

# Biodiversity, culture and food sovereignty in Colombia





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# Biodiversity, culture and food sovereignty in Colombia.

## Presentation

*Eighteen years after the CBD<sup>1</sup> has been signed, the biological and cultural diversity in Colombia and in other countries in Latin America are in a higher risk of erosion. The strategic natural ecosystems show an accelerated process of loss and degradation, life itself from indigenous people and their cultures are menaced, and the governments in the region have not implemented an environmental policy oriented towards the appropriate protection y conservation of the natural ecosystems and the local communities that support them.*

*The current economic model breaks with the way to a sustainable use of the biodiversity, which makes that the indigenous, black and peasant communities not only lose their collective rights on the biodiversity and the guaranties to benefit themselves of its use but also their food sovereignty and autonomy are violated and exposed, as they have never been before, making the environmental, cultural and socioeconomic crisis worse. The force given to the implementation of a sustainable development policy of the growing societies in Latin America during the 90s is currently undermined, and in many cases unsustainable development and production models are prioritized, serving the demand of the globalized economy. At the moment, the free commerce policies on the conservation of strategic ecosystems are predominant over the territorial rights and the life forms of the communities in our countries.*

*In the case of Colombia, not only the fulfilment of the goals and commitments established by the Colombian State represent an essential step to stop the loss of habitats, species, genes and traditional knowledge, but it is also necessary to put into the debate basic issues that have to do with the gradual and induced loss of the territories, the seeds and the knowledge of the communities. It is necessary to withdraw policies and guidelines for Colombia*

*and the Latin American states, especially in those where life had arisen and had been cultivated, as they waste the foundations of sustainable development away, and because they are opposite to the protection and the conservation of the biodiversity and the food sovereignty of the people. Likewise, it is necessary to face up to the voracity of the multinational biotechnological companies, which look for the privatization of all of the life forms through the control and manipulation of seeds, genetic resources of pharmaceutical use, the agrochemical business and the imposition of a standard diet around the world. The unsustainable development models have not responded and keep giving false solutions based on production models, mainly such as the agro-industrial single crop farming, the agro- fuels crops, transgenics and tree plantations.*

*Despite such a critical scenario, in Colombia and in many parts of Latin America and the world, numerous initiatives from communities and local organizations that look for the defence and control of their territories, the biodiversity, the productive systems and their food sovereignty and autonomy are kept and are thriving as alternatives to the unsustainable development models. That is the reason why today, more than ever, it is necessary to appreciate these common efforts now that they are the best option to avoid the world eliminates the main inheritance that accompanies humanity: the biodiversity.*

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1. In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development took place. Two historical agreements were signed in this meeting: The United Nations Convention framework on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which more than 150 governments signed and currently counts with 187 countries. The Convention has three goals:
    - Preserve the biological diversity.
    - Use, in a sustainable manner, the components of the biological diversity.
    - The fair and equal share of the benefits derived from the utilization of the genetic resources.



# Latin America: a planet's niche of biodiversity and rearing.

From the twelve countries that hold the 70% of the Planet Earth biodiversity, seven are in Latin America: Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela. They form an almost continuous regional bloc of life. The concentration of the biodiversity in Latin America is detailed in the following chart:

Number of species per taxonomic group for the five most biodiversed countries in the world.

Plants	Amphibians	Reptiles	Birds	Mammals
Brazil 53.000	Colombia 698-733	Australia 755	Colombia 1.815	Brazil 523
Colombia 41.000	Brazil 517	Mexico 717	Peru 1.703	Indonesia 515
Indonesia 35.000	Ecuador 407	Colombia 524	Brazil 1.622	Mexico 502
China 28.000	Mexico 284	Indonesia 511	Ecuador 1.559	China 499
Mexico 26.000	China 274	Brazil 468	Indonesia 1.531	Colombia 471

Source: Federal Attorney for Environmental Protection (PROFEPA - Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente). Mexico 2002.

But the conservation of the biodiversity and its sustainable use, the other two core goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity- CBD, are not in the agenda of these countries, and the future of the indigenous people and rural communities linked to the biodiversed ecosystems is still uncertain in many cases. Paradoxically, these same countries concentrating the biggest diversity in the planet are those losing such riches the quickest.

## Figures on the biodiversity in Colombia

According to the data of the Ministry of Environment, Housing and Territorial Development MEHTD 2010, Colombia is considered as the second country with the biggest number of plant species, the one with the biggest of birds and amphibians, having 1.815 and 583 species respectively, and the second richest in freshwater fish, registering 1.435 recognized species. Additionally, it has a great variety of reptile species (having 520 species), mammals (456), diurnal butterflies (3.019) and hymenopterous (4.800). Besides, approximately 50.000 flora species have been registered.

What's more, Colombia is biodiversed in ecosystems: it counts with 3 main biomes: the tropical desert, the tropical dry forest and the tropical rain forest, 32 biomes and 314 types of continental and coastal ecosystems. 56% of the territory is covered by natural forests. It has 6,42% of the tropical forests in South America and the 1.5% of the forests in the world.

