Amazonian visions of Visión Amazonía: Indigenous Peoples' perspectives on a forest conservation and climate programme in the Colombian Amazon

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Abstract Although Indigenous Peoples' rights to own, control and manage their lands and territories are well established under international law, Indigenous Peoples affected by forest conservation and climate protection programmes continue to denounce interventions that fail to uphold their rights. This article focuses on the internationally funded Visión Amazonía REDD Early Movers programme in the Colombian Amazon. Drawing on observations and critiques by Indigenous rightsholders in the Middle Caquetá River and human rights insights from a legal complaint raised by one Indigenous community against the programme, we demonstrate the programme's inadequate protection of collective rights, especially relating to the fundamental right to free, prior and informed consent and the resulting inequitable benefit sharing. We focus on conflicting views between Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors over the definition of direct effects on Indigenous Peoples (which triggers the requirement for prior consultation and consent), the basis for inclusion of Indigenous Peoples as programme beneficiaries, and the role accorded to Indigenous science in such programmes. Notions of permission and consent in the customary law and economic practices of the concerned Indigenous Peoples are central to the conviviality and reproduction of human and non-human societies within their territories. To ensure more accountable and sustainable international environmental finance and conservation interventions, and to ensure respect for Indigenous Peoples' self-determination and territorial and cultural rights, we recommend that these initiatives adopt human rights-based, pluri-legal and intercultural approaches centring on the right to free, prior and informed consent as a structuring principle. Additionally, we call for more robust measures in forest and climate protection programmes, to recognize and respect customary law, collective property, traditional livelihoods and Indigenous science.

Keywords Carbon finance, Colombian Amazon, customary law, free, prior and informed consent, nature-based solutions, pluri-legality, REDD+, territorial rights

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Introduction

For us right now the current boom in programmes being renamed as 'nature-based solutions' risks more colonization of our territories and further discrimination and marginalization like we suffered during the times of the *cauchería* (natural rubber extraction), church missions, international trade in animal skins, the gold rush and drug trafficking. Now it is the 'green economy' coming down on us … (Hernando Castro, presentation to the Royal Anthropological Institute's *Anthropology and Conservation* Conference, 25 October 2021).

Since global finance and various stakeholders in the Global North began promoting nature-based solutions for climate protection, Indigenous Peoples and human rights advocates have highlighted the potential harmful impacts of these initiatives on rights, freedoms and livelihoods (Indigenous Environmental Network, 2009; Griffiths, 2010; van Dam, 2011). The proliferation of REDD+ initiatives (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) since the 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in 2009, has resulted in a plethora of Indigenous denunciations condemning defective application of the Cancún social safeguards specific to these types of forest conservation and climate interventions (UNFCCC, 2011), including in relation to the recognition and respect of customary tenure and free, prior and informed consent rights (Sunderlin et al., 2014; Berk & Lungungu, 2020; CEPKA, 2021). Most recently, Indigenous organizations have stated that the rules for international funding for climate and forest protection under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement adopted at the 26th Conference of the Parties in Glasgow in 2021 do not contain adequate safeguards for the rights of Indigenous Peoples in accordance with international human rights law (Cultural Survival, 2021).

The quote above by an Indigenous leader of the Nipodimaki (Uitoto) people in the Colombian Amazon

and co-author of this article (HCS) is taken from a conference presentation focusing on the flawed application of safeguards for Indigenous rights in an ongoing climate and forest intervention known as the Visión Amazonía REDD Early Movers programme. Inaugurated in 2015 and ongoing in 2023, it is funded by the UK, Germany and Norway under a mechanism of payment for verified emission reductions and aims to create a new model of sustainable development for the Colombian Amazon based on low deforestation and low-carbon activities. It includes a component of environmental governance with Indigenous Peoples, a theme that often figures in the public reports and communications from the programme, which contain impressive numbers regarding Indigenous beneficiaries and territorial coverage as well as striking images of Indigenous participants. However, these numbers and images obscure three key defects in this initiative. Firstly, although their territories and forest resources were subsumed under the carbon inventory of the programme, Visión Amazonía was designed and implemented without the free, prior and informed consent of affected Indigenous Peoples. Secondly, although more than half of the budget of Visión Amazonía is based on resources owned by Indigenous Peoples, because the programme operates on a stock and flow principle of benefit distribution, their gross share amounts to only 22% of the total budget, and net benefits are lower still. Thirdly, Indigenous rightsholders and representatives see the initiative's design as incompatible with their own science of territorial care and management, which has maintained healthy and intact Amazonian forests in their territories for millennia.

These shortcomings form the core of Indigenous Amazonian misgivings about Visión Amazonía and similar, often related, conservation programmes active in the region, especially critiques articulated by representatives of the Pɵɵsiɵhɵ (Andoque) and Nɨpodɨmakɨ (Uitoto) Peoples who own and occupy forest territories along the Middle Caquetá River, who define themselves as the People of the Centre. These critiques correspond to three components of environmental justice: (1) justice as recognition (the recognition of property rights and other substantive rights and the diversity of actors and rightsholders), (2) procedural justice (participation, representation and decision-making in projects, programmes and policies) and (3) distributional justice (the equitable distribution of burdens, responsibilities, benefits and opportunities; e.g. Schlosberg, 2007). Scholars have argued for interdependencies between these three components (Schlosberg, 2007). We also believe these components are interconnected, and here we emphasize that the human right to free, prior and informed consent spans all three components. We find the programme's omission to seek and obtain the affected peoples' free, prior and informed consent stems from and in turn results in recognitional, procedural and distributional injustices. This finding is consistent with the position of those members and representatives of the People of the Centre who in 2018 filed a legal complaint against Visión Amazonía for its failure to seek prior consultation and free, prior and informed consent. It also acknowledges two central tenets of the customary law and cosmology of the affected Indigenous Peoples, namely that the autonomy of human as well as non-human beings must be respected and permission must be sought from powerful guardian spirits in their territory prior to any intervention affecting them or their people (i.e. the flora and fauna).

Here we explore this legal complaint through a combination of human rights analysis, anthropological insights and, most importantly, Indigenous perspectives. Our analysis shows differences between the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous actors as to what constitutes effective rights recognition and REDD+ safeguard compliance in the design and implementation of such programmes. These differences are based on the diverging views of the two sides on the identification and definition of the potential risks and impacts of a REDD+ programme on Indigenous Peoples and their territories, on the basis for deciding Indigenous Peoples' share of the benefits, and on the role such interventions should ascribe to Indigenous science and practices for territorial care and management. Because of the rise in internationally funded climate protection and forest conservation programmes and interventions affecting Indigenous Peoples and territories, the findings from this case study are relevant for contexts beyond Colombia and the Amazon. Based on our analysis we advance recommendations for ways to apply a human rights-based, pluri-legal and intercultural approach in the design, implementation, benefit sharing and evaluation of such programmes and interventions. We maintain that robust and culturally appropriate guarantees for the rights to prior consultation and free, prior and informed consent are necessary to achieve not only rights recognition and empowerment of Indigenous autonomy but also effectiveness of environmental interventions.

