



**A synthesis of reflections and proposals of indigenous, Afro-descendant, traditional and community organizations associated with the BUILD-Ford Foundation Program.**

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“Recognizing, our practices and knowledges from different perspectives, interests and ways of learning”

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## RECOGNIZING OUR PRACTICES AND KNOWLEDGES FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES, INTERESTS AND WAYS OF LEARNING"; PATHS ARE MADE BY WALKING

We start from the results and agreements of the first face-to-face meeting in Mexico City in November 2019, with 60 representatives of 29 organizations. Since February 2020, tools and dynamics of a virtual community have been used, due to the impact of the pandemic worldwide. For the same reason, the second face-to-face meeting scheduled for Colombia in October 2020 was suspended. Instead, specific virtual exchanges were carried out targeting three groups of organizations united by related interests reflected in regional histories, collective memories, ethnic and gender ascriptions, experiences and common challenges. The groups organized were: Mesoamerican indigenous and community organizations; Afro-descendant organizations and indigenous and Afro-descendant women leaders. In November 2020, there was a virtual meeting, where it was agreed to hold three exchanges, in preparation for a second virtual meeting on June 16 and 17, 2021.

Based on the results of the second virtual meeting in June 2021, the relevance of the issues raised, and the ways of conceiving the processes, 3 additional semi presential sectoral exchanges were proposed. Dialogues on organizational and institutional strengthening linked to territorial living spaces became a central subject. The first exchange was between indigenous and community organizations in Guatemala; the second, between Afro-descendant organizations and the third between indigenous and Afro-descendant women leaders.

The combination of these face-to-face, semi- presential and virtual activities have contributed to generating a sense of cohesion and group belonging among the representatives of the participating organizations. They also strengthened ties between organizations in the same country, which prior to this exercise lacked relevant communication between them, on issues of common interest. All this was possible thanks to straight and creative exchanges and dialogues on substantive topics of great interest to the mission and vision of the participating partner organizations, as well as the objectives of the BUILD program of the Ford Foundation.

The sum of activities, exchanges and dialogues have generated novel narratives to analyze, conceptualize, design and implement forms of organizational and institutional strengthening, formation of inclusive leadership leading to generational renewal, comprehensive sustainability and actions to rethink and improve the relationships of IAT and community organizations, with the Ford Foundation and institutions of the philanthropic community.

**The exchanges and dialogues also generated abundant and high-quality audiovisual products, as well as important essays by academics and analysts on central themes, namely:**

- 1 "Perspectives from the racialized margins; anti-racist territorial struggles of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples in Mesoamerica" (Charles R. Hale, University of California, Santa Bárbara).
- 2 "Anti-racist struggles and Afro-descendant and indigenous leadership in times of pandemic" (Juliet Hooker, Brown University).
- 3 "Black organizational processes in Latin America and the Caribbean" (Matilde Ribeiro, Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-brasileira-UNILAB, Brazil).

**The project, in principle, was set to last for 12 months (September 2019-August 2020). When analyzing and comparing the objectives to be met and the expected results with the results obtained, it is clear that the project managed to achieve its objectives and, in some aspects to exceed them.** Thanks to the effort and sense of unity around the common interests of the organizations and actors involved, outstanding results were achieved in unity, coherence and communication. Greater precision was achieved on key concepts related to the strengthening of the organizational and institutional structure, generational change and the formation of inclusive leaderships. Proposals to achieve comprehensive sustainability related to natural, cultural and political heritage in ancestral territories were also identified. Likewise, it was possible to outline greater clarity on how to propose collaborative relationships with higher levels of equity and horizontality with the cooperating and philanthropic community.

A common element experienced by indigenous, afro-descendant, traditional peoples and organized communities in their respective countries is the confrontation between the nature of the national state and the spaces of life, constituted by the territories as natural, cultural and political patrimony. The structures of the nation state, incomplete, parapolitical and eminently repressive (Holden, 2017), are usually controlled by groups of factual power that during the pandemic intensified their extractive policies on the territories and living spaces to which the IAT peoples and community organizations belong. The structures of the nation state experienced as a recurring threat together with the pandemic and associated social, economic and political crises, were factors that generated intense reflection and critical analysis on each of the issues addressed.

## INTRODUCTION



"Recognizing our practices and knowledge from different perspectives, interests and forms of learning", is the project with which the BUILD program set out to contribute to identify, document and systematize the experience of participating partner organizations on their sustainability as organizations and networks, through dialogues and exchanges to strengthen the strategic structures and operations of these organizations. The main objective was to optimize the use of human and financial resources, from the perspective of the mission, priorities, interests and needs of the associated organizations based on their worldviews, accountability mechanisms and responsibilities.

