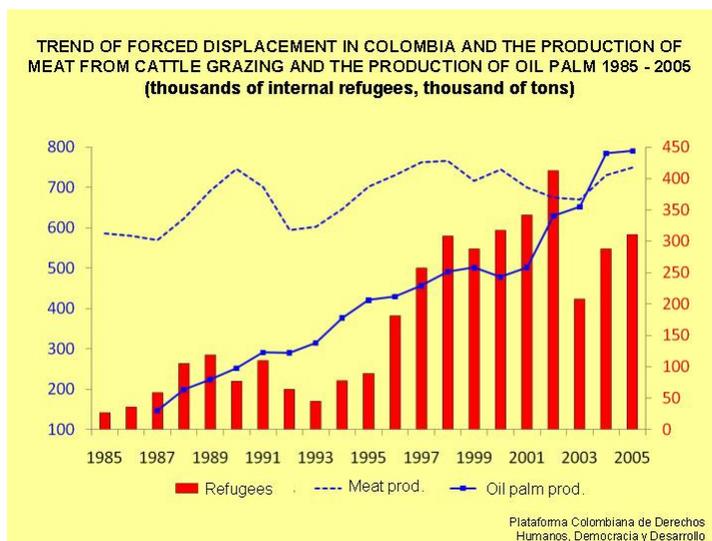
GenderCC Conference at COP14 in Poznan - Women for Climate Justice Briefing Paper on COLOMBIA

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1) Brief description of the situation regarding gender and climate change in Colombia

Colombia at Grave Risk from Climate Change, Violent Conflict and Marginalisation:

- Colombia is recognised for its **immense cultural and bio-diversity**, from a perspective of ecosystems, agro-climates, cultural heritage and ethnic groups. However, to date 40% of the natural ecosystems have undergone grave deterioration, and according to the national institute of environmental studies - IDEAM, in the year 2000, 25% of the town municipalities presented an index of water stress, and that by 2015 it is estimated that this will rise to 55%, affecting principally the Colombian Andes region inhabited by 80% of the national population.¹
- In terms of **climate change**, it is estimated that by 2050, the country will suffer a rise in average temperatures of 1-2 °C and a corresponding 40-60 cm increase in sea levels, disappearance of 78% of glaciers and 56% of cloud-forests, and increasing epidemics and disease affecting 8 million vulnerable population.² In recent years, many communities have had to affront the brutal impacts of flooding, land-slides and desertification, distressing local peoples' food production, fisheries and livelihoods.
- National climate change policy** has been conceived in economic terms, while social equality and environmental sustainability issues are to a great extent overlooked. Strategies have principally concentrated on Clean Development Mechanism's - CDM (25 pilot projects), with Memoranda of Understanding signed with countries like France, Japan, Canada, Spain and the Netherlands.³
- Governmental policies to cultivate **sugarcane and oil palm for agrofuels** has resulted in an alarming increase in mono-cropping production: for example in the period 2000 - 2007, the area planted in oil palm in Colombia expanded from 150,000 to 316,000 hect., with a "potential" total area for plantations of 3.5 million hectares.⁴
- In Colombia, over the past 15 years, close to 4 million people have been displaced from their lands due to **violence and internal conflict**; urbanization and "economic" rural displacement have also contributed to this



¹ Estudio Nacional del Agua, Instituto de Hidrología, Meteorología y Estudios Ambientales - IDEAM, Ministerio del Medio Ambiente, 2000.

² Ministerio de Ambiente, Vivienda y Desarrollo Territorial - República de Colombia, Grupo de Mitigación de Cambio Climático, <http://www.minambiente.gov.co/>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Source of data - Fedepalma (2008), web-page: <http://www.fedepalma.org/>

stark reality. Human Rights organizations indicate that nearly 7 million hectares of land have been illegally appropriated by force and dispossession (see graph)⁵. Local communities have denounced the direct linkage between forced migration, paramilitary groups and palm oil production in their traditional territories.⁶

Important Issues related to Gender and Climate Change in Colombia:

- The impacts of climate change threaten **food sovereignty and livelihoods of women** who depend on natural-based local economies (fisher folk, peasants, afro-descendents, indigenous women).⁷ Increase in food prices and basic commodities have negative repercussions in particular for vulnerable groups and female-headed households⁸, which are exposed to chronic and transitory malnutrition.
- The affects of desertification have resulted in the depletion of **water resources and soil fertility**, meaning that women need to bear the burden of finding (if they can) clean water and food supplies.
- **Regional and national inequality** in terms of per capita income, land rights, access to education, etc. all put women in an unfavourable position. The most recent calculations of the United Nations (2007 - 2008)⁹ gives Colombia a Gini coefficient¹⁰ of 0.59, which puts us amongst the eight countries with the worst distribution of wealth in the world. Climate change is predicated to accentuate the gaps between the rich and poor, and women are among the poorest and most disadvantaged.
- **Militarism and political conflict** intensify women's vulnerabilities to climate change. Male migration has been a direct result of both armed conflict, as well as the introduction of extractive industries; thus many women and single mothers have had to fend for themselves and their families alone.
- Transnational corporations and governments shape unsustainable production and consumption patterns (plantations, mining, agri-business, agrofuels). Many **struggles led by women** to demand social justice and oppose these policies are being repressed and criminalized by governments.
- **Displacement of families** due to violence and climate catastrophe undermine the position of women and their control over lands and households, while many do not even hold official titles or

⁵ Graph produced by the Plataforma Colombiana de Derechos Humanos, Democracia y Desarrollo.

