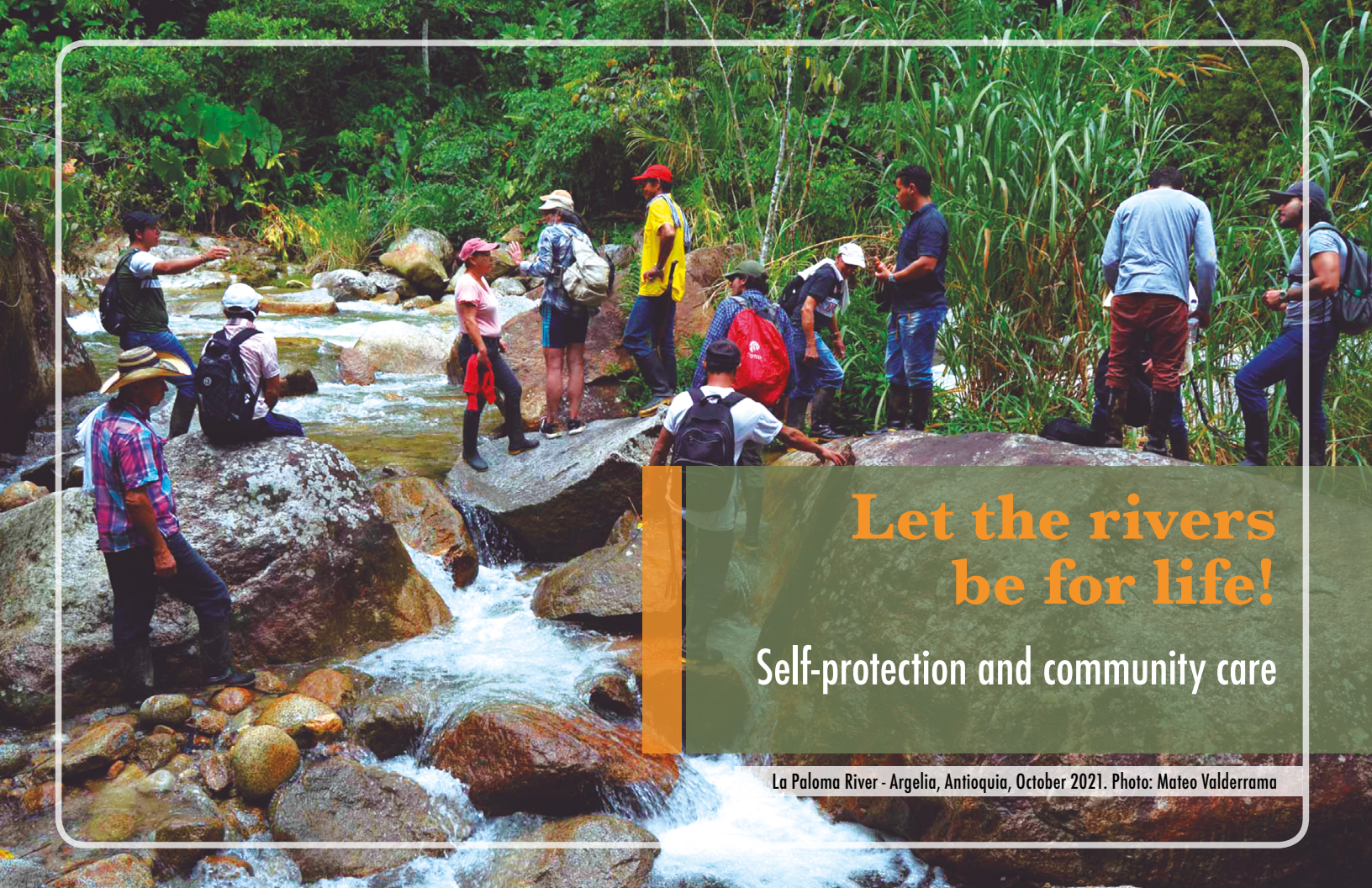


Let the rivers be for life!

Self-protection and community care

La Paloma River - Argelia, Antioquia, October 2021. Photo: Mateo Valderrama



Villeta Florida.
We do not want hydroelectric power plants.

Collective textile
Villeta Florida Village,
Argelia, Antioquia.

Peasant Association of Antioquia,
School of Nursing UdeA and
University of Aberystwyth.
2020.



Charco El Balseadero - Dormilón River, San Luis, July 2022. Photo: Jessica Restrepo

"The grandmothers told me that once upon a time
the ravines were large in torrents
That stories from the peoples
Reached homes in cities and villages
The grandmothers told me that once upon a time
In the East they did not see problems
That they defended the waters and the land
From people who wanted misery"

Adapted from the song La Piragua;
music workshop with children.

Municipality of San Francisco,
Antioquia, Colombia.
Peasant Association
of Antioquia.

2019.



Carnaval parade, Argelia, Antioquia, August 2022, Photo: Mateo Valderrama

Let the rivers be for life!