## The grown diversity also has its origin in Latin America

The tropical and subtropical countries in Latin America are the origin and the diversity centre of the main crops that provide today's world agriculture and diet. In America, the agriculture started approximately around 10.000 to 8.000 years ago and, since then, it has shown a continuous diversification process of



the basic crops for the diet, the medicine and other uses. It is worthy to stop and think how the food diet would be without corn, bean, potato, cassava, cotton, tomato, pepper, yam, sweet potato, pumpkin, tobacco, cacao, rubber tree, and other tubers, roots, cereals, fruit trees and a great variety of medicinal plants and of other uses.

The domestication of so many foods moved on together with the American civilizations. In fact, the legends of the origin of many indigenous people have to do with the rearing of the seeds and crops.



### **THE ORIGIN OF MAIZE**

ACCORDING TO THE POPUL VUH, MAYAS' SACRED BOOK, THE GODS TRIED TO CREATE A MAN THREE TIMES.

THE FIRST TRY THEY DID IT OUT OF MUD, BUT IT WAS A VERY SOFT MATERIAL, AND SO IT DISSOLVED WITH THE FIRST RAINS.

LATER THEY TRY IT OUT OF WOOD, BUT THE RESULT WAS OF HARD AND INSENSITIVE BEINGS THAT DID NOT RESPECTED THE GODS, AND SO THEY DESTROYED THEM.

THE THIRD AND LAST TRY WAS THE CREATION OF THE CORN MAN.

## **The biodiversity has not been produced randomly; it is a deliberate development of the people.**

La agrobiodiversidad que nowadays supports the agriculture and the diet in the world is the result of the group innovations accumulated by thousands of peoples and generations of farmers, who have selected and improved many grown species and varieties adapted to the conditions of the means and the culture itself. It is necessary, then, to recognize that the indigenous people and the rural communities have gradually ensured and improved their food sovereignty and autonomy, medicines, housing materials and other resources not only for their welfare, but also for the mankind's.

The importance of the indigenous territories and the rural communities for the conservation of the biodiversity is indisputable. Those territories have kept the communities that express the biological and cultural diversity. Such diversities are reciprocally dependent and geographically compatriots, and constitute a key principle for conservation<sup>2</sup>. The territory- communities link is the key for the manage and the active conservation of the biodiversity and to allow the evolution of life in natural conditions.

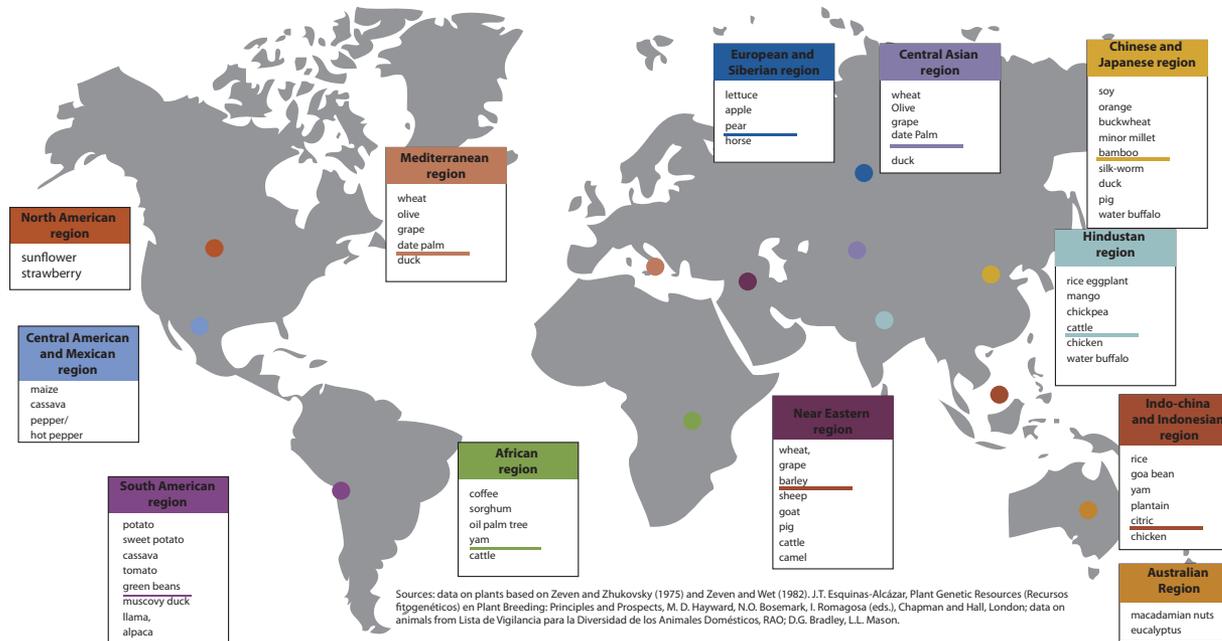
The indigenous people bestow sacredness to the territories y its resources<sup>3</sup>. They consider they cannot sell or cede it. The Western world seems to reject with great resolution this point of view, being unaware of how beneficial it turns out for mankind. Unfortunately, the biodiversity runs higher risks of disappearing due to the asymmetric commercial relations, the high consumption models and the devastating social transformations. The accelerated loss of the genes diversity and the same species is expressed in a slow death of the mankind. Not stopping this erosion allows the pieces of life of thousands of years to disappear.