This synthesis of exchanges includes the period of emergence and evolution of the Covid-19 pandemic and its mutations. It emphasizes the arguments, plans and actions of participant organizations and outlines fundamental contributions to the protection of their territories, successful preventive and curative health measures and the strengthening of the food security of their communities.

At the ecological, social, economic, cultural, ethical and political crossroads that societies and States face at the international level, the ancestral contributions and contributions of indigenous, afro-descendant and traditional peoples and community organizations (IAT + C) are fundamental to defend and revitalize successfully Mother Earth, our Common Home. Without the contributions and real participation of the IAT + C, there are no viable alternatives to current collapse. This is how climate activists, leaders, young people, artists and scientists who questioned, with their creative power, the politicians and the States gathered at COP26 made it feel. Likewise, indigenous, afrodescendant and traditional peoples with local communities are acting on the front lines of the climate crisis; their territories are home to 24% of the world's carbon and are highly vulnerable to the effects of the climate crisis.

**Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, former UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and international environmental activist within the framework of the Conference of the Parties (COP26) stated:**

"Communities are the true experts in living in harmony with nature, a fundamental reason why their territories currently contain 80% of the world's biodiversity. There are strict laws and customs, to protect nature, while the States have contradictory laws ... In reality, we use nature to solve all our problems of food security, water or climate change and other benefits. We have done it without destroying nature, so we have a lot to share with the world and we need support so that governments stop criminalizing us, because our struggle to protect our territories. For example, in the Philippines, we have an Indigenous Rights Law, but we also have a Mining Law and an Investment Agreement that encourages the extraction of our resources "(Tauli- Corpuz, 2021).

<https://news.un.org/es/story/2021/11/1499662>



The delegation from the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests (AMPB) in Glasgow declared:

“

We come with clear proposals and good practices from indigenous peoples and local communities of Mesoamerican forests in the fight against climate change ... We have called for attention to a region that offers solutions to global problems through the defense and implementation of territorial rights, and we have accompanied our member organizations in the development of advocacy strategies at the national level. We have also been successful in building capacities and promoting the exchange of local knowledge... Through the Coordinator of Women Territorial Leaders of Mesoamerica, we strengthen the incidence of women leaders in the region and their solutions for achieving climate resilience (AMPB, 2021).

*(<https://www.alianzamesoamericana.org/es/la-alianza-mesoamericana-de-pueblos-y-bosques-ha-llegado-a-cop26/>).*

”

Climate activist Elizabeth Wathuti from Kenya called for a moment of compassionate silence for the billions absent from the COP- 26, whose stories have not been heard and whose sufferings have not been felt. She asked to open our hearts stating:

“

More than two million Kenyan compatriots are facing famine caused by climate change ... The decisions made here, will determine whether children will have food and water (Wathuti, 2021).

”

*([https://www.democracynow.org/es/2021/11/5/please\\_open\\_your\\_hearts\\_kenyan\\_activist](https://www.democracynow.org/es/2021/11/5/please_open_your_hearts_kenyan_activist))*

At the opening of COP26, Yrsa Daley-Ward, a poet and activist for the rights of the LGBTQ community and a poet of Indian and African descent, alerted the audience delivering her poem:

“ Anything less than the best is too much to pay.  
Anything later than now, too little, too late.  
Nothing will change without you.  
It's too much to pay. ”

For his part, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson cited the scathing “Blah, blah, blah” with which Greta Thunberg described the endless discussions of political leaders (Carrington, 2021).

The Secretary General of the United Nations, António Guterres exhorted us to listen to the voices that question us, judge the present and presage the future. He also urged to listen to alternative voices, and the voice of youth:

In recent years, young people have rendered us a service by bringing the climate agenda to the forefront of our political debate” and, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi pointed out...

“ young people were at the center of the Pre-COP Summit in Milan. In Glasgow, here, we have to make them proud ” (Draghi, 2021). ”

(Mario Draghi, 2021).

(<https://www.panoramical.eu/italia/67057/>).