Self-protection and community care



Local bus, August 2022. Photo: Laura Jiménez Ospina

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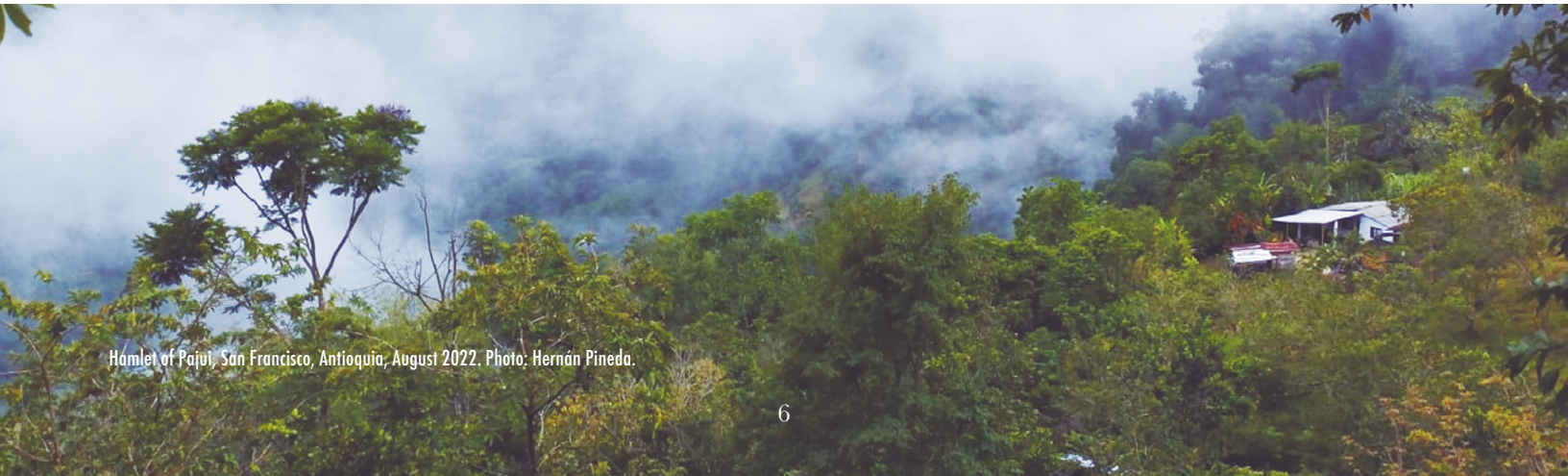
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“THIS IS WHERE WE STARTED”



This booklet stems from phase 1 of the research project *Water conflicts, violations, and forms of self-protection in Eastern Antioquia, Colombia.* It was conducted by the Peasant Association of Antioquia, the School of Nursing and the Institute of Regional Studies of the University of Antioquia, who are members of the Creating Safer Space Network, with the support of the Study Group on Political Ecology and Water Justice at the UPB of Medellín.

In April 2022, we started exploring the territorial defense and care processes developed by the social movements and communities of Eastern Antioquia since



Hamlet of Pajuí, San Francisco, Antioquia, August 2022. Photo: Hernán Pineda.

the 1960s. In particular, we studied the water conflicts over the rivers La Paloma (Argelia), Santo Domingo (San Francisco), and Dormilón (San Luis), which arose as a response to the construction of hydroelectric power projects. On this journey, we learned about impacts, risks, emotions, dreams, and collective resistances.

Through this booklet, we want to share our collaborative learning and raise awareness of the problems as well as the actions of care and protection that have been created in the everyday lives of these territories over time. We invite you to get to know the value of communities in the protection of and care for life and water, and to collectively reflect and act in order to create safer space for rivers and life.



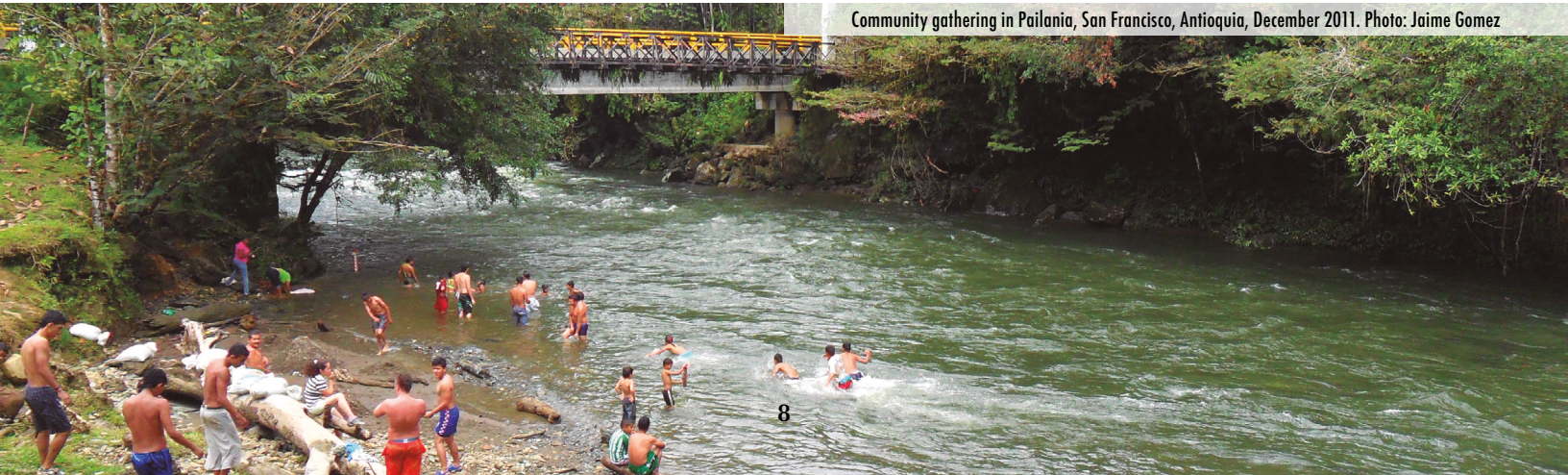
Dormilón River, San Luis, Antioquia, March 2023. Photo: Producciones el Retorno