2. B. Nietschman (1992) citado por Toledo y Barrera, en La memoria biocultural. La importancia de las sabidurías tradicionales. 2008.

3. Berkes, F y other. Rediscovery of traditional Ecology Knowledge as adaptive manage. 2002.



## Diversity centres for specific sowed plants and domestic animals origins



Biodiversity exists because peoples exist. Gradually sweeping the peoples, eliminating the life means, the traditional ways of living and producing, the languages that exactly name the diversity, all together constitute a great danger to life in the planet. The indigenous and tribal people in the world, and in the case of Colombia, the black and peasant (mestizo) communities and the indigenous people, hold knowledge within them, another inseparable part of diversity that is also in danger.

The traditional knowledge has been created, nurtured and promoted by small farmers, fishermen, hunter harvests, traditional healers, craftsmen, among others. All of them have in common their intimate association to the natural processes and rural cultures. The traditional knowledge evolves in a constant

manner integrating at the same time other knowledge throughout centuries.

The “traditional knowledge” has been discredited because it is of collective, static, inappropriate and maladjusted to prevailing models character. It is presented as of a minor class, and so it is easier and cheaper to transform it into merchandise. The modern world is supported by the paradigm of the “western science and knowledge” which sorts knowledge out and, in consequence, invalidates, underestimates and eradicates (when it is not convenient) the indigenous knowledge, defined as “not scientific”. Even in the developing countries, science imposes its technological advances as inventions capable of creating new life forms and knowledge when they actually are not.



## ¿Who owns the biodiversity? Life and traditional knowledge privatization.



*The collective rights must be recognized to the indigenous people and the rural communities as a result of their role in the preservation and maintenance of the knowledge, the innovations, the practices and styles of traditional life that have been essential for the conservation and sustainable use of the biological and cultural diversity.*

Many of these rights are unknown in practice by the States which, on the contrary, allow and promote the privatization of the collective heritage of the local communities. Policies that prioritize the conservation *Ex Situ* of the genetic resources, the free access to the resources protected by intellectual property for the development of innovations, and underestimate the conservation *In Situ* and *active* that peoples and local communities make in their territories are promoted.

Tension grows stronger among those who want to take the biodiversity and those who insist on taking it out of the business scope. During this year, that of the biodiversity<sup>4</sup>, it is needed to take a look to the tendency and the hands of whom the greatest heritage of the planet is lying.

The intellectual property rights that apply to life are unacceptable because they do not recognize the collective rights of the communities on their biodiversity and their culture. The patents favour the individual private innovation, the multinational biotechnological companies. Likewise, the biopiracy actions taken by some people, pharmaceuticals, agriculture and food companies, and institution researching on genetic resources and associated knowledge are harmful.

In the presence of the biopiracy abuses, there are remarkable efforts of the local communities addressed to:

- Getting back, conserving, managing and free exchanging of the resources and the local knowledge.
- Promoting researching with the participation of the communities.
- Implementing plans and internal rules of the communities manage.
- Rejecting bringing improved seeds in, and crops and transgenic food.
- Establishing the “*total or partial Moratorium*” to the bioprospection by the local communities.
- Explicitly demanding the not promotion of these initiatives from the States side.

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4. The UN stated year 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) to issue information, promote the protection of the biological diversity and encourage the organizations, institutions, enterprises and the general public to take direct actions for reducing the constant loss of the global biological diversity.



## Colombia, a biodiversity scenario thanks to its peoples and communities.

Due to its geographical location and its natural and human history, Colombia configures a diverse ecological variation of richness and complexity that has no comparison. Having a privileged equatorial position, it is considered the country with the second greatest biodiversity after Brazil, holding the 10% of the diversity in the planet. This biodiversity is found in both its marine and its continental ecosystems in the Amazon, Pacific, Orinoquia, Andean and Caribbean regions. In Colombia, this biodiversity is associated to 84 peoples y 64 indigenous languages<sup>5</sup>, raizal communities, African origin communities and peasant communities.

Despite the commitments made by the Colombian State in the Convention on Biological Diversity CBD<sup>6</sup>, and also in the millennium goals<sup>7</sup>, the loss of the territories, the biodiversity and the life means of numerous local communities has gone further in the last years, affecting the collective rights and its food sovereignty.

