**CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH**

**HORIZONTAL LEARNING NETWORK**

# Visions and expectations of young people in the municipality of Solano Caquetá, Colombia

Horizontal Learning Network



Authors: ICCO Conexión and Tropenbos Colombia

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# 1 CONTEXT

Solano is a municipality located in the department of Caquetá within the deforestation arc of the Colombian Amazon, the second largest municipality in area of the country. Solano can only be reached by river, although there are already several trails that allow to reach the municipal's capital by car at certain times of the year. Solano has an area of 4.2 million hectares, of which about 2 million hectares belong to the Chiribiquete Park, 700,000 hectares are indigenous reserve lands, 200,000 hectares are protected areas by environmental determinants such as wetlands, water reserves, which are untouchable according to the new regulations, and 1.3 million hectares is a forest reserve area that is not subject to titling to private individuals, and only 3% of the area is excluded from the forest reserve (all figures are approximate). This means that about 3% of Solano territory, that is the area excluded from the forest reserve, is subject to titling for private ownership, Of this area only 2% has title deeds. The indigenous reserve lands (resguardo), are protected by collective form of property with great security as it is inalienable, unseizable and imprescriptible. This offers a great advantage to indigenous peoples over peasants, especially in this context where the majority of land cannot be awarded to private individuals. Most of the deforestation is occurring in the Chiribiquete Park and forest reserve areas (see Figure 1).

Solano has been rapidly transforming from a purely indigenous territory to one that today can be considered intercultural. Today not only the Koreguaje, Makaguaje, Murui, Inga and Nasa indigenous people are present in the territory. With different economic booms, a non-indigenous population arrived in this territory. First came the exploitation of quinine wood and fine furs, then rubber, followed by the boom in illicit crops, and now cattle farming and land grabbing is the engine of transformation. This area has also had the presence of illegal armed actors. At present, the deforested areas are mainly used for cattle grazing and, to a lesser extent, for the cultivation of illicit crops. Indigenous communities try to maintain a traditional livelihood that combines slash and burn agriculture, fishing, hunting and gathering of forest products. Some of them also have some cattle.

# 2 LAND-AT-SCALE INTERVENTION

In this context, the LAND-at-scale project in Colombia is being developed, with the objective of contributing to security of tenure and sustainable economic development. In Solano, work is being carried out by Kadaster International, Tropenbos and ICCO Conexión together with the Teofila La Arenosa resguardo, where the Koreguaje and Makaguaje indigenous peoples live. The goal of the collaboration is two-fold: first, to rectify the resguardo's boundaries within the context of the request for an extension and for a new resguardo in the framework of land restitution due to the armed conflict. Currently, the resguardo is registered with the wrong coordinates in the official data of the Colombian national authorities. Second, to strengthen the extraction and commercialisation of oil from the milpeso palm (*Oenocarpus bataua*) by developing a management plan for this extraction and the restoration of some degraded areas. The collaboration has also facilitated the participation of

representatives of this resguardo to participate in municipal spaces for the formulation of a plan to stop deforestation and the updating of the land-use planning scheme. [1] According to the logic of the project, it is expected that by generating greater formality in tenure, with economic empowerment and good environmental management, it will contribute to the stability of the area and stop deforestation.