The next two sections provide background on Visión Amazonía and the People of the Centre, the Indigenous Peoples whose members challenged this programme. We then present the conceptual framework of this paper, noting key components of environmental justice and respect for the human rights of Indigenous Peoples, especially the right to free, prior and informed consent and the concerned Indigenous Peoples' practice of requesting permission also from non-human beings in their territories. We then focus on the main critiques of Visión Amazonía from the People of the Centre, addressing the failures of the programme to ensure: (1) effective engagement of Indigenous People in its design and implementation and respect for their right to free, prior and informed consent, (2) fair and equitable benefit sharing, and (3) a meaningful role for Indigenous knowledge. This is followed by our recommendations for

Visión Amazonía and similar initiatives affecting the territories of Indigenous Peoples in the Amazon and beyond. In the concluding section, Indigenous co-author HCS comments on the experience of his people with this and similar initiatives and calls for deep changes in the design and implementation of national and global environmental actions.

Visión Amazonía REDD Early Movers

Visión Amazonía REDD Early Movers constitutes the Amazon component of the national REDD+ strategy of Colombia (Minambiente, 2015, 2018). Launched in 2015 with the objective of achieving net-zero deforestation in the Amazon by 2020, during its first phase (2016–2020) Visión Amazonía reportedly provided payments and funding totalling USD 87.3 million for emission reductions during 2013–2017 based on a worth of USD 5/tonne CO_2 equivalent (Mancala Consultores, 2020, p. 48). In 2019 the donor countries pledged an additional USD 366 million for Colombian plans to reduce deforestation by 21% by 2022 and by 50% by 2025 (Moloney, 2019).

Visión Amazonía claims to promote a new low-carbon model of sustainable development via five components. The first is strengthening forest governance (Pillar 1), which supports forest monitoring and law enforcement by state environmental authorities and links to the Heart of the Amazon Project of the Global Environmental Facility and World Bank, centred on the expansion of Chiribiquete National Park and strengthening environmental governance in the buffer zone of the Park, including in neighbouring Indigenous territories. The second component is sustainable intersectoral planning (Pillar 2), which includes the development, execution and strengthening of agreements with private-sector actors for sustainability in productive sectors. The third component is agro-environmental development (Pillar 3), which involves productive alliances with and providing support to peasant farmers and cattle ranchers for deforestation-free supply chains (Minambiente, 2016). The fourth component is environmental governance with Indigenous People (Pillar 4; hereafter, 'Indigenous Pillar'), on which we elaborate below. Finally, the fifth component is enabling conditions (Pillar 5), a transversal pillar that includes, inter alia, forest inventories and deforestation monitoring in support of the payment for results system of Visión Amazonía.

The Indigenous Pillar seeks to strengthen the forest governance capacities of Indigenous Peoples through subgrants for projects presented by Indigenous organizations, under five categories: (1) territory, including legal security for land rights and support for Indigenous REDD+, (2) self-government, including support for life planning and training in consultation, and free, prior and informed consent, (3) economy and production, including actions supporting food security and ecologically sustainable economic activities, (4) empowerment of Indigenous women, and (5) cross-cutting elements, including specific projects to strengthen Indigenous languages and knowledge (Minambiente, 2017a). Indigenous Peoples are invited to access the benefits of this pillar through an annual call for project proposals. By December 2021, Visión Amazonía had financed 139 Indigenous projects with funds totalling c. USD 15.3 million (Minambiente, 2021). Although several key results indicators for measuring the impact of this pillar were adopted in the planning documents for Visión Amazonía, they are not referred to in the mid-term evaluation of the programme (Minambiente, 2016). Information is also lacking on protected area and conservation impacts, and no independent evaluation of the Heart of the Amazon project, which is co-financed by Visión Amazonía and affects Indigenous Peoples, has been conducted (P. Zhou, pers. comm., 2021).

The Indigenous Pillar was developed in 2016–2017 through consultations between the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (hereafter, the Ministry), non-Indigenous regional policymakers and the Organization of the Indigenous Peoples of the Colombian Amazon. Whereas the latter entity is an overarching regional Indigenous organization enjoying legal status as a legitimate body representing Indigenous Peoples who are the landholders of their respective territories, it does not itself hold rights over any individual Indigenous territory and thus cannot make decisions that directly affect these territories. Grassroots Indigenous organizations were later informed of an already consolidated programme through participative workshops in regional centres. This approach to participation was developed by the Ministry, the donor countries and other stakeholders within Colombia to avoid a full macro-Amazonian regional prior consultation process, which was considered impracticable for financial and logistical reasons (KfW et al., 2016; Mancala Consultores, 2020, p. 60).

The People of the Centre

This critical review of Visión Amazonía REDD Early Movers is focused on the experiences and perspectives of Nɨpodɨmakɨ (Uitoto), Pɵɵsiɵhɵ (Andoque), Féénemɨnaa (Muinane) and Nonuya peoples inhabiting the Middle Caquetá region in Colombia, who number c. 3,080 people occupying six Indigenous reserves and ancestral territories extending over an area of c. 2 million ha (Fig. 1). Along with neighbouring peoples in the Caquetá–Putumayo interfluve, they identify themselves as the People of the Centre. These peoples share common origins, customary laws and cultural practices. Their livelihoods are based on rotational

