The power of collective struggles

COP27: A BITTERSWEET DEAL

In November, the negotiations at the 27th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) culminated in a historic deal about a global fund for loss and damage: high-income countries will have to compensate low-income countries, which contributed the least to the climate crisis but bear the brunt of its worst effects.

The deal resulted from decades of struggle, led by Indigenous Peoples, activists, and civil society groups (including many of our members and partners), living in the regions most heavily affected by climate disasters.

However, this victory has a bittersweet taste, as the COP27 once again fell short of climate activists’ expectations:

- There was a colossal failure in phasing out all fossil fuels;
- Despite a record number of Indigenous activists at the Summit, fossil fuel lobbyists - with over 600 participants - were again the largest group at the conference and used this platform to push forward false solutions and greenwashing.
- World leaders at the COP failed to center human rights in the climate change discourse and fully recognize the role of environmental rights defenders.
- Egypt’s crackdown on freedom of speech and assembly and the heavy civic space restrictions marred the negotiations.

During the COP27, activists from all over the world powerfully raised their voices. Check out these great blogs and analyses:

- CIEL: “At COP27, Long-delayed Action on Loss and Damage but Continued Inaction on the Fossil-Fuels Causing that Loss and Damage”;
- Global campaign to demand climate justice: “People’s power wins at COP27 but talks fail to deliver on other key demands”;
- PBI: “Environmental defenders on COP27 and their struggles on the frontline”;
- Earthrights: “Restrictions on free speech and expression at COP27”;
- Indigenous Climate Action: COP27 round-up.
The treaty includes provisions on access to information, participation, and access to justice, and it recognizes the rights to sustainable development and a healthy environment. It is also the first legally binding instrument in the world that obliges member states to prevent and investigate attacks against environmental defenders. This is crucial in Colombia, a country where – over the last ten years – at least 322 environmental and land defenders have been killed, according to Global Witness.

In November, communities and activists in the region voted for their representatives so that people impacted by development projects could engage more directly in the treaty’s implementation.

Find out more:
- Ambiente y Sociedad - "The Escazú Agreement: a people’s victory" (in Spanish);
- Global Witness - "In Colombia, implementing the Escazú Agreement is a matter of life and death";
- CIVICUS: "Escazú: the role of civil society made a huge difference"; (in Spanish)
- UN Environmental Programme: "Latin American and Caribbean countries sign historic treaty giving environmental rights the same status as human rights".

Learning together

"We cannot work alone. We need to work through alliances and networks, at all three levels: local, national and international. We need to share resources, expertise, funding. We need to listen to each other."  

Through the Community Resource Exchange (CRE), we recently facilitated a series of community learning exchanges on the following topics:
- on the impacts of sand mining and the strategies used to advocate against these harmful projects, with communities from Cambodia, Nepal, India, the Philippines, and Indonesia;
- on two port projects, built respectively by the Asian Development Bank in Sri Lanka and by the World Bank in Kenya;
- On the struggles against electricity projects funded by the French energy firm EDF, with communities from Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Cameroon, and Togo.
- On the impacts of oil projects (including EACOP) in Uganda, with a specific focus on women and the youth, and what can be done to campaign against them.

All these learning exchanges are showing us that communities know what they need: this is why they should be the ones driving their own development.

In August, we launched our third call for proposals for the CRE. We received over 100 applications from 33 countries, and we look forward to starting working with these new collaborators, learning from them, and building linkages and alliances worldwide.

Want to know more about the Community Resource Exchange? Check out this page!
AfDB CSOs forum

On October 6-7, members of the Dev4Africa campaign attended the African Development Bank’s Civil Society Organizations forum in Abidjan (Côte d’Ivoire). While only two slots were given to the group to participate in the event, the conference was an opportunity to meet with the bank’s management and many of the Executive Directors, including some recently appointed.

It was also an excellent opportunity to strengthen our collective work: the day before the forum, more than 14 people from west and central African organizations - including projects-affected communities - participated in a strategy session.

In the meetings with the bank’s management and the Board, together with our partners, we raised concerns about CSO engagement, energy, and just transition and conveyed our joint recommendations for the future Integrated Safeguards System.

African Business and Human Rights Forum

On October 12-13, the very first African Business and Human Rights Forum was held in Accra, Ghana. Tity Agbahey, the Coalition's Africa Regional Coordinator, participated in a pre-session to share and strategize on the theme “Towards a Legally Binding Instrument on Business and Human Rights: An African Perspective.” One of our members, the African Coalition for Corporate Accountability (ACCA), and the Centre for Human Rights of the University of Pretoria organized the event.