"THE WORDS WE ARRIVED WITH AND THE WORDS WE FOUND"



Hydroelectric power station:

A hydroelectric power station is a place where electrical energy is generated from moving water. To do so, a very strong wall is built to stop the water flow and create a reservoir or dam. From there, canals lead the water through a generator that converts the energy of the water into electricity. The largest hydroelectric power station in Colombia is called Guavio. In Antioquia, there is Hidroituango, and in Eastern Antioquia there are 17 stations including Playas, San Carlos, Jaguas, Escuela de Minas, Calderas, San Miquel, Popal, Aures, and Peñol



Community gathering in Pailania, San Francisco, Antioquia, December 2011. Photo: Jaime Gomez

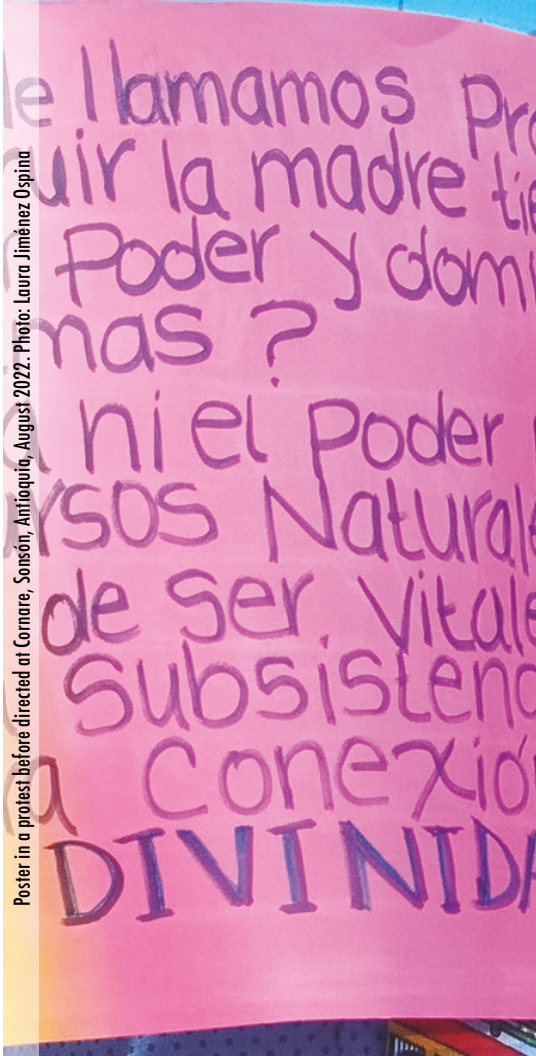
- Guatape. This makes Antioquia one of the regions with the highest hydroelectric power generation density in the country. The construction of hydroelectric power stations usually has considerable environmental, political, economic, cultural, and social impacts. Permits for their construction (licenses) are processed by the National Agency of Environmental Licenses (ANLA) or by Regional Autonomous Corporations (CAR).

Small Hydroelectric Station (SHS):

These systems generate energy from water flowing with less force; they are thus different from large hydroelectric stations, which need to dam large amounts of water. SHS are constructed "on the water's edge", that is, they use the permanent flow of water and its fall, but do not store water in large reservoirs. To capture the water, pipes or tunnels are installed to divert water from the spring or riverbed. This construction leaves a "dry riverbed" for several kilometers, to the point where the water is discharged again. "Dry riverbed" refers to the fact that only a small "ecological flow" is left, which, in theory, is expected to allow the ecosystem to survive biologically, but which ignores the cultural, landscape-related, recreational and social values of water. When these stations generate less than 10 megawatts, the government exempts them from paying fees to the community or any other taxes. Permits for their construction (licenses) are processed by the regional environmental authority. In the case of Eastern Antioquia, this duty rests with the Regional Autonomous Corporation for Negro and Nare Rivers (CORNARE).

