

# WOMEN, TERRITORIES AND BIODIVERSITY:

OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE ANDEAN-AMAZON REGION FOR COP16

PONTIFICIA UNIVERSIDAD JAVERIANA - BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA | JUNE 21ST, 2024

## WE ARE WOMEN, WE ARE DIVERSE! Our perspectives are united in defense of life!

Numerous analyses and proposals highlight the need to incorporate a gender perspective in environmental studies and public policies regarding biodiversity. Despite persistent gender gaps in women's access, management, and administration of nature, various autonomous organizational processes have successfully amplified their voices, agendas, and demands. Today, multiple international instruments acknowledge the importance of a gender approach, and its incorporation has shown significant progress. As women from the Andean-Amazon territories, and in the frame of Colombia's role as a host for the 16th Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) from October 21st to November 1st, 2024, we offer the following specific recommendations for gender-related commitments that Colombia as a signatory of this convention and host country, should take into account.



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Gathered in Bogotá on Friday, June 21st, 2024, 34 women and one representative of the LGBTIQ+ population from territories in the Andean-Amazonian region, shared experiences as leaders and protectors of biodiversity by exercising their own livelihoods and knowledge systems. In this dialogue, we discussed the Colombian government's commitment regarding the integration of a gender approach in policies, programs, and measures to protect biodiversity within the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Together, we identified a series of recommendations to guide this commitment acquired by the national government, which we share below:

## WE BEGIN WITH THE FOLLOWING IDEAS:

For us, biodiversity is an integral concept that encompasses all living things—animals, plants, soils, water—as well as the knowledge and cultural practices that maintain the vital balance on Earth. For this same reason, we state **BIODIVERSITY IS THE TERRITORY INTERCONNECTED TO OUR KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS.**

Based on this, we call for a broader understanding of the concept of biodiversity, which goes beyond scientific knowledge, in order to include the perspectives of communities and their ways of seeing and inhabiting the world, promoting a genuine dialogue between knowledge systems.

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Our recommendations recognize the vital relationship between the Andes and the Amazon at different levels. We understand that the protection of the high Andean forests affects our rivers and streams, which are connected to the Amazonian rivers.

The concept of the Andean-Amazon region is diverse, therefore, recognizing this is crucial for effective biodiversity action plans at different scales. Here, diversity is not only ecological but also cultural, as the region is home to numerous Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendants, Campesinos, and Local Communities (IPACLC). As women, we appreciate and value the complexity and cultural richness of the Andean-Amazonian region. Hence, we make these recommendations, taking the various colonial biases present in biodiversity initiatives into account.

We notice biases when our ways of approaching the world in all its spiritual and physical dimensions are not acknowledged, or when foreign territorial planning methods are applied. These biases, and the lack of recognition of our knowledge and practices, directly affect women and all the relationships that sustain life.

Additionally, while outsiders may see our territory as a source of wealth and resources, for us, it is our life, our ancestors, and our sacred sites. Territories and biodiversity include fauna and flora, but they also constitute the culture and relationships exercised by our communities. Our territory is integral; what happens in one place affects other places.

### **In this sense, the gender action plan associated with biodiversity protection in Colombia should consider that:**

1. Women should participate in environmental and territorial management from the perspective of care for life, which should be emphasized at COP16.
2. Women from the Andean-Amazon region request the recognition of Mother Earth as a subject of rights, understanding that not everything around us can be exploited.

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3. The voices of women who protect the territories must be heard. Our right to participate, rooted in our cultural and gender identities, is inalienable. Mother Nature gave us the gift of speech, granting us the legitimacy to lead processes and be spokeswomen. We must overcome hierarchical and masculine structures that limit women's participation.
4. Our knowledge as culturally diverse women is the foundation of our participation. It is crucial to recognize our knowledge systems, practices, and wisdom for territorial management, which involve but go beyond, the use and management of biodiversity.
5. Community monitoring exercises conducted in our territories must be integrated into formal monitoring frameworks and biodiversity information generation. Our efforts should be incorporated into formal strategies and plans for the use and management of biodiversity.
6. The participation of women contributes to and depends on the construction of territorial peace. However, women leaders and environmental defenders continue to live at risk. It is necessary to incorporate collective protection measures, advance the implementation of the Escazu Agreement, strengthen autonomous and institutional routes to consolidate peace-building efforts, and maintain and protect our knowledge in order to move towards equitable participation, well-being, and health. Violence against us is multifaceted—physical, sexual, psychological, and political—and it impairs our ability to participate and undermines the protection of our rights.
7. Access to and management of economic resources should be guaranteed directly to women. Economic violence has been perpetuated by excluding women from decision-making on financial resources from diverse funding sources. Communities show that when women are engaged in resource management, it leads to greater redistribution to the entire family and investment in collective interests. Therefore, it is necessary to promote

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cooperatives, productive projects for women, and public policy mechanisms that recognize both productive and reproductive work.