How to do justice to the extraordinary set of reflections, perspectives and proposals generated by indigenous, afro-descendant, traditional peoples and community organizations from Latin America, East Africa (Kenya) and Southeast Asia (Indonesia), generated during this period of presential and virtual meetings and exchanges



**The purpose of this document is to systematize the main contributions, lessons learned, reflections and proposals of the indigenous, afro-descendant, traditional peoples and community organizations (IATC) participating in the project.** In that sense, it incorporates perspectives, reflections and suggestions related to those contributions made by IATC organizations; its efforts for organizational and institutional strengthening and building inclusive leadership for generational renewal and its comprehensive sustainability. In addition, they are contributions and reflections made in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic that include its underlying factors.

It is a task that aims to remake the path many times traveled and move forward until we hear the voices of native, traditional and African-based peoples, as well as community organizations to rediscover that dimension of humanity and nature from which we have so distanced ourselves. The human species through indigenous peoples in their multiple functions as protectors of biodiversity, generators of food, culture and spirituality, recognize itself as part of Mother Nature, recognizing its finiteness and interdependence between societies and species, recovering its cosmic and transcendent dimension.

The contributions and reflections of IATC organizations, must be valued in this context. It highlights a deep spirituality and awareness of their respective histories, closely linked to their cosmogony and natural, cultural and political heritages; as well as the use of the resources of their environment and biodiversity to face with resilience the brutal impact of the pandemic, the absence of the State and its opportunistic policies, as well as the related inherent crises.

They also reflect a deep shared conviction that it is not the political entities external to the ethnic-community group, nor the severely incomplete nation states (Holden, 2017), or the instances of cooperation- even recognizing their positive and necessary role, who will provide answers to the most urgent and medium-term demands of organizations, peoples and communities. The underlying reason has to do with the nature of the nation states and political parties, whose narratives, values, policies, actions and obsolete leadership lack the capacity and legitimacy to respond to the needs of peoples, communities and organizations, as well as to present inclusive and creative alternatives to the enormous challenges of the societies, peoples and communities of the global South.

The formulation and facilitation of the process was managed by Margarita Antonio, Maricela Kauffmann, Edwin Matamoros, Filippo del Gatto and Galio Gurdían, consultants of the Caribbean and Central American Research Center - CCARC (for its acronym in English); an entity that since 1980 has been characterized by conducting transformative research and practices in support of processes of social, economic and political demands in the territories of indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants in Latin America, especially in Central America.

## UNDERSTANDING KEY CONCEPTS AND WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT PROCESSES

The essence of the project was to discuss and clarify key concepts and on that basis to dialogue, reflect, carry out exchanges and systematize concerns on topics shared by the philanthropic community and the IATC. Some of those topics were the following:

### Institutional and Organizational Strengthening (FOI)

To strengthen their own thinking, the organizations, communities and peoples require qualified personnel to prepare proposals and develop activities. It involves knowledge management, from and by organizations, with capacity building in the legal, technical and political fields.

Institutional and organizational strengthening are key to ensure transparency and governance of organizations in the future. The proposals, which each organization has built, could be analyzed in learning exchange networks that contribute to structuring and linking the different communities and organizations. Sharing experiences and achievements strengthens the capacities of organizations.

### Leadership

Transferring knowledge meaningful to develop forms of inclusive leadership and recognize the diversity of the population in the territories (indigenous, afro, traditional and local communities) is essential for the youth; the leadership of the near future, who will transfer their knowledge and commitments to future generations.

It is necessary to strengthen women's and youth organizations by promoting their participation in decision-making and generational renewal processes.

The criminalization against leadership should not continue. **Leadership has to be a collective** endeavor, to achieve that individual approaches are articulated to collective interests.

### Sustainability

Strengthening capacities for sustainability and financial autonomy will help us to be less vulnerable and more resilient to exercise our rights and safeguard ancestral natural livelihoods.

Create reserve funds in organizations, to deal with emergencies and urgencies of the associates

## Women and Youth

Women are underrepresented even though we are the majority.

We demand equal participation so that our voices are heard in the different spaces for the defense of collective and individual rights.

Encourage the creation of strategies for young women's voices to be heard in decision-making spaces.

Create a fund dedicated to community-based women, to accompany their management and territorial administration.

Articulate the demands and new contributions that youth are making in various fields such as: sports, sexual diversity, people with disabilities and artistic production as areas for presenting political demands and identity development as peoples.

There is a strong demand for the articulation of indigenous and afro-descendant youth that did not exist in the past. The autonomy approach has regained strength at the local level and is capable of generating social mobilization, using information and communication technologies (ICT) and alliances.

## Security

Our leaders live under permanent threat, for acting firmly in defense of our rights.