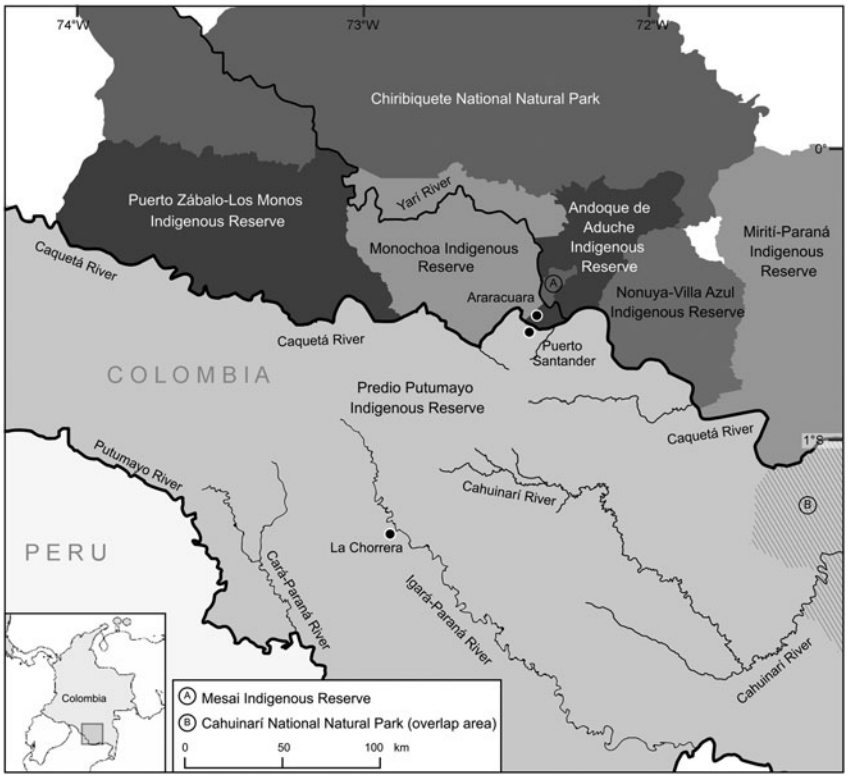

FIG. 1 Indigenous Reserves and National Parks in the Middle Caquetá, Colombia. This map is for indicative and illustrative purposes only. It may not be interpreted nor used to define, assert or deny territorial rights, nor to identify traditional territorial jurisdictions relating to any of the named Indigenous Peoples shown inhabiting these territories and other lands otherwise traditionally owned, occupied and used.

farming, fishing, hunting and gathering and are complemented by participation in the cash economy.

The People of the Centre also share the premise that underneath their non-human bodies, animals, plants, spirits and other non-human entities possess a human-like subjectivity that they retain from the times of origin. Similarly, the ancestral territory (*nagɨma* in Nɨpode, *pĩñõifɵsi* in Andoque) is seen as a person endowed with agency that nourishes human and non-human beings, whose intricate interrelations keep the territory alive and life-giving (Echeverri, 2005; Karadimas, 2013; Román et al., 2020). The territorial origin shared by the human and non-human beings is referred to as the law of origin decreed by the Creator, which stipulates proper exchanges and other relations between them. The forces of origin are contained in *rapue* (in Nɨpode) and *yohafisé* (in Andoque), polyvalent terms denoting science, word, advice, ethical behaviour and, for the Nɨpodemakɨ, ceremonial dance (Echeverri, 2022). The dance ceremonies practiced by these peoples are geared towards social reproduction, collective healing and conviviality between human and non-human communities (Gasché, 1984; Griffiths, 1998; Londoño Sulkin, 2012).

The People of the Centre also share a history of forced labour, displacement, genocide and other gross human rights abuses perpetrated by the Anglo-Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company (Casa Arana) in the early 20th century. The operations of this transnational company decimated the Indigenous population from an estimated 46,000 in 1908 to a few thousand in the 1930s, when the survivors started a still ongoing process of demographic and cultural recuperation (Pineda Camacho, 2000; Andoke, 2011). Alongside an Indigenous governance system operating through a network of ceremonial dance houses and clan territories, since the 1980s traditional authorities have also been associated through collective representative organizations, including the Regional Indigenous Council of Middle Amazonas (hereafter Regional Indigenous Council), whose main objective is to defend their constitutional and international rights and to struggle for the formation and consolidation of Indigenous territorial entities. Some of the earliest portions of territory legally assigned to the People of the Centre were lands along the Caquetá River that were officially declared *reservas indígenas* in 1975 (meaning they were reserved for Indigenous use) after the dissolution of the Araracuara Penal Colony that had owned these lands previously. These reserved areas were established in response to struggles by Indigenous leaders and allied activists to assert land and territorial rights (Useche Losada, 1994, p. 174). In 1988, the same *reservas* were upgraded to *resguardos*: Indigenous reserves owned collectively by their respective communities. In the same year, the state created the Indigenous Reserve Predio-Putumayo (Resguardo Predio Putumayo) south of the Caquetá on lands owned previously by the Anglo-Peruvian Rubber Company under national laws. The Colombian Caja Agraria bank, which had bought these lands from the Company in 1939 after the expulsion of the latter from

Colombian territory, had various development plans for the property, but both vocal Indigenous leaders and assertive traditional authorities of the People of the Centre, supported by priests and activists, convinced the President of Colombia to buy the lands and provide the Indigenous Peoples with legal title to them as a single Indigenous *resguardo* (Echeverri, 2022, pp. 89–90). The large Indigenous reserve, totalling 5,869,447 hectares, was declared through Resolution 030/1988, but this Resolution left delimitation of the traditional jurisdictions of each Indigenous People as a future task. Such internal delimitation remains pending in 2023, although the Andoque, Muinane and Nɨpodɨmakɨ Peoples have advanced some tenure mapping of traditional territories. This process is ongoing but incomplete, partly because of a lack of adequate resources (e.g. Consejo de Ancianos Féénemɨnaa, 2017).

Legal and conceptual framework

The critical analysis of Visión Amazonía presented below is grounded in key principles of international law recognizing that Indigenous Peoples are vested with substantive rights to self-determination, territory, culture and collective property, and with the associated autonomous decision-making right to free, prior and informed consent as codified in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and related international human rights instruments (Doyle, 2014, 2022). These standards are binding on states and intergovernmental agencies, which are obliged to ensure that environmental policies and interventions, including REDD+ programmes, uphold the territorial rights of Indigenous Peoples and their free, prior and informed consent (MacKay, 2009). These obligations are embedded directly and indirectly in the REDD+ Cancún safeguards adopted by States-Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The prior consent and other rights standards applicable to Indigenous Peoples similarly have been adopted by UN agencies funding national REDD+ strategies (UN-REDD, 2013).

Critiques of Visión Amazonía by the People of the Centre echo the struggles of other Indigenous Peoples worldwide to secure three dimensions of environmental justice: recognitional justice, which requires respect and recognition of the identities and related rights of Indigenous Peoples, including rights to self-determination, territory and non-discrimination; procedural justice, which concerns effective participation and adequate representation in decision-making processes in projects, programmes or policies; and distributional justice, which concerns the distribution of the positive and negative effects of a project, programme or policy amongst different groups and individuals (Inturias et al., 2016, pp. 47–52). The right to free, prior and informed consent traverses these three dimensions. Its recognitional dimension reflects the duty to respect the legal entitlement of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination and to their lands, territories and resources by seeking their consent. The procedural dimension is embedded in the qualifiers free, prior and informed, which denote requirements for full and effective participation and respect for the collective decisions of traditional landowners before an intervention or external decision is implemented. The distributive dimension reflects ensuring more equal power balance negotiations, including negotiations over benefit sharing.