Commons:

Commons are resources used by a community or group in common. They include, for instance, forests, water, air, collective use pastures, collective



Poster in a protest before directed at Cornare, Sonsón, Antioquia, August 2022. Photo: Laura Jiménez Ospina

easements or infrastructures, including those which are located on private land but made available for collective use, roads and passageways, community centres, and other elements essential to human survival. We use this term instead of natural resources, because the latter assumes that goods or assets coming from the land exist to satisfy market needs, enabling the creation of voracious exploitative relationships between men and nature. The commons approach, by contrast, promotes equitable access to what is necessary, fair, and just, and care for that which sustains us and future generations.

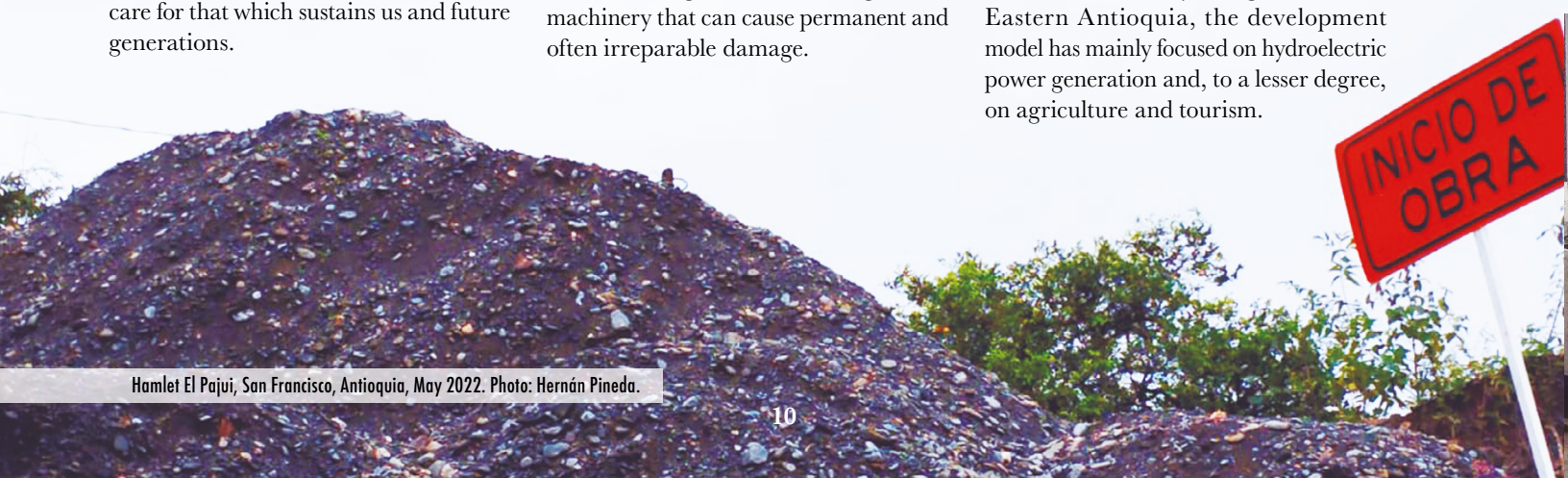
Extractivism:

Extractivism entails taking goods from nature (such as oil, wood, minerals, water, oxygen, etc.) and trading them through large companies. Some countries rich in natural resources use this model to grow their economies, even though this may cause problems such as conflicts over the control of these goods, wealth being concentrated in the hands of the few, and people forced to leave their lands. Environmentally, extrativism involves the use of large-scale technologies and machinery that can cause permanent and often irreparable damage.

Development model:

A development model is a long-term plan used by countries or regions to grow their economy and organize their resources to achieve specific goals. This includes meeting people's basic needs, reducing poverty, creating social protection systems, and improving the population´s well-being.

Models can focus on different economic activities such as natural resource extraction, industry, or agriculture. In Eastern Antioquia, the development model has mainly focused on hydroelectric power generation and, to a lesser degree, on agriculture and tourism.



Hamlet El Pajui, San Francisco, Antioquia, May 2022. Photo: Hernán Pineda.

Hydro-social conflict:

A conflict arises when two or more actors want different things and cannot agree on the same issue. In the socio environmental sphere, a hydro-social conflict occurs due to differences over how to use and distribute water. Hydroelectric power stations, aqueducts, tourism, and the private appropriation of water sources, among others, are some of the most common issues in hydro-social conflicts.

Unarmed civilian self-protection:

Generally, this denominates a set of strategies and principles for physical self-protection of civilians in the midst of violent contexts through unarmed methods. In our case, we decided to include the emotional dimension and the interdependent relationship between people and territory in the definition. Communities living in Eastern Antioquia have established ties with their lands that define their life projects, identities, and social meaning-making. Therefore, self-protection is not only linked to preserving their own physical integrity, but also to protecting and safeguarding these ways of life, and the emotions, memories, and collective practices attached to them.