Supporting a protection program for defenders is of the utmost importance to guarantee their lives.

Sharing and analyzing experiences in learning exchange networks, could contribute to the physical safety of the leaders.

## Worldview, spirituality, ethics and values.

We are in a process of struggle for Human Rights; we face problems deepened by hunger, poverty and exclusion at all levels.

Cultivating harmony and alliances, with the fortitude and blessing of our ancestors, strengthens us with the stamina and resolve to continue practicing traditional values and customs against the criminalization of our respective worldviews.

Emphasize the need to continue strengthening ethnic organizations and communities. Think together the ways to continue lobbying and transforming philanthropic institutions, to achieve the balance of support for urgent issues and continue to strengthen organizations in their operating systems.

The philanthropic community and cooperating institutions must direct their resources directly to the actors in the territories. They must respect us, complement us and create means to channel resources to those issues prioritized by the communities.

## THE NATION STATE IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH; AN INCOMPLETE, INEFFICIENT AND CORRUPT STRUCTURE, DOMINATED BY EXCLUSIONARY, RACIST INTERESTS AND DE FACTO POWERS.

**IATC peoples' and organizations' approach to the nature of the State is based on their historical memory and recent experiences, namely:**

Incomplete, exclusionary, racist and rentier nation state structures, whose short-term economic model is based on discrimination of indigenous, afrodescendant, and traditional peoples and unsustainable extraction of natural resources. Furthermore, the state apparatus is in the hands of factual powers and organized crime (Briscoe, 2009). In general, they are structures whose social, economic and political model consists of perpetuating unequal social relations, of race, class and gender, as well as the extraction and exploitation of resources generally located in community territories, to the benefit of factual power groups damaging the territories and its biodiversity as living spaces, natural, cultural and political patrimonies of indigenous, Afrodescendant, traditional peoples and community organizations.

The groups in power use some basic elements of the nation state such as sovereignty, self-determination and coercive structures (army and police) to deny, violate and evade their constitutional obligations (national and international) to repress the individual and collective exercise of civil, social, cultural and political rights, especially rights of IATpeoples and community organizations, to establish or defend the interests of those groups, classes or sectors in power.

**During the pandemic, policies of violence and racism have increased and worsened in the power structures of the nation state that erode, weaken and repress national and international institutions of civil, social and political rights.** In their international relations, nation state institutions attack and weaken the regional and international institutions that formulate and defend human rights, enshrined in texts such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). They also block advances in the recognition of economic, social and economic rights, especially those recognized by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), as well as the functions of civil society as a whole. By raising their demands, IAT and community organizations are becoming enemies of the state apparatus while the international institutional framework supporting IATC's rights, are deeply weakened by the emergence of policies hostile to individual and collective civil, social, cultural and political rights.

## TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DEBATES AND MEETINGS

The pandemic and the associated social, economic and political crises, especially extractivist public policies in their respective countries were the factors that generated reflections and critical analysis.

**This concern was transversal to the proposals of the Mesoamerican indigenous and community organizations, the representation of AMAN in Indonesia, and the organizations of Afro-Colombian and Brazilian peoples:**

“ The governments have fallen into the hands of what we call “the Corrupt Pact”. The participant organizations face governments that function as organized crime syndicates. Definitely, this situation will affect the agendas of the IAT organizations, especially in terms of criminalization and repression against them. Having understood what is happening in the region, we see a basic and important role of the IAT organizations... ”

(Elías, 2021).

“ Indigenous peoples are threatened with extinction because traditional territories are controlled by extractivist companies. There are difficulties in finding food, usually depending on the help of others to survive. There are communities that are forced to become company workers and, as victims, are forced to become an oil palm plantation. ”

“ During the pandemic we had challenges related to democracy, and especially in communication to discuss how to reorient our organization and the strategy to fight for the rights of indigenous peoples. We have learned that the answers to all crises lie with the indigenous community. Our focus at this time is on how to strengthen ourselves; we wonder how to encourage communities to help each other across communities. This is an economic concept that we want to build safely. ”

(Syarif, 2021).

**The integral and central dimension of the territory was also a core aspect of the interventions of afro-descendant organizations:**

“ ... When we talk about institutional strengthening, we think of two things: the strengthening of organizations and the black movement; and, secondly, also that of their own authorities and of governance in the territories where the communities live. From that, institutional strengthening has five points namely: Being organized, have proposals, have strategies to promote those proposals, strengthen our own thinking as an organization, as a community or as a people and to have the resources to implement these proposals (trained people and financial resources). All that entails having enough people that are trained and capable of doing the different activities that will be developed. ”

(Rosero, 2021).