International law requires that free, prior and informed consent be given meaning and content in the specific context, lived reality and customary law of the concerned Indigenous Peoples, including their concepts and practices of territorial occupation, control and management (Doyle, 2014). The existence of the right to free, prior and informed consent in the customary law of the People of the Centre (albeit in a somewhat different guise) also accounts for the centrality of this right in our analysis. For the People of the Centre, territorial occupation and control are not confined to humans. Upon creating the territory, the Creator left in various sites of the territory guardian spirits or owners who attend to them, protect the beings living there and guarantee their reproduction. Through specific protocols referred to as *rapuedɨ jenikɨre jɨkanoga* in Nɨpode and *ɵtasé* in Andoque, people seek the permission of these owners to enter a site or benefit from its resources without harm. These owners are considered in many economic activities. Hunting in areas of animal reproduction is forbidden or restricted and hunting in general is restrained by local disease theories, according to which many illnesses and troubles derive from revenge by animals and owners for overhunting. Agroforestry practices are also coded in customary law as seeking the permission of these owners. Before clearing a swidden, people ask the permission of the site owners to clear the plot and promise to leave fruit trees for the benefit of the offspring of these spirits (namely animals) after several years. Consequently, people avoid clearing swiddens next to either headwaters or stream banks so as not to interfere with the water flow, or near salt licks or concentrations of wild fruit trees that nourish animals. In a manner that is highly adaptive to the rainforest, swiddens are left to fallow after 2–3 years, facilitating forest regeneration and increasing biodiversity (Schroder et al., 1987; Andoque & Castro, 2013).

Reflecting advanced ecological knowledge and practices, these procedures also amount to an Indigenous principle of free, prior and informed consent that is significantly more encompassing than non-Indigenous concepts. This is because under customary law, prior agreement for territorial interventions must be obtained not only from the human community but also from the territory and its non-human inhabitants. When denied such permission, Indigenous communities and individuals will avoid the land use or

other activity devised, revise past and present actions that could have caused negative reactions, and modify their future dispositions.

However, states have attempted to regulate the content of the right to free, prior and informed consent in ways that constrain the exercise of self-determined decisions in accordance with such customary law. The operational applications of international law and UN REDD+ safeguards are often subordinated to national interpretation and laws concerning the rights of Indigenous Peoples. In Colombia, although the national REDD+ strategy affirms that the Cancún safeguards and UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples apply to all of its planned REDD+ actions (Minambiente, 2018, pp. 276–277), the provisions of implementing plans give priority to the adherence to national laws, which are deemed the official safeguard standards (Camacho & Guerrero, 2017, pp. 10, 14; Camacho et al., 2017, p. 30). Although Colombia has ratified Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation and endorsed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, national legislation normally applies a lower standard of prior consultation in place of free, prior and informed consent. Until recently, national administrative regulations on prior consultation stipulated that Indigenous Peoples did not have a legal right to give or withhold consent for activities affecting their territories and way of life (Gómez-Rojas, 2010; Consejo del Estado 2022). In 2023, updating national operational rules for effective application of prior consultation and consent standards for Indigenous Peoples in Colombia (in accordance with guidance of the Constitutional Court and international human rights bodies), remains pending.

Methods and author contributions

The analysis presented here is based primarily on the personal experience and observations of the two Indigenous co-authors of this article (LAA and HCS), who have engaged in deliberations regarding Visión Amazonía REDD Early Movers and related programmes. Critical human rights-based analysis is grounded in a review of Colombian Constitutional Court Sentence T063/19 on the Andoque's appeal to state tutelage concerning the programme, and the formal responses of various state actors. Information is also drawn from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Aduche Reserve by EA in 2018–2019, unstructured and semi-structured interviews undertaken by the Forest Peoples Programme in 2020–2021, and a review of published documents by TFG, EA and EGS. We used triangulation between these sources and information from rightsholders. EA, TFG and HCS wrote the paper, with revision of English and Spanish versions by all co-authors. We do not claim this paper is an exhaustive or comprehensive evaluation of Visión Amazonía nor of its sub-projects and local benefits. Rather, the discussion is framed by the insights and experiences of members of the People of the Centre, although proposals for policy change and reform are applicable to the entire programme area and beyond.

Critiques of Visión Amazonía REDD Early Movers

The right to free, prior and informed consent and effective Indigenous participation

In April 2017, representatives of the Regional Indigenous Council received the final draft of the Indigenous Pillar document of Visión Amazonía, which articulated the scope, lines of action and procedures for project proposal and benefit sharing of the Pillar (hereafter, the guiding document). By that time, however, this document had been largely approved by a government-sponsored regional multi-stakeholder roundtable in March, and so it was adopted fully without major changes in May 2017. The guiding document was thus formulated in a long process in which the representatives of Regional Indigenous Council had had no opportunity to participate directly nor to exercise their right to free, prior and informed consent in relation to the programme or any of its components. Our discussion thus opens with the critiques from the People of the Centre of the neglect by Visión Amazonía to consult them and seek their free, prior and informed consent over this document and over the entire programme, and its failure to engage them directly as rightsholders and effective participants in the design of the programme.

In April 2017, the representatives of the Regional Indigenous Council and traditional leaders thus communicated their observations to the Ministry and to international donors (CRIMA, 2017b), identifying numerous gaps and deficiencies. These included insufficient details on safeguards for Indigenous Peoples, a lack of information on the possible impacts of Visión Amazonía, and funding inequities between Indigenous participants and the functionaries of the programme. Consequently, the Regional Indigenous Council and its traditional authorities urged the Ministry to postpone the finalization of the Indigenous Pillar to guarantee proper prior consultation and to ensure full revision of the Pillar and wider programme by the People of the Centre in their territories.

Dismissing these observations as 'obsolete for the current stage of the programme's construction' (STC-063/2019, 2019, p. 9), the Ministry proceeded to ratify the Indigenous Pillar in May 2017. Asserting their rights through judicial means, in October 2017 the governor of the Andoque de Aduche reserve Milciades Andoke Andoke, assisted by his son and co-author LAA, appealed for state tutelage in the name of the Andoque people at

the Administrative Court of Cundinamarca (the department in which Bogotá is located) in view of the violation of their fundamental collective rights secured in the Constitution and protected by international conventions ratified by Colombia. The Andoque claimed that the failure to consult them and obtain their free, prior and informed consent violated their fundamental rights to territorial integrity, to self-determination, to subsistence as an ethnically differentiated people, to ethnic and cultural diversity, to autonomy, to territorial governance and to proper process of full and effective participation. They argued that the entities that participated in the formulation of the Indigenous Pillar, even regional Indigenous organizations, are not valid legal subjects of prior consultation and free, prior and informed consent.

