

Magazine

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Colombia



Delivery of the report
"Weaving Paths to
return to the origin" to
the SVJNR.
Kankuamo people
– Chemesquemena –
Sierra Nevada. March
29th – 2021.

Inheritance

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With the support of NORAD

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Photo FOKUS.



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Photo for FOKUS by Diana López Galindo.

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EDITORIAL

Each year, when those of us who support peace remember the signing of the Final Agreement between the Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP), we discover just how much the implementation of the Accord has slowed. This has profound implications for women, LGBT populations, and society in general, particularly those who live in rural areas: campesino, Afro-descendent, and indigenous populations as well those in conditions of poverty and exclusion.

Failure to comply with the agreement creates a halo of hopelessness around other accords and pacts that governments signed long ago with communities that engaged in protests to demand the full exercise of their rights.

Social protests, which began in previous years and experienced a brief hiatus during the height of COVID-19 pandemic, have grown more acute, especially among young people and particularly in urban centers such as Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín, among others.

These social protests have exposed the significant inequalities that persist in Colombia and the way in which the state's response has been to utilize militarization as a means of control.

Entities such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have expressed concern over the violence that persists in the territories as well as over the threats and assassinations of community leaders and signatories of the Peace Accord.

Women's organizations have continued to express concern over the sexual violence committed by members of the armed forces and the police, as well as by protesters in concentration zones in some of the protests. We echo this concern, as a platform composed of civil society organizations and Norway, and express our rejection of sexual violence, no matter the perpetrator.

This year has also been marked by the feminist movement's and women's struggle and demand for the decriminalization of abortion, which notably draws the participation of young women from the regions and center of the country. We await the decision of the Constitutional Court regarding the case to decriminalize abortion and are hopeful that, this time, the Court will heed women, so that they can exercise their sexuality and reproductive rights freely and autonomously.

We are grateful to our program partner organizations in Colombia, whose articles demonstrate the work that FOKUS supports in the country. 

NORWAY IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Norway has become an elected member of the United Nations Security Council; the country's two-year membership began in 2021. What is Norway's role in the Council and what can FOKUS expect from its participation?



TEXT: FOKUS
EN COLOMBIA
PHOTO: THE
NORWEGIAN
MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN
AFFAIRS



As a member of the Security Council, Norway has four issues prioritized: 1) diplomacy for peace; 2) climate and security; 3) women, peace, and security, and 4) protection of civilians. Additionally, it occupies various roles, such as that of leading two of the Sanctions Committees, one on North Korea and the other on ISIL and Al Qaeda; acting as pen-holder on the issues of Afghanistan and the humanitarian situation in Syria; and leading two working groups: one on children and armed conflict, the other on climate and security.

Although it can be argued that, for non-permanent members, it is more difficult to achieve the same degree of influence on the Council's work, membership continues to provide opportunities to position a country's central issues on the agenda. First, in the meetings,

powerful countries have to hear the arguments of all members, and second, the Council's leadership rotates each month among all members, enabling the presiding country to influence meeting agendas and emphasize their prioritized issues. Norway will assume the presidency in January 2022.

As mentioned above, one of the prioritized issues for Norway is women, peace, and security. The country has emphasized that it will work to include women in peace processes, in the operations of the UN Peacekeepers, as well as in all cases discussed by the Council.

Women always need to have a seat at the table and cannot be relegated to sitting out in the hallway.

Furthermore, Norway has stated that it will work so that all members become aware of the differential impact of conflict on men and women and the need to include the different experiences of men and women in efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts.

Regarding this issue, Gro Lindstad, director of FOKUS, has stated that it

is important that Norway continue prioritizing this agenda in the Council:

Norway positioned efforts to achieve gender equality and guarantee the rights of women and girls as one of its primary arguments to win a seat in the UN Security Council. With this so clearly defined as a priority, it must be maintained as such during the duration of its membership. It is closely connected to all discussions in the Council and everything must have a gender- and women-based approach. This is evident in the refugee crises, wherein women and girls face particular risks, such as in the current situation in Afghanistan and in catastrophes related to famine, climate change, or other sorts of unstable situations or challenges to democracy. In Afghanistan, we can see how women and girls are now afraid

of losing the rights they have gained in the past few years. These are not special rights, but equal rights connected with fundamental human rights. Women always need to have a seat at

the table and cannot be relegated to sitting out in the hallway.

With regard to the Council's work related to Colombia and monitoring the implementation of the Peace Accord, Norway has expressed concern about the assassinations of human rights defenders, community leaders, and ex-combatants. The country has said that

The Minister of Foreign Affairs Ine Eriksen Søreide at a Security Council meeting in September 2021.



it is important to implement all parts of the Accord, especially guarantees for security, political participation, and gender-based measures.

Regarding this, Ana Milena González, director of FOKUS in Colombia, says:

In Colombia, the primary request we can make of the Norwegian government in its role as Council member is to keep applying pressure on the Colombian government to implement fully the Accord, signed five years ago. The reports written by members of Colombian civil society, which have a national or regional scope, demonstrate that while the pandemic contributed to decelerating implementation, this has nevertheless been a constant in the current government.

The Security Council should make it a priority to insist on total compliance with the Accord's gender-based measures.

This situation, as GPaz reports demonstrate, is also the case for implementation of the gender-based approach. The Security Council should make it a priority to insist on total compliance with the gender-based measures that were negotiated in the Accord, as a message not only for Colombia but also for the world at large.

It is also fundamental that the Security Council observe and monitor the situation of community leaders, human rights defenders, and

signatories of the Peace Accord, given that the homicide rates over these five years continue to be cause for alarm. Respect and care for life must be the aim of all organizations, entities, and governments

that have believed in the path of dialogue and negotiation as the only solution to advance in peacebuilding.

Consequently, as a member of the UN Security Council, Norway now has the opportunity to position important issues, such as that of women, peace, and security, in the center of discussions. FOKUS hopes that this country will continue prioritizing this issue in its work and help the Council show the importance of implementing the Peace Accord with a gender-based approach in Colombia. **FM**



INDIGENOUS WOMEN OF THE SIERRA NEVADA DE **SANTA MARTA WEAVE THEIR OWN PEACE AGENDA**

Indigenous Kankuama, Wiwa, and Arahua women gathered in the community of Chemesquemena to weave their knowledge of harmonization for their peoples before sharing with women in the Caribbean.