## THE MAIN ISSUES ADDRESSED BY THE PARTICIPATING INDIGENOUS, AFRO-DESCENDANT, TRADITIONAL AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS ARE SUMMARIZED BELOW:

- ◆ The territory as a living space, constitutes the center of the natural, cultural and political patrimony. This spatial centrality of the territory, makes possible the community structure and kinship relations. Also, the formation of legitimate authorities, the practices of traditional medicine, as well as sustainable production and food security, turning the territory into a fundamental and irreplaceable living space;
- ◆ The growing awareness of ancestry and ascription linked to a spiritual and respectful worldview for Mother Nature. Collective memories, kinship relationships, culture, languages and spirituality are embodied in their territories as an space of life with cultural and political expressions, inspiring identity resistance, resilience and creativity;
- ◆ There is a great diversity of expressions of organizational and institutional strengthening depending on the ethnic and cultural affiliation of the people or community concerned;
- ◆ Land ownership, use and management are considered fundamental factors to guarantee food security and sovereignty;
- ◆ The importance of addressing the issue of the individual security of the IAT C leadership and their communities, in the face of external threats from the state apparatus and the factual powers;
- ◆ The clear awareness of growing in the formation of inclusive and egalitarian leadership based on generational renewal;
- ◆ The growing participation of women and youth in communication and management instances using ICT. However, there is a strong emphasis to consolidate such advances ;
- ◆ A clear awareness of the need to attract collaboration and support from cooperation and philanthropic institutions to face the challenges to achieve the social, cultural, political and financial sustainability of the IATC organizations, including accountability to their base communities;
- ◆ The need to reinforce "nodes" or regional centers for reflection and systematization to collect, systematize, reflect, provide feedback, influence and lobby based on the reflections and proposals of the IATC;
- ◆ The systematic and formal training at a technical and professional level of institutional and professional staff and leaders of organizations;
- ◆ The clear demand to review and consolidate the association and more horizontal relationships between IATC peoples and organizations with philanthropic institutions and related international cooperation organizations;
- ◆ The complexity and tensions facing the social and political relations of IATC organizations with regional, national and international power structures.

## LESSONS LEARNED

**The most relevant contributions and lessons learned were shared with the spirit of exchange, convergence and communication that characterized this process.**

The territorial living space has ecological, cultural, spiritual and political meanings. In contrast, the main interest of the state structures and factual powers is to continue their policies of disarticulation and extinction of community life spaces. A supra-regional sense of community, belonging and joint action has emerged from IATC organizations. This has generated a rapprochement on common interests and issues, between indigenous, afro-descendant, traditional and community organizations, with interests and cultures sometimes historically conflicted and almost always differentiated, which transcends territories and borders.

- ◊ There is a procedural and respectful construction of inclusive leadership as forms of generational renewal;
- ◊ Participating organizations have demonstrated maturity, experience and management capabilities, especially in dealing with the pandemic and underpinning crisis;
- ◊ The organizations' approaches are coherent, clear and supported by their experiences;
- ◊ There is a substantive growth in relations and exchange of intra-community resources and grassroots members of the IATC organizations, which transcends formal institutional relations.

## RIGHTS AND GROWING AWARENESS OFF IATC LEADERSHIP

The perception of the working group, throughout the process of facilitating meetings and exchanges between the IATC organizations, is that far from the prevailing discouragement in the metropolitan centers of power, the unique and extraordinary struggles of the IATC stand out to develop their capacities for resistance and resilience in the face of the pandemic. The interaction, communication and reflections of the participating organizations reflect the following characteristics:

- ◊ There is a growing esteem, appreciation and respect of the IATC organizations for their timely and effective response in preventing the worst effects of the Covid pandemic and responding to the most urgent needs, despite the adverse social, economic and environmental state policies and hostile actions of the factual powers;
- ◊ There is greater knowledge and understanding that nation states, controlled by factual powers, do not respond to the interests of indigenous, afro-descendants, traditional peoples and organized communities. The IAT C organizations, based on their experience, learned not to expect public policies and actions from the structures of their respective national states to be responsive to their needs and interests.
- ◊ They emphasize the importance of strengthening the binomial organizational and institutional strengthening. They consider a priority to promote the organizational structure and network linked to the communities and territories, as a decisive factor to advance in the strengthening of the institutional structure.