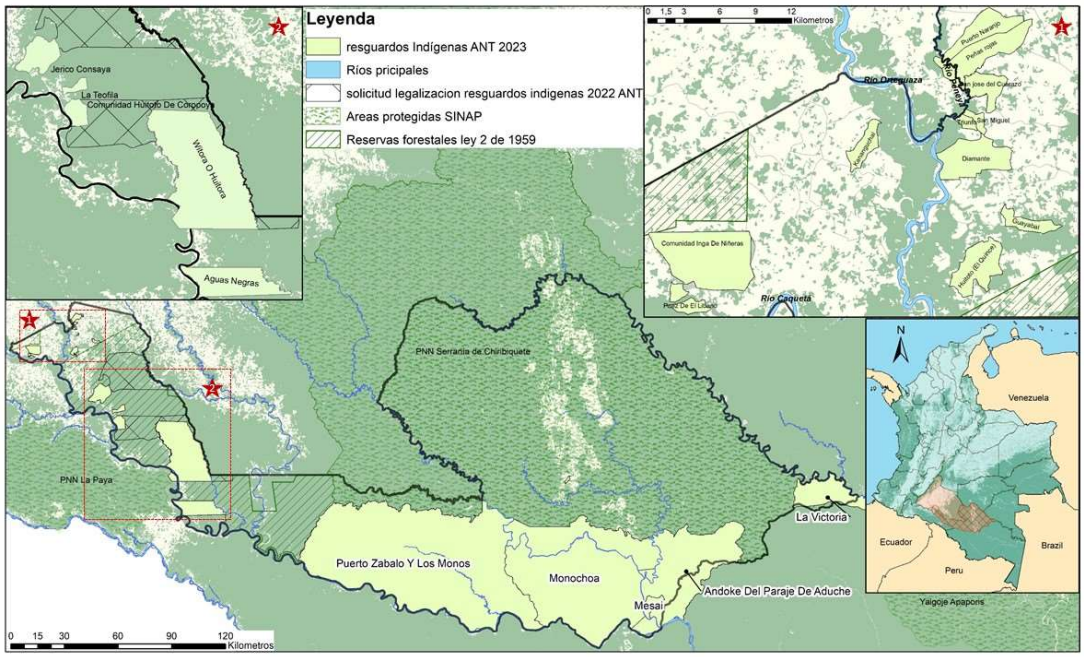



*Figure 1: Map of Solano municipality and LAS project area*

# 3 PROJECT OBJECTIVE – THE VOICES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The objective of the horizontal learning project was to find out the youth's perspective on the future, their ideas about land tenure, economic development, and the environmental problems and possibilities of this territory in order to put their vision into dialogue with the premises of the LAND-at-scale project. For this purpose, we[2] carried out a survey amongst people under 30 years of age. We interviewed 17 young men and women, both indigenous people from the villages involved in the LAND-at-scale project and from the Murui people, as well as peasants who are not directly involved in the project. We would like to clarify that we took as a reference the category of the official youth of

[1] Both documents are a legal requirement that the municipality must comply with, but for which it had no participatory schemes. In an alliance with several NGOs, this participation of peasants and indigenous people was promoted.

[2] The interviews used in this document were conducted under the guidance of Maria Clara van der Hammen of Tropenbos Colombia by Karen Sainz, intern at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, and transcribed by Ana Beltran, intern at the Universidad Externado de Colombia.

the country, i.e. a person between 17 and 27 years of age. Locally, this category is more difficult, because it is associated with single people and generally in this rural context marriages are established at a very early age and the roles that youth assume are similar to those of other adults. Nevertheless, we think it is interesting to explore their visions about the future.

According to the policy to attend youth of the department of Caquetá, in 2019 there were 2,616 men and 2,547 women between the ages of 18 and 27 in Solano. In comparison with other regions, there are a series of risks for the youth population mainly associated with the armed conflict, such as forced displacement and forced recruitment by armed actors. For the definition of this policy, a series of problems related to the lack of educational opportunities, support for entrepreneurship and credit and, in general, the lack of specific policies and programmes for this population were diagnosed through meetings with young people in some of the municipalities of the department.

The group of young people interviewed are all between 17 and 30 years old, some are people who have taken on specific tasks within their community, such as being the youth or women's representative, taking on the leadership of the community action board, or coordinating a specific project. In other cases they are people with no specific position in the community. One of the interviewees has a background in agroecology, lives in the town centre and works with the municipal mayor's office, and one of the interviewees has completed a teacher training course and is working in her community's school. Another interviewee is part of the municipal council. The vast majority of the interviewees were born and raised in the municipality of Solano, and some were born in the neighbouring municipality of Solita or Florencia, the capital city of the department of Caquetá.

# 4 RESULTS

## 4.1 TERRITORIAL ISSUES

All interviewees expressed concern about the armed conflict, war, and forced recruitment as something that is difficult to manage in the territory. The women interviewed all mentioned that the armed conflict makes it difficult for them to move around the territory, and in the case of the indigenous women, they have sometimes had difficulties to go to their farms to harvest their produce because of the armed actors' prohibition to move around the territory. The indigenous women feel that the different armed actors and even the peasants affect the territory and the sacred places of the indigenous people.

> *"We have our territories but we are always at risk, armed people and even our neighbours can come and do harm, we have to be careful". (Indigenous woman)*

Another problem reported is the presence of illicit crops. Several of the indigenous interviewees point out that they are affected because they are accused of cultivating coca when in fact, they only grow

the traditional mambe for their own consumption and they are not interested in cultivating for the production of cocaine.