TEXT AND
PHOTOS:
**MUJERES
KANKUAMAS**



The violence which the *Heart of the World* experienced during the armed conflict broke the equilibrium we inherited from our spiritual mothers and fathers, particularly because conflict harms the life and survival of the indigenous peoples of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta who share the same Origin Law. This violence alters the spiritual principles of: *unity*, in that it fragments communities and their self-governance; *territory*, in that it occasions

the invasion and desecration of sacred sites; *culture*, in that it prohibits the use of elements related to indigenous identity, whose loss provokes an imminent risk of physical and ancestral elimination—as is happening to their mother tongue, traditional blankets, mochilas (woven bags), and the poporeo (the gourd used to store the lime of carbonized seashells used in combination with coca leaves); and lastly, *autonomy*, since the authority to govern based on our principles is threatened by interests other than those of caring for and protecting Mother Earth.

The importance of protecting the Sierra Nevada—considered a responsibility inherited from their ancestors—is a duty that the women of the indigenous Arahua, Wiwa, Kankuama, and Kogui peoples assume as part of the role assigned to them by their ancient tradition. For this reason, in 2020, they

wove speech—which they call *cabuya*, the word—verifying how women, their families, the authorities, and the territories have suffered similar dissonances during the war, while also recognizing that this same ancestral wisdom has enabled them to continue resisting and promote healing, unity, and survival.

That was the stitch that united the word in the community of Chemesquemena last July, where representatives of the Kankuamo, Arahua, and Wiwa peoples gathered to reaffirm themselves and ratify this weaving as the “Indigenous Women’s Peace Agenda.” This agenda is based on cosmogeny itself and corresponds to a great mochila of four strong and steadfast *cabuyas*, which raise the walls with thoughts/emotions/actions that hold up their agreements in a great spiritual and political alliance

for survival. In the first *cabuya*, the indigenous women reaffirmed that peace is the re-establishment of harmony to heal all the acts of violence that affect women, families, their peoples, and the territory.

The second *cabuya* reaffirmed that women, being part of the territory and linked to Mother Earth, balance, heal, and safeguard it and its people from violence, and this has led them to play a role in the exercise of justice alongside the authorities. The third *cabuya* indicated that the environment of harmonization in the political, cultural, and social spheres—which manifests in their contributions to distinct ancestral dynamics—is necessary to maintain the cosmovision that takes shape in the Good Life. And the fourth *cabuya*, which identified the family as the nucleus and axis of the structural policy of the peoples of Santa Marta, is maintained as a fundamental principle in the spirituality of sacred sites.

From on the above, comes recognition and promotion of the value and contribution of indigenous women of the Sierra Nevada, the territory, and the great house as harmonizers. They work hand in hand with spiritual and political authorities to address the external threats that insist on the extermination of their peoples, and drawing upon the legacy of guardians of the ancestral territory, whose ancestral knowledge and practices for returning to the origin are indispensable for this re-establishment. To achieve this, they are guided by sacred sites where women, together with men, find tranquility, steadfastness, and clarity to protect their way of life and achieve spiritual, cultural, organizational, and political balance.

This great *mochila* of *cabuya* has, as its next stitch, the agenda's presentation and the group's joint participation before the

Consejo Territorial de Cabildos (Territorial Council of Indigenous Governments, CTC), the Heart of the World's highest authority, since the protection of the Sierra Nevada involves the continental Caribbean, whose rivers join and eventually reach the sea via the Magdalena River. This establishes the Intercultural Peace

In the first *cabuya*, the indigenous women reaffirmed that peace is the re-establishment of harmony to heal all acts of violence.


Agenda as a space for harmonization and care not only for the life of the indigenous communities involved but also for the country and humanity at large, both of which have lost themselves in the threat of climate change.

To advance this agenda, it has been proposed that the group approach other indigenous, Afro-Colombian,

and rural women, as well as women politicians in the Caribbean region of the country, in order to engage in an exchange of ideas and knowledge based on the diverse perspectives and trajectories of their paths, proposals, and defenses made in the interest of this common objective: to protect

and care for life, which is the heart of peacebuilding. This proposes a regional, joint endeavor aimed at applying a particular perspective to the implementation of the peace accords: that of

the women who take the floor and defend the ideal of a dignified life for their peoples and organizations, and, above all, defend their territories.

For peace in our territory and the survival of indigenous families and women of the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta, we continue to stand strong with our legacy, *Hasay Hasay* (Strength Strength). 



VOLUNTARY TERMINATION OF **PREGNANCY IN CRISIS**

The pandemic has exacerbated the barriers to access voluntary termination of pregnancy (VTP), especially for the most vulnerable women. The challenge is to overcome these barriers and continue to ensure access to safe and timely abortions.



Mujeres exigen abortos libres, seguros y oportunos.

During the pandemic, Lorena and her daughter had to move out of her mother's house because the family disagreed with her decision to access a voluntary termination of pregnancy (VTP). This drove her to move to a municipality in Cesar, but she did not know how to access a VTP through her health insurance there,

since she lacked internet access and minutes on her cellphone. When La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres's¹

¹ La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres is a feminist collective of organizations and individuals who have worked since 1998 to end discrimination and defend the rights of women in Colombia—in particular, the rights to free choice and voluntary maternity, and the total decriminalization of abortion—through activism and knowledge generation, supporting the construction of democracy. For more information, visit: www.despenalizaciondelaborto.org.co



TEXT AND
PHOTO: MESA
**POR LA VIDA Y
LA SALUD DE
LAS MUJERES**

lawyer contacted her, Lorena indicated that she did not have anyone with whom she could leave her daughter and preferred to wait until the quarantine was over to access health services. In the end, Lorena did not have a VTP.

Lorena's case is one of the more than **1,300 cases of women for whom La Mesa has provided legal accompaniment since 2006**. This case demonstrates that even though abortion has been decriminalized in three instances² since the passage of Ruling C-355 in 2006, women continue to face multiple barriers to exercising this right, and are often forced to assume the responsibility of unwanted motherhood.

These barriers were raised with the measures adopted to contain the pandemic, deepening health inequalities and gaps affecting women in vulnerable situations. These exacerbating developments were largely due to: **the low priority given to various sexual and reproductive health services compared with health services related to COVID-19**; decreases in income due to unemployment, which lowered the ability of many to obtain contraceptives or access services; and an unwillingness to go to pharmacies or health centers for fear of contracting the virus (Grupo Médico por el derecho a Decidir, 2021).

Likewise, during mandatory isolation, and owing to restrictions on mobility to contain the crisis, new barriers emerged associated with: i) the lack of information about healthcare routes and channels to access VTP; ii) difficulties obtaining information due to a lack of privacy at home; iii)

connectivity issues associated with digital paperwork; and iv) childcare responsibilities (La Mesa *et al.*, 2021).

And although the Colombian state has recognized that **the VTP is an essential service that must be guaranteed during the pandemic** and has adopted some of the international standards that exist to safeguard it, challenges to access still remain for those who find themselves in vulnerable situations, unable to travel to health centers, as is the case of women with an irregular immigration status and those who live in rural areas where armed actors are present.