### A loss linked to the deterioration of life conditions of the communities.

*More than 40% of the original vegetation cover has been deforested in Colombia.*

*More than 70% of the natural forests have been lost, and only 1.5% of the original extension of tropical dry forests is kept in the Andean region.*

*45% of the country is used for purposes different from its aim; that is how the livestock farming occupies 40.1 million hectares when its potential use is of only 15.3 millions.*

*The population displaced from the lands in the last fifteen years overpasses the 3.5 million people.*

### Land possession in the rural sector in Colombia

Range	Parcels	%	Landowners	%	Area	%
0- 50	2.411.399	94,25	3.346.445	93,74	12.683.460	18,77
> 50	147.204	5,75	223.436	6,26	54.892.954	81,23

Data Cadastre Base, Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi, 2003

The deep inequity has made small farmers live in marginal areas of the country and be in more risk of losing their lands and traditional systems of production. The State's erroneous rural policies have contributed to the inappropriate use of the lands with the best fertility conditions and access in extensive livestock farming and in the last years, in the production of agrofuels, transgenic and raw materials for exporting.



- The language is the essential tool for the construction of the cultural diversity, and the raw material for the creativity and the human knowledge. Toledo and Bassols, 2008.
- Colombia makes part of the Convention of Biological Diversity since February 26, 1995.
- The protection of the biodiversity was included in numeral 7<sup>º</sup> of the Millennium Development Goals.



# An economic development model that consumes the planet's capacities and the communities' work.



resources, the logging of forests and the loss of the biodiversity and of the food sovereignty.

- Introducing hybrids and improved varieties that only work with the intensive use of machinery and chemical supplies displace the traditional varieties.

In Colombia, like in the majority of the countries in the South, production models based on the homogenization and industrialization of the productive systems and in the corporate monopolic control of the production are thoroughly questioned due to its evident and negative environmental, social and economic impacts. The energy consumption in the world and the unsustainable productive y extractive activities have generated changes in the territories and the life forms of the communities like:

- Moving from own consumption agriculture to an agro-industrial agriculture oriented towards a global market has entailed to the degradation of the ecosystems and the

- The concentrated and monopolic control of the land and of the means of production has pushed small farmers to the most unproductive lands in zones of slopes, tropical rainforest and diminished parcel.
- The replacement of primary and secondary forest areas by agro-industrial plantations such as African oil palm tree and timber species such as Eucalyptus and Pine tree.
- The increasing sow of transgenic crops (OGM) and the overcrowding of the genetically modified food consumption for human and animal diet.

Among the unsustainable production models, the *transgenic crops and the agofuels stand out*.



## **Transgenic crops in Colombia waste away the food sovereignty.**

*The crops and the transgenic food have generated a strong rejection from different sectors in the society, specially the farmers, the consumers, the environmental movements and part of the scientific community because of their environmental impacts on the countries of the South and on the health of the population.*

*In 2003, the Colombian Agriculture and Livestock Institute (ICA) approved Monsanto to commercially sow cotton Bt - Bollgard (resistant to Lepidoptera plagues and herbicides). After seven years of sowing these cottons in Córdoba and Tolima, during the 2008 and 2009 harvest periods, the farmers failed and had millionaire losses because of the transgenic seeds that do not responded to the goodness and promises made by Monsanto.*

*Also, in 2007, it was approved the commercial sow of transgenic corn Bt and corn resistant to herbicides around the country but in the indigenous reservations, which, worthy to be mentioned, is not a warranty for protecting the enormous diversity of native and national corns in Colombia from the genetic contamination. There is a deep concern with respect to the impacts on the local communities. Despite it all, no previous queries with the indigenous and black communities were made.*

*As crops and transgenic food are introduced, the social movements and the local communities implement actions to face them through more sustainable alternatives. Among them, the getting back, conservation and use of the biodiversity and traditional agriculture and agro-ecological systems, campaign, network and actions against the OGM promotion, and the defence of the food sovereignty, alliances, declaration of Transgenic-free Territories and Zones (TFT) and judicial action against the biosecurity norms and commercial releases of OGM.*

## **Agrofuels: a formula for environmental disaster and food sovereignty loss.**

*The agrofuels develop a deeper tension for land and water by making the food lands into agro energetic complexes that bring risk to the autonomy and the food sovereignty, diminishing the natural ecosystems y agro food. The loss of the biodiversity generates, in these cases, people being sent off the country to the cities, and local and regional economies being destroyed.*

*The government of Colombia decided to turn the country into an agrofuels producer by changing the environmental and rural policies, creating legal stability for investors, tax exemptions, obligation to use the mixture of gasoline with ethanol and palm tree oil for diesel, and the free trade zones for agro-industrial projects and production plants for alcohol y diesel.*

*The agro-industrial production of sugarcane hoarded the best pieces of land from Valle and Cauca, in Colombia, and now that cane is used for the production of ethanol. The territories of the local communities and the regions with agro-industrial potential which are food producers are in the risk of being incorporated into those green deserts. The oil palm tree has been established in the territories of black and peasants communities, and its expansion has been related to the destruction of the tropical forests and, even worse, the increase of the armed conflict and the violation of the territorial and human rights.*