All the interviewees also mentioned illegal mining and the pressure from oil companies as a problem for the territory. Furthermore, they pointed out that deforestation was a serious problem, with some of them suggesting the need to promote the restoration of the forests. Two of the indigenous women said that they would like the territory, both the resguardos and the municipality, to be governed by women, as they consider that they are more caring and would be better governors as they would act more for the collective benefit than for individual interests.

## 4.2 ROOTEDNESS TO THE TERRITORY

The young people of this territory all have a great appreciation for the space where they live, they are proud of their land, the forests, the rivers, and the fauna. They all have a great interest in knowledge, in training and seek to have the tools of knowledge to be able to live well in this space. The peasant men and women place great emphasis on the knowledge of school and university education (with the exception of one young man who mentions the education he received from his father, a peasant who is very concerned about the environment), while the indigenous men and women pointed mainly to traditional knowledge and their traditional knowledgeable men and women as what they need to live well in the territory. Some see possibilities of complementing this with training that is related to the territory and the opportunities it offers, such as environmental care and the use of some non-timber forest resources. It is striking that despite living in a context of such a marked armed conflict, none of them consider a future outside this territory or in an urban space. As one of the indigenous men said:

> *"I live very happy in this beautiful territory, I love moving through the jungle and the rivers, I like the way it smells, I like the way it sounds. I wouldn't want to have to leave this place*".

## 4.3 HOBBIES AND PASTIMES

Opportunities for recreation are few in the rural context, several pointed to productive activities as options for spending their free time. The indigenous women mentioned for example handicraft making. Some are emphatic in saying that outside of work there is little entertainment. One of the young indigenous men said that he likes to learn traditional songs in his free time. Several of the men mentioned football as fun, or that they go for walks in the forest or on the road with their companions. One of the male farmers, an indigenous girl, and another female farmer mentioned that they like to read a lot. A young farmer mentioned swimming as his favourite pastime, and those living in the urban area mentioned that they like to listen to music, watch videos and follow influencers on social media.

## 4.4 LAND TENURE

The issue of land tenure for indigenous people, and especially for indigenous men, is an issue that generates a lot of security and a sense of belonging. As one of them put it:

> *"I can go to any of these resguardos, even the very distant ones, and I will always be at home, on my land". (Indigenous man)*

Farmers are much less clear on the issue of tenure, because as explained in the introduction, the possibilities of formalising their land are not very great and some think that the possibilities that the farm (in most cases without titles) can offer to their fathers can offer some opportunities in the future. In an exceptional case where the family has a title deed, the future options are clearly anchored in the possibility of a particular productive development in the form of chicken and pig breeding, for which the interviewee intends to get more training.

> *"I came with my mother and my brother to assume the work in the farm. My mother had to teach me everything. We came because we don't want to lose the property, as it is not easy to have a tittle deed. Now I want to learn more and breed chicken in a technical way, a few years ago I would not have imagined such a possibility". (Female farmer)*

Two interviewees, one peasant and one indigenous, mentioned that the lack of legality in peasant land causes many problems and that they felt that if it were formalised, better agreements related to forest management and care for water sources could be reached, as the peasant would live in peace looking after their land.

One of the peasant boys pointed out that he likes it that the indigenous people are in the process of requesting the extension of their territories, as he sees the care they have for the forest in a positive light, but that he thinks it is important that peasant neighbours are also informed of these processes so that they can reach an agreement.

## 4.5 THE ENVIRONMENT

The indigenous women have links with particular plants, such as medicinal plants, that they say are important for their lives and for which they feel affection and seek their conservation. They have learned to take care of, and use these plants from their elders. Also, the seeds of food plants are very important and they feel that they have an important task in maintaining this agrobiodiversity and some of them also present themselves as guardians of these seeds. In this sense they also see themselves as having an important task to sweeten with their words the coexistence not only with the natural environment but also with other people.

The male farmers all expressed their concern for the environment and a certain sense of guilt for the deforestation done by their parents' generation. They said that they would like to find ways to stop

and reverse this process. In this sense they mentioned that they want more accompaniment in order to develop a more sustainable land use model.