While the draft binding instrument does not touch on development finance institutions (DFIs), we built on the report “Wearing Blinders” findings to show how such an instrument could help prevent human rights abuses and attacks against defenders.

The report points out that DFIs often fail to identify, assess, and mitigate reprisal risks. In a global context of shrinking civic space, this leads to an escalation of reprisals. This is why it would be crucial to have a binding instrument on business and human rights to guarantee transparency, accountability, and better human rights due diligence. The instrument should also apply to DFIs, mainly when they operate through financial intermediaries or support the private sector.

A new president for the IDB

On November 20, the IDB announced that Ilan Goldfajn - the candidate nominated by Brazil - will be its next president. Ahead of the election, we had joined +30 organizations from the region in exhorting the bank’s Governors to ensure the candidate was someone with integrity, committed to human rights, and capable of leading the transformations required to face Latin America’s social and environmental challenges.

Read the letter to the IDB

Regional updates

LATIN AMERICA

The review of IDB’s Access to Information Policy

Together with our members and allies in the region, we have been engaging in the revision of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)’s Access to Information Policy. This is a crucial tool to guarantee communities’ right to access information and ensure transparency and participation. In the online and in-person consultations with the IDB, we identified the policy’s shortcomings and made recommendations to improve them.

AFRICA

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ADB: Stop Reprisals!

In September, ahead of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Annual Meeting, 45 civil society groups signed a joint letter with a series of recommendations for the ADB on how to prevent and address reprisals. The ADB team reviewing the Safeguard Policy Statement (SPS) states that the Bank is considering including a contextual risk analysis for all projects that would explicitly look at reprisal risks. This would be an essential first step forward. However, several additional issues must be addressed for the ADB to tackle reprisals effectively.

What should the ADB do to stop reprisals?

In its revised safeguards the bank should:
- Commit to zero tolerance for reprisals (against people raising concerns about activities directly or indirectly linked to ADB projects)
- Require the ADB to develop and follow a mandatory human rights due diligence policy.

This should include mandatory protocols to:
- Assess and mitigate reprisal risks
- Respond to reprisals
- Provide access to remedy

Read more in this joint letter to the ADB

The Women's Summit

In November, over 170 grassroots women gathered in Bali for the Women's Summit. It was a vibrant two-day event that offered a precious opportunity to strengthen solidarity and share experiences among representatives of communities impacted by development projects in Indonesia and their allies. The event was organized by a group of feminist organizations, including Aksi for gender, social and ecological justice, the Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development (APWLD), and Solidaritas Parampuan.

Our members and allies also organized many other events. For example, CIEL, Arab Watch Coalition, Accountability Counsel, Bank Information Centre, Plataforma International, and others organized the session "Responsible exit: how accountability to communities is necessary for sustainable investing."

NGO Forum Annual Meeting

In November, we also participated in the Annual Meeting of our Coalition’s member NGO Forum on ADB. The participants shared their priorities and updates on the advocacy work towards the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Among the issues addressed during the meeting, we focused mainly on reprisals and just energy transition: two critical issues in the region, which are often inter-connected.

In October, with several of our members and partners, we helped co-organize two events at the World Bank Civil Society Policy Forum:
- The role of multilateral development banks in the energy transition and the critical minerals extraction
- Civic space and reprisals risks: missing elements in the assessment of development projects

The sessions were an opportunity to have a public discussion on two key topics (just energy transition and reprisals) and to present a series of recommendations on how the World Bank could better implement a human rights approach, ensuring its projects do not lead to violations and attacks against defenders.

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In this page, you can watch all the recordings.
On October 22, in Dakar, the police arrested Babacar Diouf, programme officer of the non-governmental organization Lumière Synergie pour Développement (LSD), and 25 members of the Collective of community members impacted by the Regional Express Train project (TER), including five women. After being held for two nights at the police station, the group was transferred to the Public Prosecutor's office and held for three additional nights on charges of public disorder. On October 27, they were finally released.

The group was arrested at the house of one of the members of the Collective allegedly because they were discussing the organization of a peaceful protest to express their legitimate concerns around the train project and to demand their right to fair compensation. Local communities displaced by the project have been facing involuntary resettlements, property demolitions, loss of livelihoods, and reprisals, and they are still waiting to receive compensation.

Read more in this joint statement

We are seriously concerned about these arrests, which constitute a flagrant violation of the right to peaceful assembly guaranteed by the Senegalese Constitution, and regional and international human rights treaties. Nobody should be arrested simply for expressing an opinion or organizing a legitimate protest.” - Aly Sagne (Director of LSD Senegal)

As public institutions, development banks need to ensure that affected people and human rights defenders can safely speak out, raise questions, and demand compensation when their rights are violated. The concerns of the affected people need to be addressed. If the right to freedom of speech and protest is not respected, and if communities end up facing poverty and inequality instead of prosperity, we can't call this development."