*It is worrying that the civil society does not have accurate information about the impacts that agrofuels generate. For the case of the oil palm tree in the Pacific region, many black communities have resistance processes against these plantations. Regarding the cane crops for ethanol, the indigenous and black organizations from the north of Cauca are implementing actions that look for the stoppage of the agro-industrial front of cane and the expropriation of water from the collective territories.*

## **Food sovereignty and autonomy of the people, and alternative for the defence of the territories and the continuance of the cultures.**

During the last decade, the social movements and the local communities around the world have adopted and promoted a food sovereignty approach, which takes the political declaration of the ONG/OSC Forum for the Food Sovereignty, from Rome in June 2002. *“It is the peoples, communities and countries right to define the own agricultural, pastoral, labour, fishing, food y agrarian policies which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate for their exclusive circumstances. This includes the real right for a food diet and production, which means that all the peoples have the right to have food and resources for the production of ensured, nutritious and culturally appropriate food as well as the capacity of supporting themselves and their societies”.*

More recent approaches additionally involve the concept of “autonomy “ as





a comprehensive control of the food cycle, the seeds, the means of production, the consumption and the trading, for which it is also necessary to have the lands and territories availability and local control.

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8. Toledo, Victor, Julia Carabias, Cristina Mapes y Carlos Toledo, 1985, *Ecología y autosuficiencia alimentaria: Hacia una opción basada en la diversidad biológica, ecológica y cultural de Mexico*, Mexico, SXX1, 118 pp.

The food autonomy understood as the capacity of reproducing the culture in a territory collectively inherited and managed<sup>8</sup> emerges from the recent indigenous movements. It is a frame based on the own right that allows the practice of the free determination of people to drive their social, economical and political processes. In Colombia, it is lead by the communities that have got great changes from the modern Colombian State, the indigenous people from the Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC) and the *Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca* (ACIN). They raise an structural discussion: the *food sovereignty is possible only if it can be counted on the control of the territories that have been culturally appropriated and ruled by their own governments but, mainly, that have been inhabited by peoples and communities that take into account the biodiversity and the knowledge associated to them.*

## **Sustainable use based on the biodiversity and the food sovereignty in Colombia.**

*In 1991, Colombia, imported 500.000 tons of food and in 2009, imported 9.5 million tons represented in 75% of the corn, 85% of the soy and 95% of the wheat nationally consumed. Nonetheless, a great part of the food basic supply is still cultivated by small farmers in the country. They cultivate the 70% of the area having corn crops, the 89% of the panela sugarcane, the 80% of the bean, the 85% of the cassava and the 75% of the vegetables.*

The increase and aggravation of the food, economic, energy and climate crisis is forcing the farmers around the world to adapt their cultivation systems to the more frequent changes. Additionally, the indigenous and peasant communities in our countries are implementing productive and cultural practices



that allow the defence of their territories, the biodiversity and its food sovereignty; not only thinking about current populations but also about the future generations, regarding the privatization public policies and the unsustainable production models.

The rural communities and the indigenous people not only guarantee their food but also contribute to the diet of the cities. This has been made possible through the traditional production systems based on the control and the defence of the territories and manage of the biodiversity with initiatives like:

- Getting back, conserving and managing local seeds, medicinal plants, raising landrace animals and livelihoods grow in gardens.
- Diversifying crops through agroforestral and silvopastoral systems.
- Conserving pieces of land through green manures, erosion control and living barriers.
- Managing microbasins, woods restocking, conserving water sources, managing wetlands, restocking native fish and common managing water.
- Getting back and diversification of the traditional diet food.
- Agroecological and environmental education with local actors and schools.
- Strengthening local, regional and export markets, based on a fair trade and a confidence certificate, and through the bartering with seeds, local products and handicrafts.
- Managing plans and internal rules for territorial control.
- Civil and pacific resistance against adverse environmental and rural policies and megaprojects of high environmental and socioeconomic impacts.
- Incidence and demands of rights to access to land, control and defence of the territories and natural resources, food sovereignty and previous query.

## Importance of the local experiences in Colombia with food sovereignty.

The indigenous and peasant families members of Asproinca at the west of the country, the *Zenú* natives in the Caribbean zone, the Afro and black communities on the Pacific coast and the *Nasa* natives (*Paeces*) in the south-western Andean region report on the possibilities of manage and respect life, ensure food and remain as communities in decent conditions in their territories.



### **ASPROINCA: a resistance proposal and a defence of life.**

The association of indigenous and peasant producers from *Riosucio*, Asproinca, is located on the western Andes in Colombia. For 25 years, the families, members of the association, have enriched the growing diversity from a comprehensive scope on the planning of the rural development based on the getting back, conservation and manage of related plants, animals and traditional knowledge. A careful management of the piece of land and the water has also been kept.