Care:

Caring for our world means to go the extra mile to keep it safe and build it so that we can live in the best way possi-



Mural San Luis, Antioquia, February 2023. Photo: Producciones El Retorno.

ble; or putting it in Eastern Antioquia's terms, "making it a good vividero [place to live]". Care invites us to work collectively to build a network that sustains life for us and for future generations.

Solastalgia:

This term is used to describe the sadness, discomfort, and distress we feel when our natural environment drastically changes or is destroyed. This happens when people feel disconnected or separated from their land and the things that they are familiar with, such as the rivers.

Legal regulation of licensing processes:

Colombian law 99/1993 establishes that an environmental license is needed to carry out any project or construction that may damage the environment and the commons. It was created to prevent, mitigate, correct, compensate, and manage the negative effects a project may have on the environment.

Decree 1753/1994 set the requirements needed to obtain an environmental license. Subsequently, Decree-Law 2150/1950 simplified the process, integrating all the necessary permits, which materialized in the procedures established in Resolution 655/1996.

These standards state that, for a license application, an environmental impact study must be undertaken, and depending on the results, a decision to grant it or not is made. If the license is granted, it can be modified. After obtaining it, it can be transferred to other people.

It is important to note that these standards and authorities do not include any community consultation or participation processes about the project.



IMPACTS ON COMMUNITIES AND THEIR TERRITORIES



The map attached at the end of this booklet shows the state of the construction and licensing of the different SHS and micro-stations located in Eastern Antioquia. It also shows the reservoirs, rivers, and protected areas declared by CORNARE. The following tables summarise the research results on how these projects have impacted the rivers **La Paloma** (**Argelia**)**, Dormilón** (**San Luis**)**, and Santo Domingo** (**San Francisco**)**,** as well as the actions taken by the communities to address the threats and risks posed by these projects.



El Retiro Village, Cocorna, Antioquia, September 2022. Photo: Hernán Pineda.



Municipality of San Luis

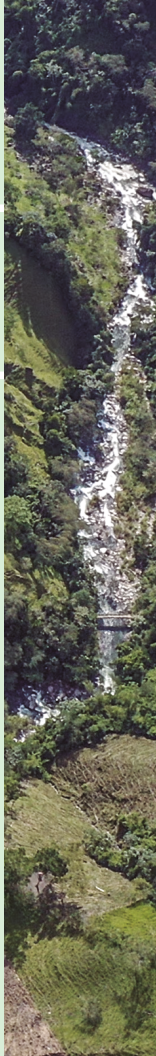
Dormilón River

State of licensing projects for power generation.

Concessions were declared expired.

What has been done?

In 2012, the inhabitants of San Luis saw how two machines moved toward the Dormilón River to build a hydroelectric power plant. At that time, a group of people who would later become vigias [watchers] of the Dormilón River, denounced the project's lack of community consultation and the threats the SHS posed for the river. The watchers were created as a defense process that included:
sending collectively constructed rights of petition, study groups to structure mobilization actions and understand the legal tools, marches, assemblies, digital platforms, media outreach, open town halls, and other mechanisms combined to show the discontent of San Luis' residents toward the hydroelectric project.
In 2015, after a march carried out by the watchers, CORNARE declared the expiration of the water concession for the project. Since then, the group has been working on other initiatives that seek to protect the Dormilón basin.
Since 2019, the Tierrap collective has been accompanying various actions in the company of the watchers of the Dormilón River.





How would it affect the community?

After the expiration of the concession was declared, the watchers have worked on denouncing other socio-environmental problems that occur in San Luis and proposed various solutions for them. Among these conflicts are: mass tourism, the construction of urban infrastructure near the river as a result of real estate expansion, mining concessions, privatization of village aqueducts and water catchment networks. Among the most important effects that these conflicts have had and will have are: the stigmatization and criminalization of those who defend the territory, an increase in water charges, poverty and unemployment in San Luis, change in the peasant identity of the municipality, damage to the ecosystems linked to the Dormilón river due to the use of dredgers, the reactivation of paramilitaries, threats to the physical integrity of leaders and activists, the privatization of roads and water sources, changes in local economic activities, increased levels of inequality, the criminalization of protest, forced displacement, deforestation, change in land use, selective assassinations, and the militarization of the territory.

What actions are being carried out by the communities?

Since 2012, the Vigías del Río Dormilón, accompanied by many residents of San Luis, have combined advocacy actions, and their interventions have ranged from the legal level to social mobilization.
Currently, they are carrying out actions such as marches; raising community awareness of socio-environmental problems; management of petition rights to obtain institutional information and plan actions; community assemblies; use of digital platforms for the dissemination,documentation and reporting of different events; territorial walks to highlight the importance of local peasant life; training in schools and colleges; festivals, concerts, and the promotion of cultural activities linked to the river and the defense of the territory; use of the legal process of the intervening third party; citizen oversight; positioning representatives in local government bodies; water activities to bring people to the river; promotion of community tourism through the creation of an ecological trail; promotion of community gardens and a cooperative economy.