La Mesa accompanied 111 cases of women seeking to access a VTP; of these, 37 (33%) correspond to migrant women.

MIGRATION AND ACCESS TO VTP

In 2020³, La Mesa accompanied 111 cases of women seeking to access a VTP; of these, 37 (33%) correspond to migrant women. These cases revealed that women who lived in rural areas or municipalities that either lacked health services or the class of care required to perform VTP at an advanced gestational age, experienced serious difficulties in traveling overland land or by air, stemming from their irregular migratory status, during social isolation.


Women migrants in particular faced specific barriers such as: i) a lack of availability in the surgical schedule; ii) delays in the authorization of procedures; and iii) violations to healthcare regulations, guides, and protocols.

ARMED CONFLICT AND THE RIGHT TO ABORTION

In 2016, the government and the FARC-EP signed *The Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace*; however, enormous barriers currently exist to implementing the cross-sectional gender-based approach. These barriers range from failing to recognize or investigate cases of sexual and reproductive violence that women leaders, human rights defenders, and victims continue to suffer, to barriers that women ex-combatants face when trying to access sexual and reproductive healthcare, especially VTP.

Regarding this last point, it is worth emphasizing that the reincorporation areas where some women ex-combatants live are often located far from health clinics and either lack access routes or travel to them is cost-prohibitive.

CHALLENGES TO GUARANTEEING VTP

The outlook for guaranteeing the right to free choice and voluntary maternity as well as the total decriminalization of abortion demands that the state design differentiated routes or guidelines to guarantee the right to a legal abortion that addresses the particular circumstances of women in each region of the country. Additionally, the government must adopt measures to eliminate barriers to accessing VTP and engage in ongoing analysis of the impact that the criminalization of abortion has on the lives of women and on deepening the inequalities among them. 

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2 i) When the pregnancy represents a risk to the life or holistic health of the woman; ii) in the case of fetal defects incompatible with life outside of the womb; iii) when the pregnancy is the result of sexual violence or incest.

3 Between March 1 and December 31, 2020.

WOMEN SUSTAIN THE HOPE FOR PEACE

Despite political crises and the predation of life, women keep the dream of peacebuilding possible through hope.

To speak of hope in Colombia means to stubbornly keep the possibility of peace alive, which means going against the flow of what is daily established as normal in a country and in a year when, like never before, we have experienced massive social mobilization which has been repressed in an unprecedented fashion. A year in which the impact of the pandemic has continued affecting the majority of people who identify as women and impoverishing them. Above all, this year has shown Colombia to be a country that seems to constantly forget that it signed a peace accord with the FARC-EP five years ago, with a government that makes enormous efforts to ignore, discard, point fingers at, and disappear others, because the dream of peace is not a priority for those who are in power, just as the impacts that the aforementioned situation continue to have on women is not a priority.

We are convinced that we, the women's organizations present in the territories, are the ones who keep alive the

certainty that women's political participation and agency is their only ally when it comes to lobbying local and district governments for changes that would make a peaceful city possible. For this reason, we continually take actions to confront the institutions that have the ability to promote the issue of peace in city. This is also why we participate in acts that promote the

The certainty that the Peace Accord must continue to become a felt presence in the lives of women in these neighborhoods drives us.

funneling of budgetary funds toward local peacebuilding work in areas of the city with high rates of violence against women and young people, and which host large populations of Venezuelan migrants and individuals affected by the armed conflict.



TEXT AND PHOTO:
**CENTRO DE
PROMOCIÓN Y
CULTURA - CPC**

At the same time, the certainty that the Peace Accord must continue to become a felt presence in the lives of women in the neighborhoods where we work drives us; and this has to do with the political training activities that continue to be a priority in a country that could easily lose the memory of why the political acts that lead to armed conflicts occur. Our work is also done with the awareness that cities are not bubbles untouched by war, since most women in the neighborhoods where we work have arrived there after fleeing from areas that have been deeply impacted by armed confrontations.

Peace territorialization continues to represent an urgent need, hence the importance of the Agenda de Paz de las Mujeres Populares y Diversas



("Peace Agenda of Working Class Women and Diverse Populations") in Bogotá, a space which gathers women from diverse organizations in the city to engage in dialogue with and join other women to advocate for the permanence of the Peace Accord at the city level and lobby institutions. Yet it is in these neighborhoods where the value and impact of the Peace Accord continue to be completely absent from the lives of Colombian and migrant women. This fact became more evident after the social movements and national strikes which occurred earlier in the year, which changed the immediate landscape.


Coordination between women's movements is very important in the current context in order to respond to the political situation of social movements as well as to the processes which emerged after the Peace Accord was

Despite the difficult situation we are experiencing as a country and as a city, women weave hope for peace.

signed. The latter challenged us to support the true reincorporation of women who came from the insurgency, who were signatories to the Accord and are present in the territories. This means continuing to work to overcome the mistrust many have of these women, including within women's organizations. It is a long road but one that must be traveled if we really want to talk about peace. Trust is being developed through spaces dedicated to self-care as a possible means of overcoming the violence women insurgents experienced, given that that self-care fundamentally includes ele-

ments such as the political survival of the body and emotional harmony, which help women recover their power.

Lastly, women community leaders in working class neighborhoods have been among the most affected by the pandemic, as they rely on the informal economy to earn a living. In these neighborhoods, the solidarity with and among women has acquired a new dimension that also requires accompaniment so that they do not lose the position they have earned as peacebuilders in their communities.

Given all this, with regard to organizational processes, and despite the difficult situation we are experiencing as a country and as a city, we can say that women weave hope for peace. 

THE REVOLUTION WILL BE FEMINIST OR THERE WON'T BE A REVOLUTION

More and more women are joining the social protests underway in Colombia. The social uprising allowed us to see the strength of the feminist movement and its reach.



TEXT AND
PHOTO: FONDO
LUNARIA
MUJER

Undoubtedly, young women have been protagonists in the social protests underway since 2019 and which intensified with the arrival of COVID-19 in 2020, a year in which the world was forced into isolation to try to prevent the virus from causing an even greater number of infections and deaths. Quarantine and the government's contingency plan to mitigate the consequences of the public health crisis, however, revealed the inequality and poverty that grip the country.

To learn about the perspective that young women have of the current political context as it relates to social protest, sexual and reproductive rights, and the different forms of violence experienced by women, Fondo Lunaria talked to three feminist organizations that operate in different cities in the country: Villavicencio, Santa Marta, and Cúcuta.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIAL PROTESTS

El Cuarto Mosquetero is a digital media outlet that covers the issues of gender and peace with social and environmental justice. For the past three months, their team of journalists and volunteers has covered social movements, “ollas comunitarias” (informal soup kitchens organized and managed by community members), artistic activities, and other kinds of events in public spaces.