> *"We want to learn more sustainable ways to live in this territory. Many of us are really willing to change. But it is important that the state recognizes that we are not the cause of deforestation. A poor farmer only cut down a few hectares each year in order to cultivate food. Other people, rich people coming from outside pay others to cut down 100 or 200 hectares". (Male farmer)*

The peasant women are concerned about the care of water, as they have seen that deforestation and climate change have affected water sources in the territory. At times in the summer they even run out of water, which affects their wellbeing.

The indigenous men show a great closeness to nature. They have the need to defend their territory, not only from large companies but also from neighbouring farmers who do not respect the boundaries and do not have the knowledge to interact in a wise way with the forest.

> *"We have a capacity to communicate with nature, especially through birds, and we know the damage that deforestation is causing, we know that even where there is still forest we can see the degradation, we would like to stop the deforestation". (Indigenous male)*

## 4.6 INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS

Finally, the question was also asked about inter-ethnic relations. The peasant women pointed out the great difference between the extensive rights of indigenous people and the lack of rights of the peasants. The Indigenous interviewed also expressed a great distance and very few relations with the peasants. Only one of them mentions that she has an indigenous friend from whom she learns about the culture and with whom she shares interests in reading and music. Above all, they emphasise that it is a hostile relationship due to the lack of mutual knowledge.

The indigenous women said that relations with the farmers are practically non-existent. One of them mentions that every year they make agreements about respecting the boundaries of the resguardos with the peasants but that they do not fulfil them.

The male peasant farmers showed fascination for the indigenous world and all expressed that they would like to learn more about this world. They believe that together with the indigenous youth they could develop interesting proposals for the territory with the indigenous contributing their knowledge about the forest, the plants and its uses and the peasant farmers their drive, knowledge of handling cattle and entrepreneurial attitude. Something similar was expressed by the indigenous male interviewees who said they want to better understand the world of young peasants, who feel that they experience similar problems, such as the lack of opportunities for young people to develop income-generating proposals and study possibilities. But they also point out that there are many neighbourhood conflicts and that more opportunities are needed to solve these problems. The

indigenous youth also point out that they see that the farmers treat the territory very badly, deforesting and leaving the pastures without a single tree, and that they would like to teach them how to take care of it Hence, both groups point to the importance of recognising common interests and also the need to learn and build productive solutions for all.

> *"I would very much like to learn more from the indigenous people, they have a lot of knowledge, they know how to live off the jungle, and I would like to share with some of them who have cattle, so that they can learn to manage them in pastures so that they do not do so much damage". (Male farmer)*

# 5 DISCUSSION

The interviews' findings provide some important reflections for projects combining land tenure, economic empowerment, and sustainable environmental management in intercultural territories. The relationships between culturally different populations are not always harmonious and can impact the success of the proposed interventions.

A first point to bear in mind and which is felt in intercultural relations is the difference in legal frameworks applied to each of the population groups. It is important to take into account that this has implications for intercultural relationships.

The second point is the lack of knowledge and the lack of spaces for interaction, which is especially marked for both indigenous and peasant women.

The livelihoods that the different populations have configured for themselves are very different. In the case of the indigenous people, the aim is to maintain an economy related to the forest, ensuring conservation, while the peasants have developed ways of turning their backs on the forest and achieving a better economic income.

An important aspect is that many of the major issues like the difficult situation of public order, or the lack of state support for development of sustainable use of forest products, are common to all inhabitants regardless of their ethnic or cultural affiliation. This is a first entry point to build more harmonious and sustainable ways of relating to each other.

Another important common aspect is the interest in environmental issues and the concern among young people for sustainable management and the construction of sustainable productive solutions in which they see that intercultural exchange can be very important. Indigenous communities sharing their knowledge about the environment and farmers sharing their knowledge to interact with the market and promote enterprises.

In order to contribute to the security of land tenure, to economic empowerment, and sustainable environmental management it may be important not only to limit interventions to what happens within an ethnical territory but to explore the relationships and possibilities beyond its boundaries.

As for the LAND-at-scale intervention in this specific case, we have limitations due to the bad public order situation but if this improves during the duration of the project, we could explore actions that involve both indigenous and peasant youth to exchange ideas and knowledge about forest management or exploring and sharing economic initiatives such as the oil palm production.

As for the overall recommendations we can work on as a consortium, is to show the potential to contribute to peaceful coexistence in intercultural territories by exploring shared interests among youth of the different populations and to exchange experiences and to work together in interesting sustainable livelihood solutions.

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