⁶ For more information on case studies, please refer to the following reports: "Agrocombustibles : Llenando tanques, vaciando territorios", Proceso de Comunidades Negras en Colombia - PCN y Censat Agua Viva, Bogotá, 2008. / "Los agrocombustibles : Receta para un desastre ambiental y el hambre en el Sur", Revista Semillas, No. 34/35, Bogotá, dic 2007.

⁷ "El derecho a la Alimentación en Colombia : situación, contextos y vacíos", Plataforma Colombiana de Derechos Humanos, Observatorio de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional, Fundaexpresión y Comisión Interfranciscana, Bogotá, dic 2007.

⁸ According to governmental surveys (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar - ICBF), 25% of the female population who are economically active in Colombia relate to female-headed households, due to reasons of being made a widow, separation, abandonment, violence, physical or labour incapacity of their spouse.

⁹ Informe de Desarrollo Humano 2007 - 2008, Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo - PNUD.

¹⁰ The Gini coefficient is used as a measure of inequality of income distribution or inequality of wealth distribution, defined as a ratio with values between 0 and 1. A low Gini coefficient indicates more equal income or wealth distribution, while a high Gini coefficient indicates more unequal distribution.

deeds. Moreover, women and children refugees are more exposed to poor diet, anaemia, diarrhoea and respiratory diseases, and have to contend with unhygienic and unsanitary conditions.

- **Agrofuel production** such as oil-palm and sugarcane, increase the marginalisation of women, threatening their resource base, food autonomy and livelihoods. Monocrop plantations and agribusiness convey increased land requirements that put pressure on “marginal” lands, which are farmed by the rural poor and frequently by women peasants. In general, the replacement of agrobiodiverse systems by monocultures is a major cause of impoverishment of rural women.¹¹
- It is important to look at the dimensions of **consumer desires** as they influence the use of energy and natural resources. Advertising in Colombia is highly gendered and notions of masculinity and femininity are strategically deployed to sustain a wasteful and consumer orientated society.

Demonstrative Community Experiences on Climate Change in Colombia

Women Struggle against the Impacts of Desertification - Lebrija	Women Fisher-folk and Families Defend the Bajo Sinú Territory
<p>A pilot scheme¹² on women’s water management is being developed in the Angula-Lajas catchment of the municipality of Lebrija (Santander), a vital ecosystem to sustain the livelihoods of 8,000 rural inhabitants. The region has suffered immensely from water scarcity and desertification due to changing precipitation patterns, mono-cropping and large-scale agribusiness. The Women’s Peasant Association - AMMUCALE, with >400 affiliated women in 13 rural localities, have demonstrated the benefits of adopting rain-water harvesting techniques and diverse sustainable agricultural practices. This has been a key factor to raising the social status of women, as well as a novel method to foster traditional knowledge recovery and create complementary economic initiatives. At an institutional level, alternative water policy issues are being validated and discussed with municipal government, universities and regional authorities.</p>	<p>The Bajo Sinú river catchment (Córdoba) is inhabited by indigenous Embera-Katio and fisher-folk / peasant families. However, in 1999 this region was affected by the construction of the Urra I hydroelectric dam (1,400 million cubic metres). This caused irreversible impacts to tropical forest and mangrove ecosystems, disruption of traditional fishing economies and an increase in the regional armed conflict. Moreover, in the last two years, the local communities have suffered the intensification of flooding catastrophes, with more than 20,000 families made refugees and 5,000 hect. of food crops destroyed.¹³ The association ASPROCIG, with 105 community-based organizations, has shown leadership and determination to demonstrate economic and social alternatives and defend their collective territory based on the principles of agroecology and social justice; women play an essential role in this community organization and the resistance process.</p>



¹¹ Declaration : “Encuentro Nacional Crisis Alimentaria en Colombia”, Bogotá - Colombia, (4 - 6 Sept. 2008), which was approved by 157 peasant, indigenous, afro-descendent, environmentalist and social organizations from Colombia and Latin América.

¹² For more information the following educational journal is available for distribution: “Cosechando Agua y Alimentos : Una Apuesta Común por Defender la Vida”, Fundaexpresión - Ammucale, Floridablanca (Santander), Noviembre 2008.