Women were constantly subjected to sexual violence or harassment during these events.

Lina Álvarez, *El Cuarto Mosquetero*'s editor, spoke with us about what covering these events in Villavicencio has been like. “The first days were complicated because we weren't used to reporting in the midst of [tear] gas and attacks. Thanks to Fondo Lunaria's Fondo en Movimiento [(Fund for the Movement)], we had security support and took advantage of our platform's visibility to organize food and support for the campesinos who had joined the demonstrations.”

During the social protest, women talked about the care economy and

equality, as well as the issue of young people's employability and access to work, demanding guarantees and just and humane working conditions. They also demanded access—particularly for sex workers—to the health care system during the pandemic.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

On the other hand, over the past few decades, the Colombian political context has had a conservative and fundamentalist bent, and has substantially restricted sexual and reproductive rights not only for women but for all citizens in general. Disapproval of this situation is also evident in the national strike. We spoke with Oriana Camargo, of the Sororidad para Avanzar collective in Santa Marta, about this issue.

“There is a clear omission made by the health care system and local government to implement institutional actions that would effectively guarantee women's sexual and reproductive rights, not only in compliance with Ruling C-355 of 2006, which establishes the right to the voluntary termination of pregnancy, but also in terms of access to contraceptives and gender-identity guarantees within the legal framework,” she explained.

For Oriana, one of the most important demands is access to secular sexual and reproductive education, outside of a religious framework, provided not only at the high-school but also at the university levels.

WHAT ABOUT THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF VIOLENCE THAT YOUNG WOMEN EXPERIENCE?

During the national strike, women with green and purple bandanas were present, representing a front-line of women, mothers, sisters, and feminist human rights frameworks that strengthened their acts within the social demonstration and accompanied the demands for protesters' rights; however, women were constantly subjected to sexual

violence or harassment during these events.

On their platform GRITA, the non-governmental organization Temblores documented 35 victims of sexual violence at the hands of members of the armed forces and police between April 28 and July 15, 2021. For her part, Gabriela Chacón, member of the Observatorio de Asuntos de Género in Cúcuta, added that these acts were committed not only by the armed forces and police but also by some protesters.

"The strike is a co-ed protest scenario, the fight is carried out alongside men, which has made it challenging to revitalize these spaces since we've found that the men [who participate] are the same protesters that attack or abuse women," she indicated.

To address this issue, a monitoring group was created for these cases. It concluded that institutions continue to lack an understanding of how to implement a comprehensive gender-based approach.

The social uprising has allowed the public to witness the strength of the feminist movement and the leadership of young women in varied artistic, political, and social acts and demonstrations, as well as their participation in different assembly spaces. The violent acts described, however, demonstrate that the inclusion of women's agendas in collective movements is still a work in progress, something which must be achieved to create spaces that are safe and free of violence and oppression for all women. [FM](#)



More and more young women are marching.



2021

IN PICTURES





Photo for
FOKUS by Diana
Lopez Galindo.



UMA KIWE: MOTHER EARTH AND INDIGENOUS WOMEN

The liberation of Mother Earth represents an ancestral commandment and Nasa women have played an important role in working toward it. In this article, we aim to raise awareness about their contributions and their relationship to the territory.



TEXT AND
PHOTOS:
**CODACOP -
TEJIDO MUJER
ACIN**

A territory is a space where reciprocal relationships are woven, permitting harmony among the community, nature, and everything that inhabits the land. The Nasa people cultivate a deep relationship with Mother Earth. The land is female and related to the feminine.

The department of Cauca, in the southwest region of the country, is characterized by its multicultural diversity. There, different peoples—Afro-descendent, indigenous, and rural people—cohabit the land. The Nasa people represent the largest indigenous ethnic group and have the most consolidated organization, mobilization, and resistance processes in the country. This has allowed

them to keep alive the commandment to “liberate Mother Earth” and maintain their autonomy, as well as appreciation for their own systems of knowledge, language, and the governance of their territories. Women have played a fundamental role in achieving this; without them, the survival of the Nasa people would not have been possible.

Women have reconstructed the history of the fight to “liberate Mother Earth” through the voices of their elders, women

Accessing landownership in their own names [...] has been possible thanks to collaboration among women.

for whom such work represents a liberating project that crosses their stigmatized and uncomfortable bodies, places where the memory of untiring battles and of multiple forms of violence reside, due to the mere fact that they are women.

The elders remember how, with the creation of the Indigenous Regional

Council of Cauca (CRIC, for its initials in Spanish) in 1971, they worked to recover ancestral land that had been expropriated by landowners since the days of the Spanish colonization. Then the process of land recovery began and traditional roles for women, rooted in patriarchal imaginaries linked to domestic and care labor, predominated, roles which they adopted in order to gain access to new undertakings. This way, they became members of the Indigenous Guard, a role in which they often went ahead of their male counterparts to confront repression, protect their colleagues, and prevent detentions. On many occasions, dawn found them standing guard over recovered lands, caring for what by right belonged to them. There are stories of women who gave birth in the middle of this fight. Yet this strategic role was not enough to break the silence and the invisibility of women, their voices, and their proposals, especially when it came to redistributing the very land they had succeeded in recovering through land deeds.

Increasing safety and overcoming the victimizing history of domination, violence, and discrimination to which they have been subjected, has been a slow process: having a voice, occupying positions of power as authorities for their reservations, and accessing

landownership in their own names (an area where work still needs to be done), among other achievements, has been made possible thanks to collaboration among women, study groups, advancements in knowledge of their rights, and reclaiming agency, and, by extension, the process that energizes the Cxhab Wala Kiwe project Tejido Mujer.

Participation in the liberation of Mother Earth demanded the creation and strengthening of alliances, recognition among allies of the value of the contributions of each one, and recognition and granting of authority to others. The women have commented that engaging in liberation processes, while surrounded by landowners, paramilitaries, drug-traffickers, and members of the armed forces and police, made them feel afraid and highly vulnerable. Yet thanks to the strength of their ancestors, the protection of the spirits, and the certainty that they were in this together, the women always found the strength to minimize the impact of the ridicule, insults, and discrimination which they faced as women and which deepened the harm inflicted on them as a people.

Becoming aware of the fight for land and for the autonomy of their people, and earning recognition for their role in this fight, helped women build the strength to confront the violence and discrimination they experienced at the hands of their partners. Participating in agricultural groups and earning an income, getting together with other women, talking, sharing their feelings and dreams, and fighting for a plot of land—something which did not simply mean liberating Mother Earth but also the possibility of having access to her, to liberating their bodies and strengthening their empowerment processes and participation in the indigenous movement—all contributed to building this strength.