The appeal asserted that any governmental or non-governmental entity interested in an intervention in an Indigenous territory or that could affect it must consult the members of that particular Indigenous People through their legal representatives and traditional authorities in their own territory and seek their free, prior and informed consent. For that reason the workshops for the construction of the guiding document, with the participation of certain delegates of Amazonian peoples, could not replace prior consultation or free, prior and informed consent as they did not necessarily involve the traditional and legal authorities of the represented peoples and some affected groups did not participate: the workshops involved 54 of the 63 Indigenous Peoples in the region, with some peoples, such as the Andoque, not being represented at all (Minambiente, 2017b).

Apart from the obligation to consult them and ensure a free, prior and informed consent process, the Andoque contested that the confinement by Visión Amazonía of Indigenous participation to the Indigenous Pillar alone also limited their share of the benefits. By contrast, they asserted their legitimate rights to participate in all the phases of formulation and implementation of all components of the programme. The legal demand was based on the potential direct impact of Visión Amazonía on the Indigenous territory and the lives of its inhabitants, as the programme aspired to implement a new development model in the Amazon, which encompasses the territories of the Andoque and other Indigenous Peoples. Achieving such an end would probably involve the restructuring of an entire region and of its administration, governance, settlement patterns and economic activities, which could impact the territories and cultural, social and economic lives of Indigenous Peoples across the region.

The proceedings of the appeal reveal the differences between Indigenous Peoples and governmental and environmental actors regarding a national-level REDD+ project. Narrowing direct effect to projects or policies implemented exclusively in the Andoque territory or its surroundings, the appellees did not respond to the Court in terms of Indigenous rights as guaranteed by international norms. The Ministry denied the need to conduct prior consultation regarding the Indigenous Pillar because the Andoque had not presented any projects to the first and by then only call for proposals. Other governmental agencies claimed they were not carrying out projects in the Andoque territory or they were not taking part in the Indigenous Pillar.

In October 2017, the Administrative Court rejected the demands of the appeal, affirming that, as a national-level policy, REDD+ did not require consultation. Distinguishing the latter from Visión Amazonía, the Court declared that the programme would have required prior consultation should the Andoque have demonstrated concrete effects on their territory, which they had not. Nevertheless, in March 2018 the Constitutional Court chose this case as deserving further consideration.

Although the appellees adhered to their previous claims, the Court insisted that the ambition of Visión Amazonía to implement a new development logic in the Colombian Amazon required special attention to the Andoque because they are an ethnically distinct population at risk of extinction. Revising the formulation process of the guiding document, the Court discovered that the Indigenous participants in the participative construction workshops, including the Indigenous facilitators, had vehemently criticized Visión Amazonía, similarly to the Andoque. Indigenous participants complained that the staff from the programme took the workshops as referenda over a guiding document that they had drafted beforehand, and they insisted that such forums did not replace prior consultation and free, prior and informed consent in Indigenous territories. Like the Andoque, they contested the confinement of Indigenous participation to one ethnically defined pillar and objected to the conditioning of international payments on deforestation reduction instead of the maintenance of intact forests (see below); some concluded that Colombia had 'sold their forests'.

In February 2019, the Constitutional Court partially revoked the ruling of the lower court. Affirming that the right to prior consultation of the Andoque had been violated in the case of the Indigenous Pillar, it ordered the Ministry to consult them and formulate guidelines tailored to their needs and vision so that whatever project they wished to submit would not be constrained by a document they had not been privy to. However, although the Court argued that such projects with a high potential of affecting Indigenous Peoples require consultation, it denied this right in the other pillars, in which it only conceded the Andoque the right to effective participation. It resolved that such consultation should be realized in case of evidence that a measure taken in those pillars could affect the Andoque directly, in which case their free, prior and informed consent should be sought.

However, the Constitutional Court did not consider that such consent should be sought concerning two projects carried out in other pillars, although we argue such projects are particularly susceptible to affecting Indigenous Peoples and as such require a proper free, prior and informed consent process. The order of the Court referred to research activities in Indigenous territories, including those for the National Forest Inventory that were to be conducted under the Enabling Conditions Pillar by two governmental research institutions: the Amazonian Institute of Scientific Research and the Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies. The Court ordered these institutions merely to seek permission and consent from the Andoque authorities to carry out research in their territory but not necessarily through a full, prior and informed consultation procedure despite the possible impact this activity could have on governmental and non-governmental forest interventions, including those involving forest carbon stocks. In July–August 2021, the Amazonian Institute of Scientific Research inventoried two sample sites within the Andoque territory, for which they sought permission and consent from the Andoque authorities in April 2021 during an assembly of the Regional Indigenous Council. As this was not a proper process of prior consultation, the Institute merely informed the Andoque members of an already consolidated forest inventory activity without giving them the opportunity to modify or join it to guarantee their ancestral science would be reflected in its methodology or outcomes; the only Indigenous participation sought was hired manual labour. Nor did the Institute provide complete, impartial and culturally appropriate information about the possible implications of the intervention, one of these implications being the eventual pricing of their carbon stocks, which would affect future projects and policies. Such an extractive approach to scientific research widens the already large power gap between Indigenous Peoples and governmental and scientific entities in Colombia. This is a clear case in which projects carried out in pillars other than the Indigenous Pillar could also affect Indigenous Peoples directly. One of the Constitutional Court judges expressed her reservations about the decision not to order the realization of prior consultation in the case of two other projects for a regional-scale study subsumed under the Cross-sectorial Planning Pillar, arguing that studies concerning the territory of the Andoque could lead to policies being implemented that affect them negatively (STC-063/2019, 2019). By guaranteeing Indigenous participation in the entire programme the state could have avoided or at least minimized such potential discrimination and marginalization.

The consultation ordered by the Court was held in July 2019. As the Court did not order to seek consent from the Andoque for the entire programme, the consultation did not result in significant changes to Visión Amazonía REDD Early Movers, whose first phase of implementation was by then fully operating.

Concerns over property rights and benefit sharing

The Andoque participated in the second call for Indigenous proposals with two projects and the Regional Indigenous Council participated with one; members of the other reserves affiliated to the Council participated in the following round. Through this competitive process, the Indigenous rightsholders attempted to secure their share of the benefits of the Indigenous Pillar. However, not only had they not participated in determining the proportioning between the share from this pillar and the rest of the funds from Visión Amazonía, but their own economic contribution to the budget of the programme in the form of the carbon stocked in their forests was significantly higher than the benefits reserved for them. This section deals with the appropriation by Visión Amazonía of Amazonian carbon and the disproportion between the revenues of the programme from the territories and resources of Indigenous Peoples and the benefits that it allocated to them (or more precisely to those of them who would draft projects conforming to the predetermined principles and lines of action of the programme). Although missing from the original appeal, this reclamation was raised in the second stage of the legal process (STC-063/2019, 2019). This concern was often raised with the authors by People of the Centre in private conversations.