Asproinca has boosted an endogenous and sustainable development under the food sovereignty principles, the use of the available local resources and the continuance in the territory, despite the intensification of the armed conflict. The families have between one to three hectares on pieces of land on the slopes, which that are not so fertile. As main economical activities, they grow coffee and panela sugarcane, farm livestock at a small scale and raise minor species (pigs and birds).

*The indigenous and peasant families from Asproinca use 28 native varieties of bananas and plantains, 24 of corn, 45 of bean, 6 of pumpkins 20 of cassava, 21 of other tubers, 22 of cane, 113 of medicinal species, 14 of vegetables, more than 20 species of fruit trees, 7 varieties of coffee, 79 of ornamental plants and around 90 species of timber and use trees for the protection of the basins. The families have seeds banks as places for rearing and education, and they use actively the different species. "To be the custodians of their own and get backed seeds is an honour to the families"*

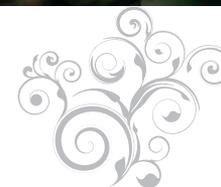
Within the strategies to fulfil the association's goals, the following can be stood out:

- The plan made from bottom to top, meaning, from the families, to the community and then, the basin. This is supported with the diagnosis and the property design.
- The inventory of the species, get back and manage of the traditional seeds and landrace animals.
- The meetings and exchanges of seeds. Agroecological fairs and barbers at a local and a regional level.
- Agroecological production in small parcels starting from productive projects that integrate agricultural, livestock, aquatic, forestal and ranching components.
- Getting back and restocking of woods at a farm and community level.

- The production and processing of medicinal plants and getting back to the traditional diet.
- The use of alternative energies as the anaerobic digesters and log-saver ovens.
- Training through workshops, meetings, and written and audiovisual material development.
- Political incidence for the defence of the territory.

### **Strategies from the organizations in the Colombian Caribbean jointed to the Zenú indigenous people for surviving the dispossession and strengthening the food sovereignty.**

The Zenú people has settled from before the Spanish conquest in the middle of the Colombian Caribbean, in the departments of Córdoba and Sucre, in a very warm zone with long drought periods and a topography having valleys, savannahs and hills with pieces of land diminished by the deforestation and the extensive livestock farming. This people had the control of a huge area in the Caribbean, and after a process of land getting back, in



which around 150 leaders lost their lives, they finally kept barely 25.000 hectares.

These indigenous decided to create a group of indigenous organizations to defend and control their ancestral territories from the local level and, at the same time, start getting back processes, use and manage of the biodiversity and of the productive agrosystems, the related traditional knowledge and of the social systems. The Zenú people decreed the declaration



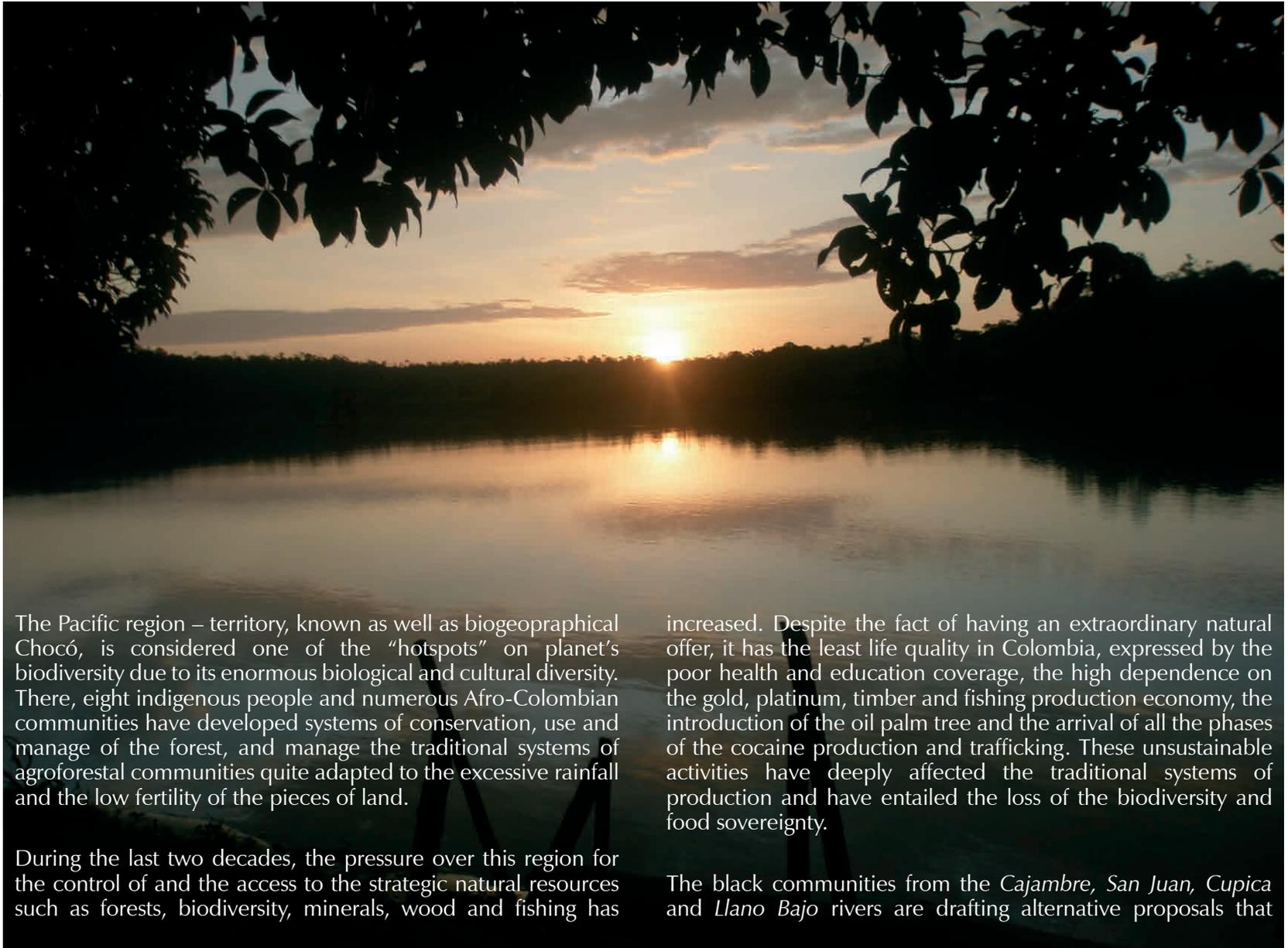
of the Transgenic-Free Territory when they saw their culture the diversity of native corns menaced by the massive sow of transgenic corn in the agro-industrial zone contiguous to their indigenous territories.

