

EXTRACTIVISM AND PACHAMAMA DOES NATURE HAVE AN OWNER?

Civil society has been reporting on and condemning the practices of extractive industries and transnational corporations that control the exploitation of natural resources. There is also another element of concern that is underscored when we talk about natural resources: who owns nature? Does nature have an owner?

The extraction, access and control of natural resources¹ has become one of the major issues in new geopolitics and the cause, directly or indirectly, of many national and international conflicts. The United Nations reports that since 1990, at least 18 violent conflicts have been fueled by the exploitation of natural resources, and four out of ten violent inter-state conflicts have been linked to natural resources over the past 60 years².

A central issue is access to and control of the benefits of these resources and the people who suffer the consequences. There is a growing global movement that opposes a certain type of mining by multinational companies. Our position is based on the governance of those resources and those communities. This means that we advocate that the communities and people decide for themselves the type of development they want in their region.

To that end, ALBOAN supports several different processes like La Puya-Guatemala, with the women of Ixcam³ who oppose mining; in Colombia they focus on gold and coal and on 3TG in the DRC.

Mining in the east of the DRC is done by hand in high-risk conditions. The workers have no job protection and are forced to work in unstable tunnels and dark passageways that threaten to collapse.

Nor is there any guarantee that the mine does not employ children (child labour). Likewise, some of the mines are controlled by armed groups, which means that the benefits are not kept in the community, but rather are used to finance a conflict that has left five million deaths, a displaced population and a brutal rate of sexual violence in its wake. Beyond the miners, the mine requires many other people to work as porters and provide auxiliary services. Although most ore porters and extractors are men, many women also work in support positions for the miners, either as porters or as food vendors. Prostitution rates are high in the communities around the mines. Finally, the school dropout rate of boys and girls who leave school to work in the mine is significant. It is important to remember that these mines are often located near camps of people who have been displaced by the conflict and are often the only source of income for these families, so children choose to work in the mine to help the family financially.

ADVOCATING FOR IMPROVEMENTS:

As a result, some mining communities are organising behind artisanal miners' cooperatives to improve safety conditions (for example, by prohibiting pregnant women and minors from entering the mine). The country's new law also seeks to put an end to poor working conditions and the abuse of armed groups that control some of the mines in the eastern part of the country⁴.

The request that the artisanal miners are making is the desire to improve the working conditions of everyone who works in the mines. The organisations that ALBOAN collaborates with in the Congo have reported on the need to establish mechanisms so that artisanal mining remains a source of income and a driver of development in the area, with the benefits from mining impacting local people and communities. Security measures are also required if this is to be possible, in order to prevent armed groups from seizing the mined ore or the revenues it provides. Increased job security in the mines is also an issue for employees, who urge that the mines put an end to forced labour, child labour and the exploitation of pregnant women.

In short, they call for mining to be safe, benefit communities and stop fuelling the conflict that has caused the most deaths since World War II.

¹ Research published in 2012: Does nature have an owner?: www.alboan.org/es/multimedia/publicaciones/articulos/tiene-dueno-la-naturaleza

² United Nations Environment Program - UNEP. 2009. From Conflict to Peacebuilding: the Role of Natural Resources and the Environment.

³ <http://gaurkoemakumeak.wordpress.com/2014/06/04/mujeres-en-resistencia-no-violenta-en-la-puya-guatemala/>

⁴ See the IPIS interactive map : <http://ipisresearch.be/mapping/webmapping/#>

ACTIVITY PROPOSAL

A VISIT TO MINING MUSEUMS

Development: Through the campaign Conflict Free Technology, in ALBOAN we want to connect the local and the global. You maybe know about the mining traditions in your town or city.

- Have you ever wondered how these people work(ed)? What working conditions do (did) they have?
- How was the life of miners? Was it the same for men and women?
- How many hours did they work?
- Which was their salary?
- How did they act together to reclaim their rights?
- Who got the benefits of what they extracted from the mines?

We come up with a proposal to visit some of the mining museums you have around your village, to identify and bring closer the common points and the differences between the miners in your town and DRC.



If the visit is not possible, you can also do research on them.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

-  www.tecnologia Libre de conflicto.org
-  **Environmental science for social change: Science in context:** <https://essc.org.ph/content/view/793/163/>
-  **Does nature have an owner? (document):** <http://www.alboan.org/portal/documentos.asp?id=190>
-  **REDES campaign:** <http://www.africacuestiondevida.org/>
-  **Map of environmental conflicts:** <http://ejatlas.org>
-  **United Nations document:** http://www.unep.org/pdf/pcdmb_policy_01.pdf
-  **UN Natural Resources online programme**
<https://www.unssc.org/home/line-training-program-land-natural-resources-and-conflict-prevention>
-  **"Before the flood / Before it's too late" documentary:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbEnOYtsXHA>
-  **Toolkit and guidance for the prevention and management of land and natural resource conflicts:**
<https://www.un.org/es/land-natural-resources-conflict/pdfs/EU-UN%20Introduction%20and%20overview.pdf>

A project from:



www.alboan.org

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