The funding from Visión Amazonía is based on payments for emission reductions from deforestation of Amazonian biomass during 2013–2017 (Mancala Consultores, 2020, p. 44). Approximately 56% of this biomass is located within the 194 Indigenous reserves of the 63 Indigenous Peoples of the Colombian Amazon. In other words, more than half of the budget of the programme is based on resources owned by Indigenous Peoples. This makes their contribution to the resource pool of the programme disproportionately greater than the budgetary share from the Indigenous Pillar of only 22%, amounting to de facto Indigenous land and resource expropriation. This disproportion is anchored in the compartmentalization of the programme into five pillars and the budgeting of each one according to a stock and flow model, all of which were already agreed upon by the Ministry and the Natural Patrimony Fund on the Colombian side and the German state-owned development bank (Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau), representing the donor countries (Minambiente, 2016, p. 64). In this model, 74% of the funds from Visión Amazonía are invested in activities that reduce emissions (flow) from deforestation and 26% of the funds are invested in activities aimed at the preservation of existing carbon stocks. As it is budgeted exclusively as a stock component, the Indigenous Pillar cannot receive more than 26% of the budget of the programme (Minambiente, 2020, p. 74). Furthermore, Visión Amazonía prohibits the use of its recorded emission reductions as carbon offsets in other schemes. On that basis, the Andoque claimed that by engaging the forest resources

of Indigenous Peoples without obtaining their prior consent, the programme impeded them from engaging in independent negotiations with other actors concerning potential carbon or benefits referring to these years.

This resource appropriation and unjust benefit distribution, which has also been documented in Guyana and Peru (Stabroek News, 2022; Valderrama Zevallos, 2022), echoes a long history of the usurpation of Indigenous territories and resources by colonizers. From the perspective of the People of the Centre, they specifically echo the rubber extraction (which was accompanied by dispossession and grave human rights abuses) of < 100 years ago (e.g. Castro Suárez et al., 2021). This historical harm rightly makes communities cautious when international traders and financiers seek profit from their forests. REDD+ projects can dispossess Indigenous communities of their forest resources, even though these resources are not extracted physically and removed from the ground (Brightman, 2019). Amongst other reasons, it was to avoid such harms and injustice that international organizations and courts created and adopted human rights and jurisprudence that require nation states to respect and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples (MacKay, 2020). However, some Indigenous leaders question the extent to which such international transactions that record their forest resources have duly respected legal protections for titled Indigenous territories as inalienable, imprescriptible and unmortgageable properties (STC-063/2019, 2019, p. 52).

The interrelated issues of carbon rights and unequal benefit distribution were not addressed by the two courts. Throughout the proceedings, the non-Indigenous actors (the two court judges and appellees) employed a discourse distinct from the one employed by the Indigenous rightsholders (the Andoque, members of the Regional Indigenous Council and participants in the Indigenous Pillar workshops). The former measured infringement on the rights of the Andoque by changes to their current situation, whereas the latter insisted their rights had been violated because they could not exercise their self-determination and collective property rights over their resources, including the carbon stocks they have conserved historically. The premise underpinning the non-Indigenous discourse and legal reasoning seems to be the notion of the ahistorical Indian whose life conditions remain intact unless outside influence is exercised. On their part, the Indigenous rightsholders expressed legitimate economic entitlements to participate in an equitable way in the formulation and implementation of and in the gains from a programme whose resources derive from forest carbon, of which they possess a large part. Although Andoque plaintiffs expressed satisfaction that the Court ruled in their favour, they still had concerns that wider issues had not been addressed. Their initial goal was not to debate the conditions under which specific Indigenous Peoples could participate in a national-level REDD+ programme, but rather to secure a key role for all Indigenous Peoples in its overall design.

An additional Indigenous critique is that international payments are conditioned on the reduction of emissions instead of rewarding the ongoing sustainable use and preservation of intact forests. Indigenous people in general criticize Visión Amazonía for assigning more resources to the Agro-environmental Pillar (36% of the total budget) than to the Indigenous Pillar (22%), especially because, by counterpoising deforestation in other parts of the Colombian Amazon, conservation in Indigenous reserves permitted Colombia to qualify as an Early Mover and, as such, to receive international funding (Mancala Consultores, 2020, p. 68). 'How come environmental projects always reward those who have cut trees, rather than us, who have been maintaining our forests alive?' is a common refrain amongst the People of the Centre when referring to the practice whereby environmental initiatives allocate larger budgetary shares to actors responsible for deforestation to create for them alternative economic activities, whilst Indigenous forest guardians receive a more limited share of overall budgets (Griffiths, 2010). The unequal stock and flow benefit distribution structure of the programme could be connected historically to the late inclusion of the conservation component in the REDD+ funding architecture, which was conceived initially to reduce deforestation (Pirard, 2013, pp. 90–91). It also reveals the bias underlying the elaboration of various environmental programmes, according to which nature is a given reality and humans are exogenous to the principles governing the creation and reproduction of their natural surroundings (Echeverri, 2005; Blaser, 2009). This contrasts with the science and practices of territorial management and care employed by People of the Centre, which have proved effective in keeping their forests intact for millennia. By contrast, the effectiveness of Visión Amazonía is yet to be proven.

Critiques of the effectiveness of Visión Amazonía

Confining Indigenous Peoples to a single, ethnically defined pillar is not only unjust and discriminatory but could also be ineffective. The People of the Centre question the effectiveness of the overall Visión Amazonía REDD Early Movers programme as they see Amazonian deforestation continuing unabated and the commercial farming frontier advancing ever closer to their territories (EIA, 2021). Although the development model that the programme aspires to might not decrease deforestation immediately, it is revealing that deforestation soared in the Colombian Amazon during 2015–2017 (Minambiente, 2020, p. 20) and that in 2020, the year in which zero deforestation had been pledged initially, the rate of forest loss increased by 11% from the previous year, which was higher than the national deforestation increase of 8% (IDEAM, 2021).