Municipality of San Francisco

Santo Domingo River

State of the licensing projects for power generation	An environmental license was granted to build the Santo Domingo Hydroelectric Micro-Station. The applicant company is Empresas Públicas de Medellín (EPM).
What has been done?	Since 1997, there have been multiple requests for an environmental license for the construction of micro-stations and SHS on the Santo Domingo River. In 2013, a license for a micro-station was granted. From that moment to 2020, several license change requests were made to modify technical issues related to energy production capacity, impact area, intervention zones, associated infrastructure, and land purchase.
How would it affect the community?	Some of the impacts that licensing and the possible construction of the Santo Domingo Hydroelectric Station have brought are: the loss of and disregard for the practices of peasant life; an increase in uncontrolled tourism in sectors of the Melcocho and Pailania Rivers which causes damage to the river; the expulsion of peasants; the privatization of roads, land, and commons; increase in the cost of land and the taxes to be paid for it; and loss of ties with the territory and re-victimization. It is important to highlight the loss of land available for peasant life with the purchase of more than 477 hectares for the project.

Over time, the water ecosystem can be affected; reactivation of the armed conflict, stigmatization and criminalization of those who dissent, and loss of productive capacity and changes in ways of life are also possible.

What actions are being carried out by the communities?

Among the activities carried out by the communities are the use of citizen participation mechanisms to demand respect for various rights; community organization for the defense of the river; creation of spaces for denunciation; alliances with public institutions to avoid overloading the territory and environmental damage; carrying out exercises that allow communities to identify the effects that hydroelectric projects would bring; local public events; diffusion of what is happening through media and artistic activities; promotion of community tourism; territorial walks; strengthening of memories and life stories; defense of the peasant way of life; management of a court of opinion; and linking of peasant knowledge with specialized technical knowledge.



Collective textile, Hamlet of Diamante. Photo: Mateo Valderrama

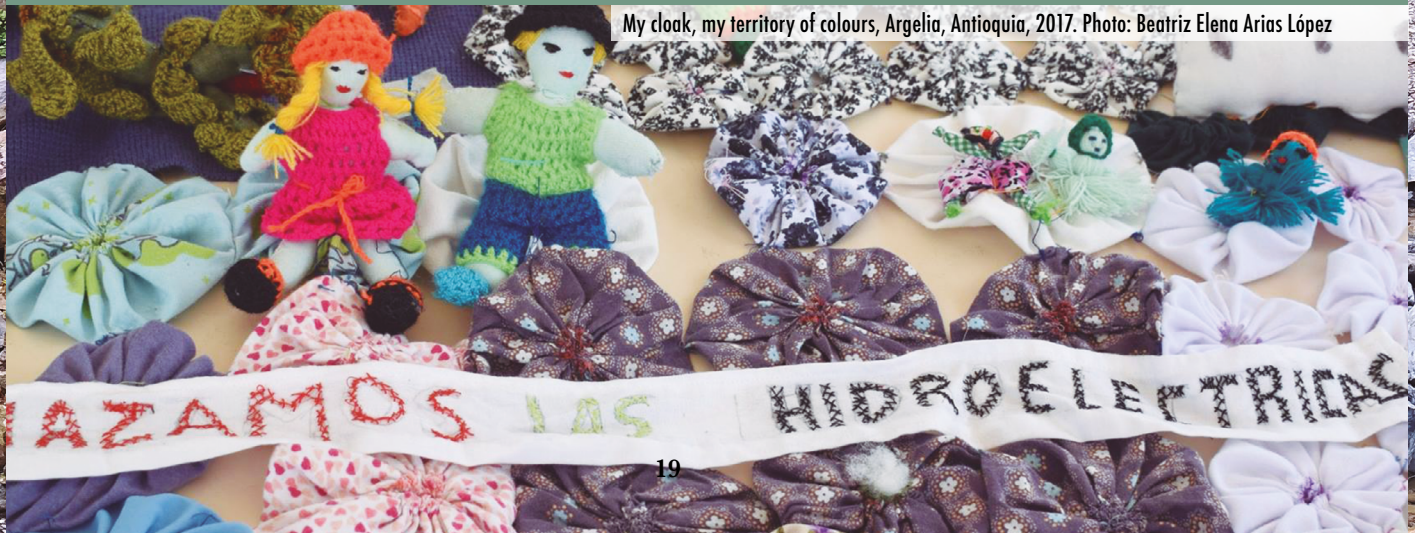
Municipality of Argelia

La Paloma River

State of the licensing projects for power generation.	Currently, no project has been built, but Palomas IV, Palomas III, and Argelia have an environmental license. Corporación Jurídica Libertad has filed three annulment actions for the three projects. The applicant company is Genmas.
What has been done?	In addition to the aforementioned legal actions, the community organized itself in the process Guardianes del Agua, Terruño y Herencia de Vida Campesina (Guardians of Water, Land and the Heritage of Peasant Life) to promote the defense of the territory.
How would it affect the community?	Among the effects that the SHS would bring with their construction, and have brought during the licensing process, are: transformation of and disregard for the peasant way of life; the stigmatization of those who defend the territory; the privatization of self-managed rural roads, the territory, the river, and other commons; reactivation of the armed conflict; threats to the physical integrity of those who defend the territory; family disintegration; impacts that especially affect women related to the increase in the burden of care and working hours on the farms; risk of forced displacement; disruption of the social fabric due to the disputes before the arrival of the SHS to the territory; unauthorized extraction of information; lack of community engagement and participation in licensing processes; and lack of access to justice.