8. It is fundamental to incorporate how communities name biodiversity in their own terms and encompass their broader understanding of the term. Technical concepts and those used at a local level are equally valid, and fostering a dialogue of knowledge is crucial.
9. Although women have access to various participation spaces, these are primarily consultative rather than decision-making scenarios. Women have not yet achieved a decisive role, and our positions and recommendations often lack binding authority. True participation must be measured not just by the number of women present but by the extent to which our voices are genuinely heard and considered. Additionally, persistent barriers to accessing these participation spaces must be addressed and overcome.
10. Participation requires robust organizational strength and safeguards for training and access to education and information. Effective communication channels, such as community radio, should be strengthened to support our advocacy efforts.
11. The gender approach must be integrated from an intersectional perspective in order to overcome barriers that limit women's participation, gender-diverse individuals, and those with non-normative identities. Ensuring social mobilization rights is essential to move forward in this process.
12. To support women's political participation and influence, it is crucial to provide interpreters and translators, recognizing the linguistic diversity enshrined in the 1991 Constitution. This ensures women can express themselves in their own languages, not just in Spanish. Additionally, translating key documents is essential to ensure optimal understanding.

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13. Understanding biodiversity must encompass its relationship with the human rights to healthy food and food sovereignty. Our food systems, including agroecology and the Amazonian chagra, must be respected and recognized, as they embody our knowledge systems as Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendants, Campesinos, and Local Communities (IPALC).
14. Complementarity between male and female roles is the foundation of local gender approaches and biodiversity use and management systems. Gender integration should go beyond the male-female division and mere participation numbers, based on complementarity.
15. Safeguards should be established to ensure that Regional Autonomous Corporations (CAR), Colombia's current environmental authorities, do not mediate decisions in our territories or limit citizen participation in environmental planning and management.
16. It is crucial for Amazonian territories to be protected based on our communities. The 1991 Constitution establishes that our State is plural and diverse; however, a major barrier for our political participation is that this principle is not fully implemented. To move towards this, it is necessary to formalize Indigenous Territorial Entities (ETIs) as the highest form of protection and territorial security in the Eastern Amazonia, as well as to formalize campesino territorialities (Peasant Reserve Areas and Agroecological Campesino Territories) and Community Councils- Collective Territories of Afro Communities. Additionally, women living in areas under the 2nd Law of 1959 or Forest Reserve Zones must have access to land and the resources derived from it.
17. The formalization of Indigenous Territorial Entities (ETIs) should lead to institutional adjustments that facilitate coordination between national and indigenous governments, recognizing these as integral authorities that encompass environmental authorities. Indigenous women play a crucial role in

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implementing Life Plans, which serve as territorial policies grounded in our cultural principles and acknowledge the diverse roles we fulfill.

18. The Convention on Biological Diversity should articulate with other international human rights instruments, such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the recommendations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Declaration on the Rights of Campesino and Other People Working in Rural Areas. In Colombia, we believe it is necessary to implement the legislative act that recognizes campesinos as subjects of rights and special protection.
19. There must be coherence and coordination between policies designed to achieve goals both under the Climate Change and Biodiversity Conventions. In this context, mitigation mechanisms, such as REDD+ and carbon credit sales, must consider the realities of the territories and promote our participation as women. These should not be imposed initiatives or formulated solely from international or other distant contexts based on compensation or pricing nature. Additionally, it is crucial to consider other mechanisms beyond REDD+ that are truly based on our worldviews and ways of life..

**Lastly, we wish to honor with deep respect the women who are no longer with us, who devoted their lives to defending and nurturing our Andean-Amazonian territories.**

**Our collective action to amplify these recommendations is a way of honoring and preserving their legacy.**