## WHERE DOES THE STRENGTH, DYNAMISM, AND RESILIENCE OF THE ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATING IN THE PROCESS RESIDE



**In its growing awareness of being part of and being inserted in communities and territories characterized by possessing tangible and intangible resources linked to natural, cultural and political resources, collective memories of ancestry, traditions, cultures, languages, knowledge, resilience, spirituality and ascriptive identities. Simultaneously, in the existence of authorities recognized by the community and therefore with legitimacy.**

All these factors together generate a deep sense of belonging and responsibility towards ancestral and native territories and communities.

The participating organizations are in turn aware of the gaps, weaknesses and challenges still to overcome and which are set out in detail in the work that CCARC carried out in 2009 for the Ford Foundation (CCARC, 2009).

It is interesting to contrast the internal growth of the participating PIATC organizations, with respect to the CCARC diagnosis. The IATC organizations of the global South, associated with the project, representing a great diversity of indigenous, afro-descendant, traditional and community peoples and communities, would be mostly what the cited diagnosis characterized as transformative organizations, with a clear conscience of the need to claim their territories and resources, through available legal means, in order to transform the social, cultural and political structures in which they are inserted (CCARC, 2009). The participating organizations are also aware of and work to strengthen their organic and structural ties with the communities they represent in order to achieve the levels of accountability and inclusive leadership that their constituencies demand.

It is necessary to contrast such growing ethnic-community strength, with the implosion of the parapolitical and incomplete structures that characterize the Latin American states and the global South, generally in the hands of factual powers and organized crime. In the global South, state structures do not seem to have completed their constitutive process and democratic character to respond to the needs and rights of its citizens in an inclusive way. IATC peoples and communities continue to be, for real purposes, objects, livestock and mere resources; in the best of cases "labor supply" laborers, subject to the interests of power groups, entrenched in the colonial or neocolonial institutions that still persist in the nation states of the global South. In most of these states, their inhabitants have not yet achieved the level of citizens with basic civil, social, cultural and political rights (Holden, 2021).

The organizations and members of indigenous, afro-descendant and traditional peoples and communities, as producers of thought, recognize themselves as part of a totality constituted by their worldview and reverence for Mother Earth in whose core their spirituality is located. This approach to Mother Earth as a space of life, is constituted in the spinal column that supports, protects, animates, energizes and produces in its territories diverse and complex material, immaterial and spiritual expressions closely intertwined.

Respect and veneration for Mother Earth are seen as diametrically opposed to the economic, exploitative, rentier and short-term extractivism of nature and its resources. That short-term extractivist model is the one that prevails in the majority societies and public policies of the states of the Global South and is the paradigm that continues to be implicit in the national and multilateral plans for post-pandemic economic reactivation. In the IAT peoples and community organizations proposals, and in contrast to the approach to the territory as a good for commercial or transactional use, the ancestral territory is considered as the cosmogonic unit, the Common House, the living space, whose material and immaterial resources, especially memories collectives, traditional authorities and spirituality, must be revitalized and managed sustainably (Pope Francis, 2015; Abé, 2021). This original and original link to the territory generates capacities for resistance, resilience and the possibility of having legitimate authorities as long as said authorities are linked and respond to community structures and demands (Arendt, 1961).

## **THE TERRITORY AS A NATURAL, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL PATRIMONY, GENERATOR OF FORTITUDE AND RESILIENCE**

The organizations and their leaders are aware and incorporate in their proposals, the conviction that it is from their insertion and belonging to their territories as natural, cultural and political heritages with histories, ascriptions, values, memories, knowledge, productive practices and spirituality, that they have managed to overcome the current pandemic and related socio-political crisis. These own capacities have also contributed to the growth of their capacities for resistance, resilience and survival in the face of extermination or appropriation policies promoted by the states and dominant societies and exacerbated during the pandemic. Likewise, this set of constitutive factors makes them bearers of alternative creative proposals anchored in their cosmogony, traditional knowledge and experiences, which are a net contribution to the mainstream societies within which they live and to positively resolve the current planetary crisis.

In that sense, they have overcome the narrative and discourse of being helpless and impoverished communities and subjects, who, from a position of defenselessness and vulnerability, implore help from people, entities, national or international public institutions, external to peoples and communities.