What actions are being carried out by the communities?

Among the activities that the communities have carried out is the participation in events to make visible what is happening in Algeria; the denunciation, diffusion, and documentation of what is happening; participation in local government bodies; advocacy in planning spaces; creation of spaces for denunciation; promotion of cultural and artistic activities for denunciation; strengthening of peasant memories; linking of peasant knowledge with technically specialized knowledge; community organization for the defense of the territory; self-management of community activities; assemblies; taking over public spaces; dissemination strategies through media and digital platforms; alliances with local officials; exchange of experiences and testimonies with people who have experienced similar situations; territorial walks to acknowledge the river; creation of awareness-raising spaces with the general population and promotion of river enjoyment practices.



My cloak, my territory of colours, Argelia, Antioquia, 2017. Photo: Beatriz Elena Arias López

SELF-PROTECTION, CARE AND THE COMMONS



In this booklet, we have shared how the communities of Argelia, San Luis, and San Francisco have protected themselves from situations that threaten their rivers and their ways of life. These actions have been carried out in order to take care of the territories, live better, and achieve a feeling of security, which allows people not only to take care of themselves, but also to cultivate practices and social relationships aimed at caring for water and life. It is not enough to take care of the watersheds and the water flow, if we do not also take care of the relationships and community life.

San Francisco, Antioquia, March 2023, Photo: Producciones El Retorno

**In the words of Nelly,
one of the villagers:**

“When you travel to other places [you realize] that things are true, [that many people have had their rivers taken away, that those goods that we all need to live have been privatized]. Then you [understand] that you must think about what you are going to leave to the children and future generations. We may not last long, but the thing is that there are children, there are grandchildren, that they are the ones who inherit those lands, they are the ones who are going to live there in the future, so that is what has motivated me to this struggle.”

Water is one of the most precious common goods around which the life of the territories is organized in many areas and contexts. That is why preserving access for everyone means guaranteeing justice. Water justice refers to all people and communities having the right to fair and equitable access to water regardless of their origin, gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic status.

This implies that the use and distribution of water must be managed in a fair and sustainable way, taking into account present and future needs. Water justice also implies accountability and transparency in decision -making and in the management of water resources to ensure that the rights and needs of all individuals and communities are respected.



Argelia, Antioquia, March 2023, photo: Producciones El Retorno

THE ROAD AHEAD



Peasant communities and organizations in Eastern Antioquia have a rich history of more than half a century of social mobilization against extractivist projects in the subregion, especially those related to hydro - energy production.

These projects have not only changed the landscape and the agricultural vocation of many municipalities but are also deeply related to the social, political, and armed conflict. Far from the development promised by companies and government entities,



Argelia, Antioquia, agosto de 2022. Foto: Laura Jiménez Ospina

the inhabitants of the sub-region have experienced the forced displacement of many people who lived in the impact areas of the reservoirs; upon their "return", they find new situations of risk and threats to their remaining in the territory.

The idea of territory seems different for the licensor and for the communities settled in these places. For the environmental authority there is often an idea of empty territory, of territory that can be adapted to a new use, a new function. On the contrary, for the communities, the territory, and in particular the river, are spaces for recreation and community bonding, not just a source for extracting materials. The levels of real and effective community participation in carrying out these projects are very weak because the legislation itself does not recognize the need for their participation.

The challenge we have today is how to deal with historic fear so that it does not paralyze us in a context where, as one of the inhabitants said, **there is a new reconfiguration of the territory, new situations, new threats, and new actors, many of them hidden and without a face.**

In each municipality, there are anecdotes, big and small stories about how communities have faced these situations. The local processes of Argelia, San Francisco, and San Luis, like others in Eastern Antioquia, are an important source of learning for other local processes.



Vereda el Pajui, way to Santo Domingo, San Francisco, Antioquia, August 2022. Photo: Hernán Pineda.

It is necessary to strengthen participatory processes of peasant communities. In many cases, it is not possible to access complete information on the projects that will affect the territories, what they consist of, and their magnitude, giving rise to generalized processes of distrust towards the institutions on the part of the communities.

We have made progress in the recognition of ethnic and peasant territories at the institutional level, but it is necessary to maintain the conversation about the issues of energy transition and its impacts on these territories.

The new Colombian government, which started in 2022, wants to make changes, but it is difficult to change a model that has been in place since the 1960s. That is why it is important to continue discussing, talking, and recognizing what is changing in the territories.