The effectiveness of the Indigenous Pillar is also uncertain. Although the main objective of this pillar was to enhance the conservation capacities of Indigenous Peoples, in the absence of an independent evaluation of this pillar it is difficult to assess whether it has achieved this objective or contributed to enhancing forest carbon stocks. Whilst lauding the Indigenous Pillar for achievements measured according to ill-defined criteria (Mancala Consultores, 2020, pp. 46–47, 155), the midterm report of the programme lists several of its shortcomings. Amongst these shortcomings are the hindrance of synergy between Indigenous projects for such a vast area, which is caused by the conventional methodology of calls for project proposals; the restriction of the scope and effective implementation of eligible micro-projects derived from their short duration; and the difficulties in participation without external accompaniment reported by Indigenous participants, which resulted in their dependence on non-Indigenous professionals for the implementation of such projects (Mancala Consultores, 2020, pp. 60–63).

From the perspective of the People of the Centre, much of the problem lies in suboptimal deployment of the resources of Visión Amazonía and deficient measures to target underlying deforestation drivers on the forest frontier (cf. Rodríguez-de-Francisco et al., 2021; Tebbutt et al., 2021). Crucially, they attribute the ineffectiveness of Visión Amazonía to its failure to recognize and empower Indigenous territorial governance and autonomy properly, claiming that the logic of this programme is at odds with Indigenous forms of environmental governance, sustainable forest use and management that are embedded in the day-to-day activities and beliefs of Indigenous Peoples. Therefore, they wish to reclaim a more active role in this and future forest and climate protection programmes to shape them in ways that are compatible with their own science of territorial care and management.

These Indigenous grievances resonate with critical perspectives of Indigenous Peoples in other parts of the Colombian Amazon regarding state-led environmental protection interventions, including initiatives claiming to respect Indigenous knowledge (Nassar et al., 2020; Torres & Verschoor, 2020). These studies stress that Indigenous Peoples see their knowledge as sustaining life, health, self-reliance and autonomy in their territories rather than being merely a means to protect flora and fauna and ecosystems (Nassar et al., 2020).

The knowledge incorporated in customary law and practices, as described above, has been accumulated and refined throughout generations, through direct experience and interactions with myriad beings and diverse habitats within the territories of the People of the Centre. Researchers have pointed out the incommensurability of Euro-American (or Western) and Indigenous (or traditional) knowledge: whereas the former is considered quantitative, analytical, objective, reductionist and literate, the latter is seen as qualitative, intuitive, subjective, relational, holistic and oral (e.g. Nadasdy, 1999). One aspect of the knowledge and the practices of territorial care and management of the People of the Centre from which Visión Amazonía could benefit is their holistic perspective and objectives. This is holism in at least two senses. Firstly, knowledge of the People of the Centre is based on a nuanced perception of the interrelations between the innumerable components of their ecosystems. Secondly, the practices of sustainable forest use and management in which this knowledge is embedded target both community and landscape. These practices aim to promote well-being and prosperity for the human and non-human beings inhabiting the territory rather than promote those of one at the expense of the other, and they are based on the idea that the same measures of respect and self-control that are required when exchanging with other human beings are also required when dealing with non-human beings. Arguably, this knowledge and these territorial care practices are rooted in the coformation of the human and non-human societies of the Amazon and the anthropogenesis of much of the forest (Roosevelt, 1991; Balée, 1994; Denevan, 2001; Erickson, 2008). Rather than the sum of objective observations of an external environment, the knowledge of Indigenous Peoples represents their knowledge regarding the processes of production and reproduction of such environments, processes in which their ancestors played an active part.

The complex interweaving of the human and non-human also implies that interventions planned and implemented without full respect for Indigenous rights and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples risk undermining the autonomy and capabilities of Indigenous Peoples to manage and care for their territories. Evidence shows that recognizing the territorial and resource rights of Indigenous Peoples and engaging them in conservation initiatives on equitable terms often result in more effective forest protection (Blackman et al., 2017; Baragwanath & Bayi, 2020; Dawson et al., 2021). Fair and effective conservation interventions in Indigenous territories thus require engaging Indigenous rightsholders, including elders and traditional knowledge holders, in the design and implementation of the entire intervention. Beyond human rights obligations, such engagement has significant potential to boost the rethinking of forest conservation objectives, means, scopes, timetables and evaluation methods in ways that those who are currently in charge of such interventions might not foresee. This could result in more effective measures to slow deforestation and sustain biodiversity.

Recommendations

The inequities and shortcomings discussed here call for a profound rethinking and reform of national and global conservation and climate protection interventions and finance.

Indigenous leaders and authors in other parts of the world have similarly condemned top-down conservation interventions and called for change so that national and international conservation fully respects Indigenous rights and governance (e.g. Brondizio & Le Tourneau, 2016; Artelle et al., 2019; Reed et al., 2020). In what follows we present recommendations to help international conservation actors and funders adopt and apply human rights-based, pluri-legal and intercultural approaches in their programmes and portfolios affecting Indigenous Peoples and their territories.

Firstly, we urge international conservation programmes and initiatives to take more assertive and proactive actions facilitating self-determination and governance rights guaranteed under international human rights law and codified in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Artelle et al., 2019, p. 7). Conservation organizations and state environmental bodies must expedite measures and processes to uphold the core right to free, prior and informed consent and abandon mere consultation or prior consent processes that rely on national- or regional-level Indigenous organizations as an endorsing mechanism for large-scale interventions affecting many Indigenous Peoples. Failure to take such actions will probably result in further Indigenous complaints and legal actions against conservation programmes, including REDD+ and global carbon offset schemes, which will undermine their legitimacy and challenge their viability in the eyes of the international community, donors and environmental justice organizations. Although it could be challenging for states to implement consultations for free, prior and informed consent in such large-scale conservation initiatives and programmes, they nevertheless have the legal obligation to do so. This means that sufficient time and resources should be allocated to such processes in the preparation of specific national- or regional-level initiatives and programmes. More generally, it also requires the establishment of mechanisms and processes for free, prior and informed consent in such macro-level interventions that would themselves be the result of consultations with Indigenous Peoples. The latter must be able to define how they wish to be consulted and how they will make and communicate their decisions, including decisions on giving consent, withholding it or attaching conditions to it.