Elaine Zuckerman (President of Gender Action)

The Express Train, which entered into operation in 2021, is a flagship project of the “Emerging Senegal Plan.” It required a total of €1 billion and was supported mainly by the African Development Bank (AfDB), which mobilized $200 million, and the French development agency (AFD), which provided three concessional loans totaling €230 million and €750,000 in grants to support with legal expertise and technical assistance. The Islamic Development Bank (IDB), the French Treasury Department, and the Government of Senegal co-financed the project.

In 2019, with the support of the LSD Senegal, a group of representatives of the local communities submitted a complaint to the AfDB and the AFD. It is estimated that the first section of the train line (about 36 km) has affected almost 15,000 people. Moreover, there haven’t been meaningful consultations, and the compensation has been unequal and inadequate: while some have received a symbolic cash compensation, others have not. The second section, which will extend the train line for a further 19 km, is equally problematic.
In focus: the Salvadorian women leading the struggle against the Cerro Blanco mine

At the border between Guatemala and El Salvador, the women from AMAES (Asociación de Mujeres Ambientalistas de El Salvador) and several other community organizations are leading a powerful struggle to stop the Cerro Blanco mine from polluting their water sources and their territory.

Cerro Blanco, an open pit gold mine, is owned by the Canadian company Bluestone Resources. It is located in the municipality of Asunción Mita in Guatemala, just 14 kilometers away from El Salvador.

Once in operation, the mining project risks heavily polluting the Güija lagoon and the Lempa river, which is the primary water source for El Salvador. On both sides of the border, communities have been protesting against Cerro Blanco's harmful impacts, including health issues, displacement, loss of livelihood for the local farmers and fishing communities, biodiversity loss, and lack of access to clean water.

AMAES and the local communities have been opposing the mine since 2017, organizing creative "aquatic" protests by sailing boats on the Lempa river and campaigning tirelessly to inform the public about the immense damage this mine will cause.

Thousands of people have been participating in the protests, and local communities are strongly showing their opposition to the mine. In September 2022, in a popular referendum held in Asunción Mita, nearly 88 % of the voters rejected the mine.

Though Bluestone Resources and national and local authorities continue to discredit the protests and disregard the referendum results, the communities are not waver ing in their struggle to protect their lives, territory, and the environment. They have vowed to continue their struggle until El Salvador and Guatemala governments act decisively to protect their rights and stop Cerro Blanco.

Read more:
- Mongabay - "Guatemalans strongly reject mining project in local referendum"
- The Conversation - "Canadian mining project in Guatemala opposed in local vote over environmental concerns"
- La Prensa Gráfica - "Waste from Guatemalan Cerro Blanco mine could reach Lake Güija, El Salvador" (available in Spanish only)
- Malayerba - "En El Salvador, la lucha contra la mina Cerro Blanco tiene rostro de mujer"
- AMAES Facebook and Twitter pages.

We call on the authorities to address the issue of cross-border mining. We are threatened by over 40 mining projects: I don't want to sound apocalyptic, but it looks like they want to make El Salvador disappear.

Nelly Rivera, AMAES
Full interview in the documentary "The guardians of the river Lempa" (Malayerba) - Spanish only, available here.
On October 19-20, the leaders of the world’s public development banks gathered for the “Finance in Common” Summit. Under the theme “Green and just transition for a sustainable recovery,” they discussed key issues affecting millions of people’s lives.

But once again, they took these decisions without listening to those most affected by their projects, the real experts: local communities, human rights defenders, Indigenous Peoples, feminist groups, and civil society.

They spoke about “sustainability” while ignoring the protests against austerity policies and rising debt. They talked about “human rights” without listening to those denouncing human rights violations. They spoke about “just transition” without giving space to those advocating for truly sustainable community-led alternatives while continuing to support projects that contribute to climate change.

This is why a group of activists and civil society groups from around the world came together for the #RightsInCommon Shadow Summit, an online campaign to share the messages of all those people who should be in the driving seat when it comes to development, but who are often left out.

Learn more:

- Check out this page to watch some short videos, with the powerful testimonies of the activists who joined the Rights In Common campaign.
- Op-ed by Forus: “Public Development Banks Can’t Drag Their Feet When It Comes to Building a Sustainable Future.”

Uzbekistan: the anatomy of fear

In Uzbekistan’s arid Karakalpaks region, dozens of people are living just over 500 metres away from a series of landfills. The conditions are unbearable. But the fate of this community does not receive much attention.