Nasa women from Tejido Mujer ACIN.



The liberation of Mother Earth is a commandment. For the women of the Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca (ACIN for its initials in Spanish), the commandment goes further, to mean “land for women.” The task is to document the situation of landownership for women; have information that allows them to know how women are faring in the processes of enforcing the redistribution of land in Colombia generally and in Cauca

specifically, by conducting diagnostic evaluations that show, among other things, that despite the emancipatory processes of indigenous peoples, land continues to be an elusive commodity for women, while acknowledging that this is also the case for indigenous peoples in general. Colombia is one of the countries with the greatest concentrations of land in the world and the country with the third highest level of inequality in the region. ^{FM}



Women sharing knowledge about contraceptives.

PEACE IN THE WORDS OF WOMEN EX-COMBATANTS

This article brings together the voices of five women ex-combatants who view peace and reproductive autonomy as a way to strengthen and support the country.

Since 2019, the Fundación Oriéntame project Reproductive Autonomy: A Way toward Peace, financed

by FOKUS, has developed sexual and reproductive health (SRH) brigades in the former territorial training and re-incorporation spaces (AETCR, for their initials in Spanish).



TEXT AND PHOTO:
FUNDACIÓN ORIENTAME

This has represented a strategic opportunity to help women ex-combatants access SRH health services and education without the need to travel long distances, have health insurance, pay out of pocket, or consult with others about this decision. Progress has been made in providing SRH services to women who, as part of their processes of reincorporation, are inhabiting their bodies, decisions, and relationships in a different way than they did in the context of the armed conflict before the peace accord.

This has also provided the opportunity to hear from women ex-combatants, specifically about how they understand their sexuality, their decisions, and the turns that these have taken before and during the peacebuilding process. Listening to their words and making their opinions and experiences visible is an act of recognition of transference; an act of memory in a place where women speak of their experiences, their pain, their expectations, and their dreams. It is the word articulating what history does not know.

For this reason, in this article we bring together the voices of five women to speak from their perspectives as ex-combatants about the relationship between peacebuilding and sexual and reproductive health autonomy.

Ana, Lucía, Sandra, Ximena, and Miriam (all pseudonyms) are women ex-combatants residing in the AETCRs of La Carmelita, Putumayo, and La Montañita in Caquetá. All five accessed the brigade's SRH services provided by Oriéntame in March and June 2021. Ana identifies as a Palenquera woman, Lucía as Afro-Colombian, and Sandra, Ximena, and Miriam as indigenous women.

With perspectives rooted in their diverse identities, they describe peace

as a process that is built gradually. When asked for a definition, they all agreed on two words: dedication and tranquility. According to Ana, "peace is a process of change and personal decision[-making]." For Sandra, "peace can only be achieved when there is no hunger and when all basic needs are equitably met, with social justice for all people." For her part, Miriam called peace a key element for life.

These ideas about peace become evident when these women access the brigade's health and educational services. They value the organizations and individuals interested in building trust and improving healthcare in the AETCRs. According to their accounts, providing information and

“Reproductive decision-making leads individuals to take responsibility for having a family.”

knowledge to inhabitants is viewed as contributing to the peacebuilding process, given that governmental neglect is part of daily life. Additionally, this medical care and education goes beyond the provision services: structurally, they put the need to talk about preventing and protecting against sexually transmitted diseases on the table, and support reflection about the sexual practices of young people and adults in the community and surrounding area.

For these five women, reproductive health is directly related to peace. Ana and Lucía define it as a means of hope and an opportunity for freedom. Lucía, Sandra, and Ximena state that being able to make reproductive decisions leads individuals to responsibly consider the possibility of starting a

family and the need to provide them an adequate education to support the realization of their life plans. Ximena reflects on how having information to make informed decisions is crucial for protecting young people, both by preventing early pregnancies for which they are unprepared, and also as a way to address gender-based violence and other problems within the community. For these women, reproductive health is a way for people to take charge of their bodies during the reincorporation process they are experiencing collectively, putting faith in change and peace.

Autonomy appears as an axis in peacebuilding: decisions are understood to be motors for change. Ana recognizes that autonomy is necessary because women can make decisions based on self-love, according to how and when it is right for them to become mothers. Sandra mentions that, in the

case of women ex-combatants, this is even more complex, given the ways in which the peace accords have not been upheld in the country. For these women, the future is still uncertain.

They recognize that the peace process is not over and for the community, it is important that young and adult women be able to make decisions about becoming mothers from a place of love, self-recognition, and desire. As women peace leaders in this country, one challenge they face in the realization of their life projects is improving their resources for practicing sexual self-care, with consideration for their own realities, bodies, and life trajectories, and, from there, progressing in the consolidation of their processes of reincorporation and change. ^{FM}

AFRO-CAUCAN WOMEN BUILD PEACE THROUGH MEMORY

Why is it important to recover the collective memory of Afro-descendent women of the Cauca Pacific as a contribution to peacebuilding?



TEXT AND
PHOTO:
**FUNDACIÓN
CHIYANGUA /
RED MATAMBA
Y GUASA**

Whenever they talk about peacebuilding, the memories of Black women from the Cauca Pacific immediately transport them to all the experiences caused by the armed conflict that negatively impacted diverse communities, especially women. This conflict is experienced both indirectly—as mothers, daughters, wives, friends, sisters, colleagues, and companions—and directly, when they are prohibited from participating in certain social spaces or when safety concerns prevent them from going to fields where crops are grown, participating in knowledge exchanges, or freely expressing their thoughts. It also takes the form of living a life marked by uncertainty, fear, anguish of being confined or even displaced from their collective lands.

The economy and autonomy, as well as the freedoms of movement and expression, all suffered vast outbreaks of symbolic and psychological violence (among others) which transformed the community's customs and gradually displaced its cultural practices. For this reason, recovering the collective memory of Afro-descendent women in the Cauca Pacific has turned into a tool for preserving identities, as well as one that creates a record of shared, lived histories which, for others, are simple anecdotes of what someone hardly wants to remember, if at all.

The economy and autonomy, as well as the freedoms of movement and expression, were subjected to vast outbreaks of symbolic and psychological violence.

At the same time, appropriate practices in rebuilding or recovering historical memory have two characteristics: the first symbolizes the identification of the social, economic, cultural, family,

educational, and political realities of Afro-descendent women in the Cauca Pacific and, in turn, of the community. Detailing personal and interpersonal experiences, along with the positive or negative impact that these had, supports the resignification of their stories, as well as the diverse battles and emotions they have experienced.