Secondly, and in line with demands by Indigenous organizations in our study area and the wider Colombian Amazon (e.g. ACITAM et al., 2016; CRIMA, 2017a), we recommend that such interventions adopt pluri-legal approaches where different legal systems coexist within a national or subnational jurisdiction (Merry, 1988). Such approaches must enable recognition, respect and compliance with customary legal systems and laws of origin of the specific Indigenous Peoples whose territories they target. This recognition of the right to exercise customary law is essential for realizing the right to self-government and self-determination given that the governance institutions of Indigenous Peoples are grounded in their unique legal traditions codified in their own languages (Borrows, 2005; Richardson et al., 2009). The demand for pluri-legality is embedded in international law concerning the right to free, prior and informed consent, as this right acknowledges the autonomous nature of the legal systems that Indigenous Peoples practice within their territorial jurisdictions. Therefore, new conservation interventions (or new phases of existing ones) should empower Indigenous Peoples to develop their own protocols for free, prior and informed consent in their traditional territories in line with customary law and autonomous processes for decision-making. Next, framework principles and procedures for prior consent and consultation should be formulated at the programmatic level to respect these local Indigenous consent regulations (cf. Doyle et al., 2019). Rather than limiting Indigenous rights to national definitions and interpretations, we stress the obligation in international law for nation-states and international donors to adopt specific measures and modalities to ensure that interventions are in line with the customary laws of the Indigenous Peoples whose territories could be affected. As the development of these customary laws has been intermingled with the co-formation of human and non-human societies over generations and the laws show sensitivity to the ecosystems of each respective territory, we can expect that aligning interventions with Indigenous juridical systems will result in more effective protection and conservation.

Thirdly, we recommend that such interventions undergo independent Indigenous-led evaluations to learn lessons and propose new modalities and methodologies to uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Such evaluations must focus on legal, policy and governance reforms or special measures required to guarantee the necessary conditions for the exercise of the rights to free, prior and informed consent and effective participation. Such evaluations could be facilitated by a participatory judicial review of all forest, biodiversity conservation and climate initiatives in each country or forest region, including jurisdictional REDD+ programmes, assessing them against legal norms and jurisprudence on the human rights of Indigenous Peoples. These participatory reviews should give special attention to contested laws, legal uncertainties and areas for legislative and public policy change, with priority given to the reforms required to maximize the jurisdictional and juridical autonomy of Indigenous Peoples (e.g. Gómez, 2014).

Finally, we recommend that international environmental interventions and initiatives explore new funding and benefit-sharing models supporting Indigenous autonomy and sustainability. Such interventions should consider abandoning conventional flawed models of short-term micro-projects that are disconnected from the core needs

and aspirations of Indigenous Peoples. Instead, they should invest in long-term grassroots-led initiatives for autonomous self-government, the application of customary law, cultural heritage protection, sustainable livelihoods and the operation of Indigenous environmental authorities.

Concluding remarks by Indigenous co-author HCS (Nipodimaki People)

As an Indigenous rightsholder, I have not noticed any positive change since the first mention of the Visión Amazonía REDD Early Movers project in our territory 6 years ago. What I do see, however, is the chaos and problems this programme has generated, similarly to countless previous initiatives implemented in our territory by the State and conservation NGOs and that were not conceived from our lived reality. As with those initiatives, instead of benefitting from the funds from Visión Amazonía directly, Indigenous Peoples must count on the support of godfathering allied organizations, thereby perpetuating regional forms of clientelism and dependence on non-Indigenous agents. This aggravates the marginalization of Indigenous Peoples and communities that are not backed by NGOs or powerful functionaries and are thus excluded from the programme. As regards my people, the projects financed by Visión Amazonía have also created and deepened internal divisions and inequalities between clans, families and communities, without addressing our priorities.

All of this has happened because this initiative was devised elsewhere and was brought ready-made to our territory. Whatever project, programme or process that does not originate in our thinking and territories does not bring us any benefits but rather harms our right to self-determination. Because of ongoing neglect by the State and the material necessities imposed on us during a long history of oppression and exploitation, the people split between projects and environmental *patrones*, choosing the one that promises more short-term benefits and abandoning our collective causes. We were already trapped in such a situation during the rubber genocide, when foreign interests abused our human rights and ruined our governance systems, besieging us with suffering and destruction. We do not want to repeat this painful experience.

Our cultural and demographic recuperation process was achieved through the complementary healing process of our territories. For millennia we have managed to keep our forest alive and healthy through our traditional knowledge and our economic and agroforestry system, our governance and customs, our language and even our identities. Our existence is intertwined with our territory, and our cultural survival and dignified livelihoods are intertwined with the survival and dignity of the forest. Instead of instigating problems, dividing us and creating new needs and dependences, these initiatives should support us collectively, strengthening the identity, customs and institutions of each People and supporting us to meet our truly self-determined needs.

After a long political and judicial struggle we obtained recognition of our legitimate rights to own, manage and control our territories. But each such exploitative initiative reminds us that our struggle is not over. As Indigenous People we demand participation in the formulation of programmes and projects affecting us as equal partners and legitimate owners of our territories in line with international norms as well as our Indigenous law: our laws of origin, to which we demand intercultural respect. More encompassing than the legal definition of an Indigenous reserve, each Indigenous People's law of origin guides that respective People in how to act in internal affairs and in relation to their territory.

In the Colombian context this requires the establishment of solid regulation ensuring that forest conservation projects, including carbon initiatives, guarantee the rights of Indigenous Peoples. So far this has been regulated mostly for local communities, private farms and forest reserves, but not for Indigenous ancestral territories. Having defined the Colombian Amazon legally as an immense forest reserve, the State is offering it to donor countries as if it were its owner, disregarding our legitimacy as Indigenous Peoples and as the true owners. In an obfuscating manner the government signs carbon contracts with donor countries and gives carbon concessions to various private entities, which then formulate projects in our name, presenting them to us only once they have been elaborated; when problems arise neither the State nor these entities assume responsibility. Speaking with Indigenous leaders from other countries I have heard that their peoples find themselves in similar situations outside Colombia that are not much better. We insist that donor countries sign contracts with us directly as Indigenous governments and without subsuming our territories under any wider categories nor under environmental agreements without our knowledge and consent. We, the Indigenous Peoples, have struggled too long for recognition as a special subject of rights and constitutional protection to now be lumped together with non-Indigenous rightsholders, marginalizing our norms and distinctive conditions. Projects that are formulated for so-called local communities currently prioritize the necessities and economic patterns of estate owners and peasants rather than our own. This creates perverse incentives for further harmful exploitation of the forests that we, as Indigenous Peoples, have cared for over millennia.

We are still too often viewed as mere beneficiaries of environmental projects. When comparing the images of Indigenous participants and descriptions of projects in our territories found in the reports from Visión Amazonía with our everyday realities, we feel used. It is still as if we are the decorations in the programme's shop window. If we

reclaim our rights, we are stigmatized as obstacles to conservation and economic development. This is not true, and it is an insult to us. On the contrary, we seek cooperation and alliance with external entities and environmental organizations but under the condition that these include a true exchange and that they are done in ways that recognize us as equals and as legitimate owners and authorities of our forests and territories.

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Ethical standards Ethnographic fieldwork and field interviews were conducted with the consent of the relevant Indigenous authorities, and this research otherwise abided by the *Oryx* guidelines on ethical standards.

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