The landfills, on the contrary, are about to receive new funds. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has recently proposed to expand and transform some of these facilities, to develop better waste management and recycling systems. Everyone is against the landfills. Yet, almost nobody is raising their concerns with the authorities. Why? In Uzbekistan, most people are too afraid to speak. They already know what they’d face, if they dare to.

“...It smells horrible and there are flies everywhere: we can’t even open the windows! When it catches fire we have smoke here for days...everyone here, every single household, is against the landfill.”

Read this blog by Mark Fodor, coordinator of the Defenders in Development campaign, on his recent visit to Uzbekistan.
New reports and publications

Protector Not Prisoner
By: Indigenous Peoples Rights International | Business & Human Rights Resource Centre
This briefing explores how climate actions that do not center human rights have harmed Indigenous peoples. Key findings:
- Between January 2015 and August 2022, there were 883 attacks on Indigenous human rights defenders; at least 134 were related to renewable energy projects, including hydropower, wind, and solar.
- Although Indigenous Peoples comprise 6% of the world's population, nearly 20% of the attacks globally have been against Indigenous defenders.
- This briefing includes examples of Indigenous resistance to harmful climate actions in Kenya, the Philippines, Russia, Peru, Nepal, Indonesia & Norway, as well as related legal decisions upholding the rights of Indigenous communities.

55 years and counting
By: NGO Forum on ADB
This beautiful photobook illustrates the stories of communities leading powerful struggles in the context of harmful projects funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and to show the historical track record of ADB's poor implementation of its safeguards.

Our Last and Only Resort
By: Accountability Counsel and Arab Watch Coalition
This report illustrates the obstacles to community-led accountability for the harm caused by development finance in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). This region has the lowest volume of community-driven complaints to international accountability mechanisms (IAMs) and the lowest rate of outputs from complaints filed. We seek to understand why complaints in this region fall short relative to others and what can be done to improve the accessibility and efficacy of IAMs for impacted communities in MENA and beyond.

The role of development banks in Latin America (Spanish only)
By: Derecho, Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (DAR) et al.
This report analyses the role of development finance institutions (DFIs) in six countries in Latin America (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Argentina), focusing particularly on the behavior of DFIs in the region during the pandemic, the types of support they provided, the specific financing acquired, the conditions, the problems encountered, and the main recommendations for them.

Flattering to deceive: A reality check for the ‘EU Climate Bank’
By: Counter Balance and CEE Bankwatch network
The European Investment Bank (EIB) has pumped billions of euros into polluting fossil fuel companies over the past two years despite talking up its climate credentials. According to the report, the EIB handed out at least €7.4 billion in financing to some of Europe's fossil energy giants in 2020-21 - including €2 billion in loans to companies still burning coal.
Global issues, global campaigns

#StopIMFSurcharges campaign
Arab Watch Coalition and many other members and partners have joined the campaign #StopIMFSurcharges. Surcharges are counterproductive, unfair, and undermine countries' ability to invest in human rights.

Find out more here.

#CampaignOfCampaigns
The Civil Society Group on Financing for Development and the Women's Working Group on Financing for Development are calling for a Campaign of Campaigns to galvanize collective efforts to address the multiple crises humanity is facing nowadays. The campaign addresses several issues, from climate justice to food security and feminist economy. Recently, they launched a joint letter to reject IMF gender strategy (read here).

Find out more on their website and follow them on Twitter!

What's new

In December, we welcomed a new member: Global Rights, a human rights organization based in Nigeria that provides local NGOs and community-based organizations with targeted human rights training and technical assistance to document, monitor, and report on human rights violations.

They also offer a tailored paralegal training and court accompaniment program, to facilitate access to justice for poor and marginalized women seeking redress for legal problems. It is also one of the main organizations leading the process to adopt the National Action Plan on business and human rights.

Follow them and learn more about their work.

Useful resources

- **Protection International:**
  "Collective protection of human rights defenders of the rights to land and territory"
  This research aims at exploring a more comprehensive approach to the collective protection of defenders, and community-based CSOs, particularly those in rural areas.

- **CEE Bankwatch Network:**
  **Quick guides to EIB’s standards**
  The European Investment Bank has a set of standards that project promoters are bound to follow to prevent harm to communities, climate, and the environment. In these quick guides, CSOs can learn more about these standards and how to hold the bank accountable.

- **Inclusive Development International:**
  **Follow the Money Resource Hub**
  This resource will show you how to follow the money to identify and analyze the companies, investors, buyers, and other influential actors linked to development projects. It also explains how to develop tailored advocacy strategies and defend the rights of affected communities.

- **350.org:**
  **Resources for Media**
  A series of guides on engaging with the media, giving interviews, writing press releases, and much more!

Subscribe to the newsletter clicking here, and stay in touch!