The second characteristic is associated with identifying peacebuilding actions that the women have carried out or could implement to keep their communities safe. Understanding the role of stories, narratives, and other forms awakens feelings such as hope, pain, or happiness that certain acts, situations, and circumstances cause in Black women in the Pacific, reactions which are tied to the territory where they engage in subsistence agriculture and use ancestral medicine and circles to bring new life into the world and to bid it farewell—according to rituals passed down through the generations—as tools of healing, reconciliation, or integration.

Likewise, memory allows Cauca women to give an importance place to the experiences they endured during the armed conflict by recognizing the



ways their rights have been violated and re-signifying them based on a foundation that emphasizes the co-construction of acts to defend their rights and those of their communities.

Furthermore, any attempt to create a peace process that does not include the voices of women who experienced various forms of violence, both in the past and in the present, directly and indirectly, will ultimately lead to a false healing process, if it does not provide victims tools to build truth, justice, and a true process of reparations. Regarding this point, Teófila Betancur points out, “Placing a new piece of wood over an old one doesn’t do any good; they will both sink. It’s important to completely remove the old board to create a space for reconciliation, for acceptance.

A peace process that does not include the voices of women who experienced various forms of violence, both in the past and in the present, will ultimately lead to a false healing process.

Women deserve to know where their sons, their brothers, and others are.”

To this end, everything that promotes and induces the recovery of the collective memory of Afro-descendent women is important, since rebuilding historical memory enables the identification of a community and territorial social and cultural reality that

is not just individual but also collective, identifying personal and interpersonal experiences, understanding the situation of women and their fight to engage in actions that bring about recognition, justice, and access to holistic human development.

As a result, through diverse spaces for advocacy and participation, Afro-Caucan women support the creation of spaces that allow women to dialogue with their histories, their memories, and especially with the symbols that can arise out of these processes, to build a peace with a territorial- and gender-based approach. **FM**

THE TRANSFORMATIVE **POWER OF COMMUNICATIONS**

In this article, we want to draw attention to communications as a powerful strategy that allows communities to engage in dialogue and advocacy according to their own realities.



TEXT AND
PHOTO:
**CARTOGRAFÍA
SUR**

Beyond being a tool, communications has become a vehicle of political action for young people in different contexts.



Communications can be considered a fundamental actor in conflict contexts, as well as in the construction of a culture of peace, if so desired. In Colombia, power structures maintain a monopoly on the media and communications, something which exacerbates the conflict and is also structured to promote the dissemination of disinformation and the extermination of the people's critical thinking.

The monopoly on information has been a violent strategy designed to circulate in only one direction, which has prominently positioned a communications style that is sexist, violent, segregating, and negating of otherness. The persecution of independent journalists, who have dared to show other perspectives on events, is evidence of this situation.

For the past several years, we in Cartografía Sur have been positioning communications, art, and culture as cornerstones of a transformative political project. Beyond being a tool, communications has become a vehicle of political action for young people in different contexts.

We believe in the transformative power of alternative communications as a way of making social realities visible, demonstrating cultural practices and knowledge, and keeping the collective memory of the people alive. To this end, we have worked to create context-based tools and methodologies that enable young people to access training in poster creation, radio production, mural making, stencils, screen printing, and audiovisual media.

These processes have enabled us to create job networks and critical discussion spaces with population groups, such as young people, women, and girls, with whom we have created spaces for reflecting on their cross-sectional realities, contexts of violence, impoverishment, and latent social, political, and armed conflict, which continue to be present in the territories.


While 2020 saw serious impacts at the social level, we have continued to create paths for alternative communications to provide opportunities for transformation and action. In 2021,

We believe in the transformative power of alternative communications as a way of making social realities visible, demonstrating cultural practices and knowledge, and keeping the collective memory of the people alive.

we have decided to focus our work on Warmita: Escuela de memoria y audiovisual ("Collective Memory and Audiovisual School"). Since 2011, we have been engaged in the creation of a training methodology adapted to different contexts and realities. This year, the training is intended for young people and women in: the village of Evitar in the department of Bolívar; the Nupa Community Council in the department of Nariño; the Wacoyo Reservation, in the municipality of Gaitán in the department of Meta; and Bogotá.

Each training begins with creating a cartography of the local reality, developed collectively through the participants' voices and experiences. The information that this first mapping activity provides enables reflection on the impact that the social, political, and armed conflict has on the lives of young people and women, as well as the different forms of violence that are carried out against their bodies and lives. Later, participants engage in a process of creating stories in dialogue with their communities, which are then used to create four documentary shorts that are screened in their territories.

This sort of training has had a major impact on communities for three reasons. First, because it enables young people and women to position themselves as political subjects in their territories. Second, because it facilitates reflection and creation rooted in their own realities. Third, because it enables dialogue with their communities and the life stories around them.

Finally, we wish to emphasize how alternative communications has become a powerful tool for action, through alternative media, social networks, and different community channels. This has led to counter-information processes that demonstrate the serious human rights violations that continue to be part of our country's reality. It has also brought us closer to that other Colombia that is sometimes forgotten and discriminated against. For this reason, at Cartografía Sur, our aim is to encourage organic, participatory, advocacy communication in peacebuilding. 



TEXT AND
PHOTOS:
**CORPORACIÓN
JURÍDICA YIRA
CASTRO**

and displacement, as well as through violent strategies, such as forced disappearance.

It worth emphasizing that the Final Accord explicitly established that “[i]n order to overcome poverty, **specific, differentiated measures will be implemented** to address the special needs of **rural women** and to **achieve effective equality of opportunity** between men and women,” (National Government and the FARC-EP, 2016, p. 24). It is therefore worthwhile to examine the advances made in the gender-based approach, specifically in terms of land ownership for rural women following the signing of the Final Accord. This could indicate the degree of progress made in realizing their territorial rights in the countryside.

We should first clarify that institutions—charged with recording data that enables analysis of progress in this area—have created confusion in their attempt to disguise the difficulties they face in making Chapter 1 of the Final Accord a reality. As a result, institutions such as the National Land Agency (ANT, for its initials in Spanish) and the Ministry of Agriculture state that 9,551 women benefited from land allocation and registration programs between 2018 and 2020; however, upon closer inspection, it is apparent that, of this number, only 4,825 correspond to allocations, the overwhelming majority of which are allocation petitions that were pending approval since before the implementation of the Final Accord, and

WOMEN AND LAND AFTER THE PEACE ACCORD

The Peace Accord’s gender-based measures represent a commitment to overcome the historical inequalities that women face in accessing land; however, the Accord requires stronger implementation efforts to make its promise a reality.

The *Final Agreement to End the Armed Conflict and Build a Stable and Lasting Peace* establishes a horizon of necessary political and social transformation to address some of the armed conflict’s causes and build a more democratic society; for this reason, it represented a beacon of hope for the country’s rural populations and its victims.