In Eastern Antioquia, there are not only hydroelectric power generation projects, but also mining, construction in protected areas, the blocking of access to water, and the imposition of ways of life through physical and symbolic violence. This is the difficult path that we need to understand and analyze, in order to build proposals that correspond to the life desires of those who inhabit the territory.





Bridge over the Santo Domingo River, Los encuentros Area, San Francisco, Antioquia, February 2023. Photo by: Hernán Pineda.

Research Project

Water conflicts,
violations, and forms of self-protection.
A multi-case Study in Eastern Antioquia
2022-2023.

Conducted by the School of Nursing and the Institute of Regional Studies (INER), Universidad de Antioquia; Peasant Association of Antioquia (ACA). With the support of the Political Ecology and Water Justice Study Group from UPB in Medellin.

Funded by the Network Plus Creating Safer Space:
Strengthening Civilian Protection Amidst Violent Conflict
under the leadership of
the University of Aberystwyth (Wales, United Kingdom),
funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHCR)
through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF)
of the United Kingdom, [grant number AH/T008024/1]

Acknowledgment

Tierrap - San Luis
Vigías (watchers) of the Dormilón River - San Luis
Guardianes del Agua, Terruño y Herencia de Vida
Campesina - Argelia
MOVETE
Producciones El Retorno
Kevin Arias - Mural Painter @vek_ones
Campesino communities of:
Argelia, San Luis, and San Francisco

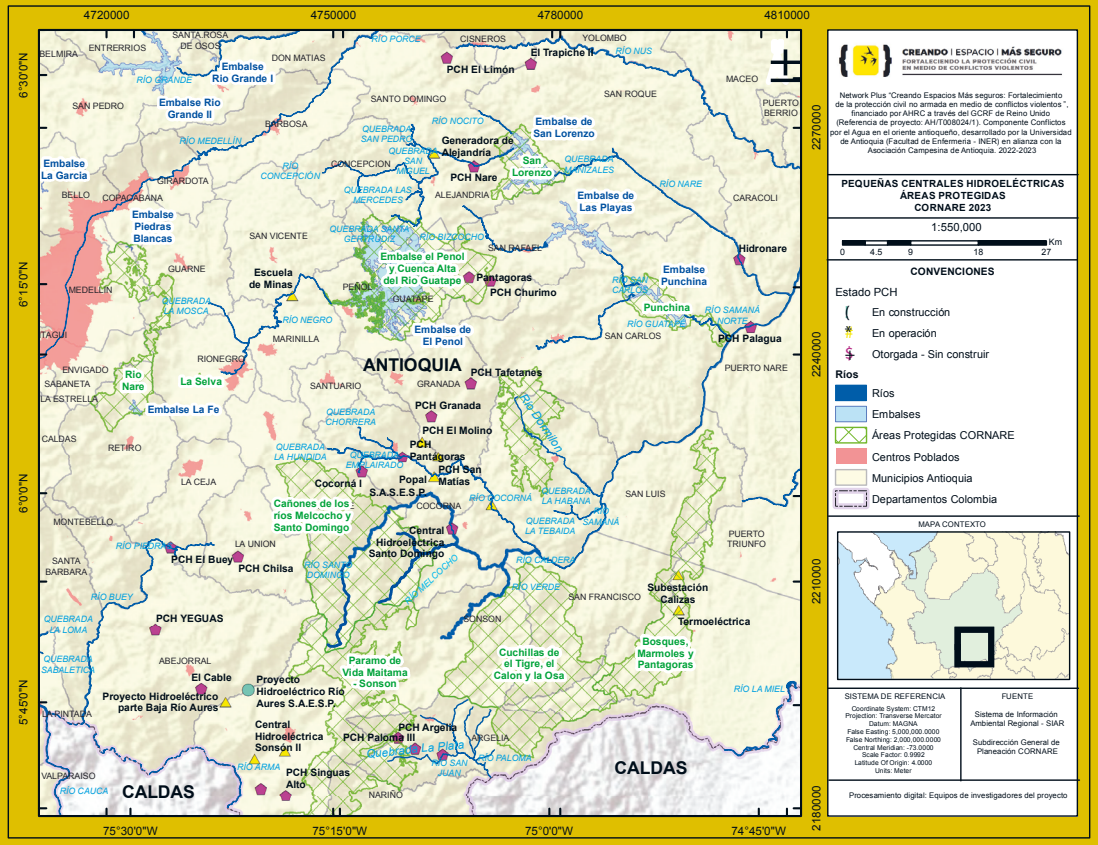
Design and layout: Sergio Mendoza C.



El Fresnito.
Untitled,

Collective textile
El Fresnito Village,
Argelia, Antioquia.

Peasant Association of Antioquia,
School of Nursing UdeA and
University of Aberystwyth,
2020.



Continued from page 13

On this map you can see the state of the construction and licensing of the different SHS and micro-stations located in Eastern Antioquia. It also shows the reservoirs, rivers, and protected areas declared by CORNARE.



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CREATING SAFER SPACE
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UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council

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