The Zenús and the mestizo peasants close to them have managed to keep their small parcels through their culture, their community organization, their pieces of land getting back, their agriculture based on the agroecological manage and the get back, conservation and active use of the seeds and landrace animals races, the management of the swamps and wetlands and the handicrafts trading. Among the strategic actions taken by these groups, the following can be recognized:

- The getting back and use of numerous varieties of native crops: 27 varieties of corn, 21 of rice, 10 of yam, 12 of bean, and 16 of cassava. Numerous fruit trees, vegetables, medicinal, log and forage species are grown as well. Seeds banks have been established. Likewise, 5 races of hens, 5 of pigs and 2 of native cattle have been got back.
- Recovering the oral history about their territories
- Getting back and enrichment of the local gastronomy.
- Restoration and manage of wetlands and water sources, and establishment of alternative aquaculture.
- Getting back, use and promotion of natural raw materials for handicrafts such as the caña flecha, and other fibres, plants dye and strengthening of the craftsmen organizations.
- Make agroecological and seeds fairs, and local y regional trading activities.
- Implementation of seeds revolving funds and of microcredit for the implementation of productive projects in the indigenous families.
- Education and cultural, technical and political training activities for the members of these organizations, implementing “from farmer to farmer” and hands-on methodologies.
- Internal control rules for defending the territories, the biodiversity, the knowledge y the systems of traditional production.



## The agroecological lighthouses from the Colombian Pacific.



The Pacific region – territory, known as well as biogeographical Chocó, is considered one of the “hotspots” on planet’s biodiversity due to its enormous biological and cultural diversity. There, eight indigenous people and numerous Afro-Colombian communities have developed systems of conservation, use and manage of the forest, and manage the traditional systems of agroforestral communities quite adapted to the excessive rainfall and the low fertility of the pieces of land.

During the last two decades, the pressure over this region for the control of and the access to the strategic natural resources such as forests, biodiversity, minerals, wood and fishing has

increased. Despite the fact of having an extraordinary natural offer, it has the least life quality in Colombia, expressed by the poor health and education coverage, the high dependence on the gold, platinum, timber and fishing production economy, the introduction of the oil palm tree and the arrival of all the phases of the cocaine production and trafficking. These unsustainable activities have deeply affected the traditional systems of production and have entailed the loss of the biodiversity and food sovereignty.

The black communities from the *Cajambre*, *San Juan*, *Cupica* and *Llano Bajo* rivers are drafting alternative proposals that



allow them to establish them on their territories, protect their natural resources and guarantee their food sovereignty. These proposals, called “agroecological lighthouses” are outlined as a core for the strategy of getting back, conserve and sustainable use of the cultivated biodiversity. In their gardens associated to the rainforest, the men and women have adopted and developed numerous species and food and medicinal varieties, and of other uses, and have put knowledge and new knowledge from the extensive family, characteristic of the Afro culture in Colombia.

The agroecological lighthouses allow the communities to advance on their autonomy and food sovereignty in different learning:

- The agroecological lighthouses have self light: *the culture and the traditional knowledge of the communities*. This light is controlled and administered by the men and women who value and understand the importance of the territory and the proper resources.