The NGO Corporación Jurídica Yira Castro (CJCY) has specifically

monitored the implementation of the first chapter of the Final Accord—which addresses Comprehensive Rural Reform—emphasizing the component dealing with access to land ownership and keeping in mind that this is one of the most important promises for Colombia’s rural population, given that one of the primary causes of the armed conflict and sociopolitical violence in the country has precisely been the unequal distribution of land, lack of legal guarantees for its ownership, and accumulation of large land masses through dispossession

4,357 correspond to the registration of private parcels of land already occupied by women, that is, they correspond to women who owned land but lacked the corresponding land deed.

This data set contains no information that would permit researchers to characterize the rural women who are registering ownership of their land or who are being allocated land, something which is vitally important to determine whether this public policy is actually prioritizing the most vulnerable rural women.

In accordance with the above, the ANT confirms that it has not advanced in the allocation of empty, unoccupied lots, which indicates that the only petitions it has addressed have been those for empty lots that women were already developing; that is, the entity only had to recognize the current occupants as the land's owners through allocation. There has not been progress in access to land for landless rural women.


According to the report presented by the Office of the Inspector General in January 2021 as part of monitoring the implementation of the Peace Accord, of the total number of individuals who benefited from registering their land during the 2017-2021 period, 65.2% of them were men, while only 31.6% were women. This data clearly demonstrates that if the ANT limits its registration strategy to land-ownership recognition for current occupants, it will reproduce the same gender gap in land ownership that has always existed. For this reason, it is urgently necessary for institutions to prioritize access to land for women who historically have not owned it, beyond simply registering the ownership of those who already have it.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing the importance of making the implementation outlined in Chapters 1 (Comprehensive

Rural Reform) and 4 (Solution to the Illicit Drug Problem) of the Final Accord a reality though the Registration for Substitution (“Formalizar para Sustituir”) program, which encourages illicit crop substitution through the allocation of land deeds. As of March 31, 2019, 1,546 land deeds had been awarded; of these, 728 were awarded to women (UN Women, 2019, p. 39).

It is necessary to continue insisting upon better progress in the implementation

It is evident that land ownership continues to be a right largely reserved for men.

of Chapters 1 and 4 of the Final Accord, in order to consolidate a public policy that enables access to land for the most vulnerable rural women and legal security over the land they own for women who already have plots. In the case of the latter, land deeds should also be accompanied by the creation of productive strategies that enable them to create a dignified life for themselves on the land. This would contribute to closing the gender gap in the countryside and indemnifying victims for the abuses many of them have suffered during the armed conflict. 

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Regional conference on participation pathways for women in the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition (SIVJRNR) and the gender-based approach.



WOMEN IN MONTES DE MARIA AND **THE PROMISE OF TERRITORIAL PEACE**

The Corporación Humanas, in alliance with Cooperaccio and with the support of the Agencia de Cooperación Catalana and FOKUS, facilitated the creation of the Montes de María Monitoring Committee, to monitor the Peace Accord's gender-based measures.



Montes de María
Monitoring Committee
for the Peace Accord's
gender-based measures.



TEXT AND
PHOTO:
**CORPORACIÓN
HUMANAS
COLOMBIA**

A group of women leaders—members of ten organizations in this sub-region—who research the degree of implementation of the Peace Accord’s gender-based measures in their territory, plan institutional advocacy activities, and work so that the promise of peace and the rights of women may become a daily reality for campesina, indigenous, and Afro-descendent women, among others.

In this process, these women have carefully studied the contents of the Peace Accord and discussed among themselves and with colleagues from other organizations the aspects of the Peace Accord that are most urgent for the region. They selected 25 gender-based measures (five for each chapter of the Accord) to monitor, including measures that address: access to rights such as education, healthcare, food, and participation for campesina women; security and protection for women leaders; and victims’ rights to truth, reparation, and non-repetition.

As part of this process, the report *Violencias contra las mujeres y derechos humanos en Montes de María* (“Violence against Women

and Human Rights in Montes de María”), which investigates gender-based violence and women’s access to rights in the 15 municipalities of Montes de María, was presented in Bogotá and Cartagena in August. This document, which the women leaders presented to public entities, academia, media outlets, and other women from Montes de María, serves as a point of departure or baseline for monitoring the implementation.

The report reveals that although this region is known for the particularly severe way the armed conflict manifested here, gender-based violence has also claimed many victims. Between 2018 and 2019, the National Institution of Legal Medicine and Forensic

They have studied the Peace Accord and discussed the aspects deemed most urgent for women in the region.

Sciences conducted 526 medical/legal exams due to family violence in municipalities of Montes de María; the percentage of women victims was between 78.6 and 82.9%. Sexual violence also disproportionately affected women and girls: in 2019, 88% of the exams conducted in the sub-region due to these crimes were done on women, while in 2018 that percentage was 90.5%. In both forms of violence, the primary aggressors were family members who were close to the victims,

including fathers, step-fathers, husbands, and grandfathers.

Regarding access to rights, the report demonstrates extremely high percentages of illiteracy and school absenteeism, above all in rural areas, with municipalities such as Chalán, San Onofre, or Córdoba topping 40%. In terms of employment and healthcare, the outlook is not any better, since Montes de María is a sub-region with a rate of households employed in the informal economy above 90% and 12.8% of households without health insurance.

Based on this kind of information, and with the knowledge they have about their rights, women leaders have begun to request information from the entities tasked with implementing the gender-based measures in this territory. With Corporación Humanas’ support, they received training in developing indicators and each person wrote *derechos de petición* (legal requests made to authorities and agencies for action or information) to receive the information they need.

To date, this process has allowed women leaders to acquire new knowledge, strengthen their organizational processes, consolidate advocacy strategies, and establish connections with other women human rights defenders in Montes de María. In this way, they not only address the implementation of the Peace Accord’s gender-based measures, but also work to build what has been called territorial peace. **FM**

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA

Bias-motivated violence against LGBT individuals has been made visible, which has contributed to building an inclusive peace.



TEXT AND
PHOTO:
**COLOMBIA
DIVERSA**

“

Let the abuse end, leave us alone, let us live our sexuality freely,” sings Nurys Angulo, a *cantaora*¹ from Tumaco,

one of the many resilient women who have overcome the heartbreaking violence of the armed conflict through art. These words represent the longing of many people who have had to hide, flee, or live in fear, resign or reject who they are because they are seen as different: because they do not love, desire, or express themselves according to what society deems “normal.”