¹³ S.O.S. Rio Sinú, information bulletin from ASPROCIG - Colombia, Julio 2007 and October 2008.

2) The main challenges of mainstreaming gender into climate change policy in Colombia

- The multitude and resolve of **women organizations in Colombia** show that they are key actors and catalysts for change. Based on kinship and village alignments, women also have powerful community-based networks. Hence, a main challenge is to enhance the participation of women's movements in policy and decision making, with a goal to contribute to a broader vision of climate justice and develop more sustainable solutions. This requires training and media resources for capacity building and wide-scale awareness raising.
- Climate change analysis and programmes have focused on scientific and technical approaches to the identification of hazards and so-called mitigation strategies. However, the potential impacts of climate change in terms of **socio-economic vulnerability** and adaptation of women has been concealed. There are very few case-studies and gender-disaggregated data relevant to climate change impacts.
- Male public officials and experts dominate the policy-making scenarios at regional and national levels, with little attention given to the **knowledge and expertise of women**. Fundamentally what is needed is enabling environments for women's participation that facilitate genuine forms of cooperation and generate political will, with far more ambitious and outreaching plans.
- Another key challenge is to ensure women's participation within National and Regional mitigation and adaptation plans, taking on board strategies that uphold collective human rights of people and the defence of cultural and natural patrimony. A joint **agenda on women's issues and climate change** needs urgently to be developed and necessarily should include the issues of agrarian reform, access to appropriate technologies, sustainable economies, food sovereignty, social justice and peace, as an integral part of long-term public policies and broader societal objectives.
- Women have long understood the generosity of ecosystems to sustain their livelihoods. However, climate policy-makers are trying to impose the concept of **market-based solutions** and ecological services linked to forests and ecosystems. These policies pose serious pitfalls for women, as they accentuate the privatisation, inequitable distribution and commodification of natural patrimony.

3) The work of FUNDAEXPRESIÓN¹⁴ and its relation to gender and climate change.

- For 7 years we have been consolidating a **Campesino School of Agroecology**, bringing together within a community-based solidarity network more than 50 peasant and women's associations from 8 municipalities of Santander. Women have gained communication skills, political standing and self-confidence, and contribute to building a dynamic and unified process. Moreover, they have put into practice the techniques and concepts of **agroecology and food sovereignty**, which can be seen as solutions to the climate crisis, since they favour ecosystem conservation and locally-based production and consumption cycles.
- By promoting **community-based forest conservation** in the Soto Province (Santander), we seek to safeguard the vitality and diversity of ecosystems, while at the same time enhancing traditional technologies such as rain-harvesting and soil conservation. Women have reaffirmed their identity, experiences and life-projects, and are one of the most committed actors in protecting the local climate.
- We have collectively acknowledged that femininity is intrinsically linked to nature, to the origins and to mystery of biodiversity. We have endeavoured to make visible the role of women as

¹⁴ FUNDAEXPRESIÓN is a Colombian non-profit organisation founded in 1999 to promote participatory educational and investigation work within local communities. Our aims are to empower marginalized groups of society towards achieving improved living conditions, social organisation and conservation of their cultural and natural heritage. Web-page: www.fundaexpresion.org

guardians of traditional knowledge and oral tradition, which include strategies such as the recovery and conservation of food crops, native seed-banks, medicinal plants and traditional breeds of livestock.

- Through national campaign work and **community-to-community exchanges** we have actively promoted the need for self-determination and dialogue between women stakeholders from a range of backgrounds: indigenous, afro-descendent, fisher-folk, communitarian mothers and peasant women.
- By means of **alternative media resources** (radio, magazines, video, wall-paintings), we reassert the role of women in these grass-root movements. As evidence of climate change becomes ever more compelling, the debates over its causes and solutions will intensify. Women's voices must get heard!
- Over the last two years, we have been actively involved in the regional and national coordination of a campaign to promote a **national referendum** to proclaim **water as a fundamental right** in the constitution of Colombia. Women's organizations were key in the achievement of 2 million supporting signatures, which permitted the civil-society initiative to be registered in the Colombian Congress in October 2008. One of the main points of the referendum is the assured protection and conservation of **ecosystems essential** to water and climate stability.

<p>Claudia Gimena Roa : Is currently the director for FUNDAEXPRESIÓN, an environmentalist and cultural non-profit organization which works together with rural and urban communities in the department of Santander - Colombia. She has been involved in the consolidation of a Campesino School of Agroecology, and has actively promoted dialogue and exchange between many peasant, women, afro-descendent and indigenous groups, as well as networking across Latin America. She studied languages and literature at universities in Colombia and Canada. As a researcher and social activist she seeks to promote literature, alternative media and artistic expression as a means to uphold cultural identity and ecological diversity.</p>
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