They present themselves as conscious and dignified peoples and communities, aware of the value as protectors of biodiversity, patrimonies and natural, cultural and political resources which enable them to offer feasible alternatives to the ecological, social, economic and political crisis of their respective societies and of the planet, based on recognized positive experiences. They are collective subjects with theoretical and practical resources to formulate and reach agreements, strategies, policies and medium-term plans with the political structures of their respective nation states and with international bilateral and multilateral institutions, committed to the sustainability and survival of nature and of the planet, including the human species.

## THE TERRITORY AND THE PROPOSALS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The territory thus proposed, is essential to advance in the organizational and institutional strengthening of organizations to the extent that territorial insertion strengthens the links and accountability with the communities. Likewise, the territorial dimension is key in the formation of inclusive leaderships with authority and legitimacy (Arendt, 1961). The territory as a whole and patrimony is also fundamental to achieve integral sustainability (including financial), to the extent that the communities and peoples represented by the IATC organizations, efficiently and effectively manage that space and its resources. The territorial heritage conceived in that way, is also decisive to promote forms of generational change that do not compete for power, but are directed to work and to be accountable to community interests in the territory.

The representatives of afro-descendant organizations from Brazil and Colombia raised throughout the reflections and exchanges, the concept of the territory as a space for community life, where the social, cultural and spiritual relationships of societies with an African matrix, such as black communities, acquire their fullness. The primeval importance of the territory and its resources, for organizational and institutional strengthening, was also argued by the leadership of Friends of Lake Turkana (FoLT, Kenya) and the Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN, Indonesia).

The territory and its resources, with its existing social, productive, cultural, spiritual, legal and political relationships, thus contribute to outlining the qualities, attributes and capacities of the people and communities in that space. The territory and its resources thus become a space of life and a factor of empowerment and self-management in the face of the generally negligent or usurping action of the nation state and factual powers. The insertion and management of the territory and its resources, generate livelihoods, experiences, knowledge, legitimacy, as well as social and economic relations linked to real expressions of autonomy.

**From this concept of territory as integral heritage, result three fundamental lines of work:**

- 1** To recover, secure and legalize the territories of the IAT peoples and community organizations, represented associated with the BUILD program. These territories constitute the natural, cultural, spiritual, ascriptive identity, economic and political heritage, and include the material and immaterial resources to revalue memories, traditions, values, spirituality, languages, ascriptions, and build legitimate and inclusive expressions of authority. In the exchanges and meetings, the organizations from Mesoamerica, South America, Kenya and Indonesia explained their legal strategy for the recovery of lands and territories, as well as the conflicts, advances and risks in physical security that such endeavor entails. Contributing to improving legal capacities to effectively advance territorial claims is a main task of IATC organizations. For cooperating and accompanying organizations, it must clearly become a central issue for their support and accompaniment plans.
- 2** Develop strategies, programs, plans and actions that incorporate the methods, knowledge, procedures and comprehensive actions of Indigenous, afro-descendants, traditional peoples and communities, to carry out a restorative management of biodiversity as well as sustainable, productive and efficient territorial heritage, to confront proposals that consider the territory as a short-term tradable-commercial good in predatory and unsustainable economic models.
- 3** Organizational and institutional strengthening is thus constituted as a result of a gradual and transversal strategy, which is built as processes and actions are implemented to recover and legally guarantee the possession, ownership, use and management of the territory and its resources as natural, cultural and political legacy.

The experience of resilience and survival of IAT peoples and community organizations during the months of the pandemic, leads these organizations to raise as a central point of their demands before the philanthropic community and those institutions accompanying them from the external world, their ability to survive and resist. Likewise, their proposal not to regress the pre-pandemic situation, characterized by public policies of territorial expropriation and resources extraction promoted by the nation state. Above all, they clearly argue that their knowledge and capacities to protect biodiversity and sustainably manage their territorial assets, constitute a fundamental contribution to successfully resolve the climate collapse and socio-economic crisis that their societies and the planet are facing.

## CENTRALITY OF THE TERRITORIES, THEIR NATURAL RESOURCES AND DEFENSE OF MOTHER EARTH

In most of the countries of the global South, in whose territories indigenous peoples, afro-descendants, traditional peoples and organized communities live, natural resources constitute the column that supports their quality of life and expectations of good living. At the same time, they have also been the main platform in the formation of the capitals of the elites associated with the generation of income from the extraction of these resources, as well as the main objective of the repressive and expropriating policies by nation states on the ancestral territories of the indigenous, afro-descendant, traditional peoples and communities. At the same time, these territories and their resources constitute the basis for facing the climate crisis with resilience and overcoming environmental collapse.