With the aim of contributing to building an inclusive peace, Colombia Diversa,

along with FOKUS, has documented, analyzed, and shone a light on the specific motivations, dynamics, and impacts which the violence has had against LGBT individuals in the armed conflict. This has been achieved through presenting the hypothesis that bias-motivated crime is a manifestation of what the law recognizes as bias-motivated violence. Gómez (2008) has defined bias as the rationalization of a

“Let the abuse end, leave us alone, let us live our sexuality freely,” sings Nurys Angulo, a *cantaora* from Tumaco

perception (usually negative) of a person or thing that is different. This allows for an explanation of the political nature of violence against LGBT individuals, shaped by the normative canons of sexuality and gender, according to which diverse sexual orientations or identities/gender expressions represent something undesirable that ought to be corrected or eliminated.

We have been able to demonstrate the existence of regimes that support hostile actions against dissident expressions that challenge obligatory heterosexuality and cisnormativity and consequently, that bias-motivated violence against LGBT individuals has been neither isolated nor occasional, but rather has been motivated by at least one of the following aims: instrumental or symbolic. In the case of an instrumental aim, the gaze of the victimizer attributes certain characteristics to the victims, which make them appear more vulnerable or favorable to the victimizer’s ends. This consideration of the vulnerability of the victim is assimilated to the idea that, because the person is subordinated, they are easier to abuse,

since there will be no consequences. In the case of a symbolic objective, the perpetrator chooses a victim in order to send a message of domination/subordination or of exclusion. This occurs because the victimizer considers the victim to be representative of the collectivity or group to which the victimizer assumes they belong, and with respect to which the perpetrator feels rejection.

¹ A traditional singer from the region whose music accompanies significant life events, such as births and deaths, as well as cleansing rituals.

Many people have had to hide, flee, live in fear, or resign or reject who they are because they are seen as different.

At the same time, it has been demonstrated that bias-motivated violence is instrumentalized in one of two ways: the first is hierarchical, the second is exclusionary. Hierarchical instrumentalization consists of employing the act of violence to signal the subalternity of the victim within the social and cultural context wherein the conduct occurs. This is often the case when the goal is instrumental, since the perpetrator takes advantage of the victim's vulnerability, or when the victimizer reminds the victim of their place within society, making explicit the framing of the LGBT individual within a life of solitude and indictment. Exclusionary instrumentalization, on the other hand, refers to a radical logic of elimination of the subject marked as undesirable, or the elimination of the undesirable and modifiable part of them since, for the perpetrator, there exists an absolute incompatibility between what is considered adequate and what the victim represents. In this scenario, acts of violence are responses to a symbolic objective, as they are aimed at depriving the victim of the possibility of inhabiting a certain social environment. With regard to its effects, bias-motivated violence is directed toward what these individuals represent, since the perpetrator considers the individual to be representative of the group with which they associate, transmitting a symbolic message of social rejection toward LGBT individuals and generating high levels of social and legal impunity.

Specifically, this work has come into being through the translation of the



theory of bias-motivated violence into legal language via the legal framework of bias-motivated crime, which has enabled the discovery of a receptive space within the legal system for demands for justice against discrimination. Thus, this crime is defined as harassment of a group or collective with its own identity, via any one of a series of motives recognized as unacceptable in international law, including gender-based motivation (RS-ICC, art. 7.1.h). These legal parameters are understood from a critical perspective that recognizes that, although gender,

sex, and desire are different categories, they are related in such a way that obligatory heterosexuality and cisnormativity are part of the cultural and social construction of what it means to be a man or a woman. As a result, this work has enabled the recognition of the profound influence that bias as a system has had on the armed conflict. ^{FM}

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MAKING GENDER EQUALITY A REALITY IN TIMES OF CRISIS

In collaboration with member and partner organizations from East Africa and South America, FOKUS seeks to make gender equality a reality. To achieve this goal, the organization works on several essential issues.



TEXT: FOKUS
EN NORUEGA
PHOTO:
SANDRA
SEBASTIÁN



FOKUS aspires to create a world based on equality in which the rights of women are guaranteed and all forms of discrimination are eliminated. Gender equality and the full realization of the human rights of women and girls continue to experience progress in important areas, but more is needed. In this article, we offer an analysis of the state of global problems surrounding the thematic areas that guide FOKUS's work and we propose measures that, broadly speaking, FOKUS considers necessary to address these obstacles.

The pandemic has caused a drastic increase in violence against women and girls, particularly in intimate

and close relationships. While initial closures caused an increase in violence against women (including violence in its most extreme form: femicide), countries are now facing a new surge in this problem. This is a consequence of men's perception of losing control over their partners. These trends constitute a shadow pandemic that has not received the

Human trafficking and sexual exploitation have increased as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

necessary attention and resources from politicians throughout the world. Human trafficking and sexual exploitation have increased as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, along with spaces where these activities can pass unnoticed. Harassment, exploitation, and abuses have become a generalized problem in online platforms, including social networks, where women and girls are most affected.

At the same time, the pandemic has also caused a significant increase in digital participation and the use of digital platforms. This can create obstacles to the economic participation of women and girls with respect to work opportunities and access to information, as this population tends to have less access to internet or cell phones than men. This can be especially prejudicial in conflict and post-conflict contexts, where protecting and strengthening the participation, influence, and leadership of women is essential to building a lasting peace.

Women's economic participation and rights are fundamental to sustainable development, especially in times of crisis. Women's work is largely related to the informal sector, which leaves many of them without a safety net or formal rights. Likewise, the fact that care work is unpaid complicates or impedes their participation in formal employment. Climate change, for its part, represents another challenge to making the economic rights of women as producers, workers, and community members a reality.



Climate adaptation and policies often do not consider gender, while the available data demonstrates that the effects of climate change are not gender neutral. In addition to producing other consequences, this affects women who work in agriculture and in places where natural disasters occur, since women and girls are more affected by climate change and natural disasters than men.

The sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls have been in danger for a long time. While we see progress in some places, such as Mexico, we also see serious set-backs, such as those in the United States and Poland, among others. Throughout the world, the pandemic has been

The effects of climate change are not gender neutral.

utilized as an excuse to deny women access to abortion services, justifying this violation of their rights with the argument that it is not considered an essential health service. Attempts to toughen legislation and reduce funding for contraceptives and abortion largely reduce the right of women and girls to make decisions about their own bodies to a question of class and poverty.

Freedom and participation are fundamental elements of FOKUS's vision of how to systematically address

these issues. Gender inequality and discrimination are the result of unequal power structures, rooted in social and cultural norms that ought to be questioned. FOKUS adopts a development perspective based on human rights, which means, on the one hand, strengthening the abilities of governments to enforce the rights of women and girls, and on the other, improving knowledge about their rights as well as providing training to ensure that these rights are respected. It also means paying special attention to how the diverse forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate one another; for this reason supporting marginalized women and girls is a priority in development work. ^{FM}



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