- The agroecological lighthouses have a master that turns them on and makes them work, and another that learns to teach a third one who *guides the new generations*.
- The lighthouse is also a *community organization school* that starts with the decision making of men and women to work together from culture and to share the benefits in an equal proportion. The territory is used and administered according to the rainforest conditions.
- The conventional agriculture that is established in the Andean systems and in the agro-industrial crops cannot take place in the Pacific. There, the greatest part of the fertility found on the pieces of land is in the vegetation and the fallen leaves. The forest succession is part of the traditional agroforestral systems.
- The *seeds and the landrace animal races* are the base foundation of the lighthouses, which are adapted to the environmental conditions and the culture of the Pacific.



## The defence of life for life, the Nasa indigenous people from the north of Cauca.

At the north of the department of Cauca, 92.302 inhabitants of the Nasa indigenous people live in 141.000 hectares. They created the *Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca* (ACIN), which is composed by 19 town hall meetings, 14 distinct reservations and 5 indigenous town councils in process of legalization.



The ACIN town councils, as governments as they are, face challenges and risks on the management of their territories originated in the public policy that promotes unsustainable production models such as the agrofuels, the transgenics, the forest plantations and the mining. The conflicts for the control of the territories, the water and other strategic natural resources forces a tension in which the indigenous try to get their land back, on one hand, and state political decisions are made favouring the cane latifundia and the mining, on the other.

Nasas bring alternatives for a sustainable control and manage of their territories in order to have autonomy and food sovereignty and, to get them, they support themselves in strategies and actions like:

- The environmental manage and protection of the moor and sacred sites.
- The creation of alternatives for a harmonious use and manage of the territory with proper systems like the “*tul e’j*”, which has agricultural, livestock, environmental and spiritual components.
- Getting back, conserve, adapt and exchange native seeds, animal and knowledge.
- Setting up seeds banks and strengthening the revolving funds.
- Training the producers in the manage y conservation of seeds, pieces of land and life spaces.
- Calling district and zone *mingas* that strengthen the solidarity and group work principles in the communities.
- Transforming and trading food through community microenterprises.
- Trading and bartering based on the own and supportive economy. The barthers or *mingas* allow the Exchange of complementary products from different thermal floors.
- Exchanging experiences with other social sectors at both, national and international levels.
- Committing on the creation of an Interethnic Territory with black and peasant communities.



La ACIN commits on having autonomous territories through the development of an own economic model and the practice of the environmental authority. On this regard, it promotes the harmonious use and manage of the territory, the reassessment of

the own system of production (Tull e'j) that allows the autonomy and the food sovereignty, and does not reject the additional learning and production technologies.

### **The Saakhelu:**

NASA people laws determine that all beings in nature must live in harmony so that the Mother Earth keeps being generous. Many years ago, Nasas celebrate the Saakhelu ritual, which indicates the agricultural calendar. The communities participate on this ritual in order to have contact with their spirits. Chicha and food are shared during the Saakhelu, and they toast to life and awakening the seeds. In this way, abundance is kept.

Saakhelu is the sacred stick on which the offering to the condor, the moon, the sun, the rain, the wind and the earth are hung. The Te'walas, who can communicate with other worlds and their spirits, participate in the Saakhelu. During the ritual, people dance, sing for life and cultural strengthening; are reconciled and rejoiced with life and nature, with the plants, the wind, the winter, the summer, the day and the night, the birth and the growing.

While the Saakhelu dance takes place, the seeds reciprocity exchange and awakening is made. To the rhythm of music, the fiestero throws different native seeds that grow in each of the climates. People pick them up. The fire, the air, the earth, the sun and the moon are reconciled in the Saakhelu ritual.



## ¿What is pending?

Nowadays, the common traditional systems for the management and active use of the biodiversity are weakened, among other facts, because of the homogeneous use of seeds in the agriculture and the forestry, and the intensification of the industrial agriculture. The unsustainable development and the promotion of a culture that encourages the life privatization, the production homologation and the unsustainable technologies, have gone into an environmental, social y economical crisis in depth.

The conservation and development of the biodiversity has to do with the sowing fields, los forests, the aquatic systems and, above them all, with the conditions to which the peoples living in the territories are left. So, the lack of future options that guarantee the diet, depend on the preservation of the diversity of species, the diversity of ecosystems and the diversity of cultures and traditional knowledge about the use y management of the biodiversity that enables the assurance of the food sovereignty and the autonomy of the people.

It is possible to protect the biodiversity, and the peoples and communities that support it, if policies and actions that control the systems of intellectual property that privatize life are taken, as well as if the continuance and the access of the people and the indigenous, black and peasant communities to their territories are guaranteed. It is urgent to protect the cultures and the traditional knowledge, to promote the systems of local production that guarantee the food sovereignty and the autonomy, and stop the advance of the agro-industrial production and the big capital over the peasant and indigenous economy. By protecting and respecting the cultures and the peoples that sustain the biodiversity, we can guarantee that life for current and future generations is sustained.



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