For IATC organizations, natural resources have an extraordinary symbolic value, which permeates the constitution of identities, political ideals and social imaginary. Entire communities, at the local, national and regional level, bank their hopes in the existence and diversity of these resources. Their plans and expectations for building their "good living", recreating their memory and narratives of a past of autonomy and self-sufficiency, imagining a revitalized biodiversity that sustains better conditions and quality of life for future generations are based on their territories.

The participating organizations are aware that the claimed territories are not isomorphic, as the CCARC analysis suggests. They know from experience that within the territories there are diverse peoples and communities with diverse identities, histories, interests and approaches to life. However, they warn that the full and legal recognition of the ownership and usufruct of the territorial space and its resources, is what will eventually enable internal and constructive negotiations on autonomous management, as well as the equitable and sustainable use of the territory and its resources (CCARC, 2009).

While political leaders at the international level evade to act decisively or continue to make promises without content, in the face of the collapse of biodiversity and global warming, the planet seems to have reached the point of no return, nullifying the conditions that have allowed the emergence of living conditions (IPCC, 2021). The climate crisis adds to the emergence of other social, health and economic crises linked to that collapse. The exponential growth of the negative factors that prevent the biological, social, cultural and political reproduction of indigenous groups and the human species, such as the current and future pandemics, constitute a small reflection of this crisis.

The spirituality and reverence of the IAT peoples and community organizations, for Mother Earth and her resources, insist that we are part of a whole and in the need to develop and maintain a spirit of respect, devotion and admiration to relate to Nature and the Cosmos. That is the deep source of IAT peoples' and communities' spirituality.

In that sense, it is necessary to develop a concept similar to the philosophy of the Mitakuye Oyasin (All my relationships) of the Lakota nation, whose meaning expresses the interconnection of all beings with each other; those that fly, those that crawl, those that swim, rocks, trees, plants, beings with two, four and those with eight legs (Theobald, 2021). The participating organizations, thus, categorically reject the extractivist economic model, linked to an unsustainable governance model, even in the periods of greatest bonanza related to the boom in prices of raw materials. The traditional use of the income generated by this model has a short-term orientation that is contradictory to the very nature of non-renewable resources.

The participating organizations propose the need to stop the destruction of biodiversity, beauty and complexity of Nature, since in its conservation, sustainable use and respect, it is found, as suggested by so many scientists and religious leaders, the route to find the quality of life and satisfaction of human beings, during their brief presence in the world. Nature dazzles and marvels, whether one assumes a religious origin or explanation or if one tries to decipher its secrets through scientific means. In this sense, there is a deep coincidence between the arguments of the IAT peoples and community organizations, and the most current scientific findings that propose the need to eradicate the extractivist development model and assume the belonging of the human species to an ecological and cosmic totality.

The indigenous, afro-descendant and traditional peoples and communities of the global South demand a change in the current paradigm of exploitation of natural resources, through a governance compatible with sustainability, inclusion and equity, through negotiations and broad social agreements based on objectives that are developed within a framework of inclusion, equity and transparency involving multiple actors, especially the IAT C., who have proven to be the best managers and defenders of these resources (Kaimowitz, 2001).

The fundamental contribution of native peoples and communities to humanity based on their spiritual, natural, cultural and political heritage, constituted by their territories and resources that form spaces of life with cultural and ethnic identity, is closely related to their dignity, creativity and proposals for group, societal and planetary sustainability. That is why the claim of the IAT and community organizations, which demand that the dominant majority societies, recognize their centennial contributions to sustainability and quality of life on the planet, is fully valid and current. These demands and the actions they require, challenge the bilateral, multilateral and philanthropic international institutions, also confronting the nation state that by definition has been built and developed denying those demands. Acting in this context will require greater strength, creativity, security and commitment from the organizations associated and committed to this effort.

Hence the insistence on formulating new approaches and policies, such as anti-racism and care policies, raised throughout the exchanges, as well as the need to defend and consolidate national and international spaces linked to IAT peoples claims and community organizations.

## RESPONSES AND PROPOSALS OF IATC ORGANIZATIONS TO FACE THE GLOBAL CRISIS AND THEIR SOCIETIES

“ We face the dilemma of saving our world or condemning humanity to a hellish future... We must opt for the long-term vision and assume moral authority, so that this and future generations can hope for all, a future of peace, opportunities and dignity in a healthy planet

”

(Guterres, 2021).

The reflections and proposals generated by the exchange of experiences, knowledge and lessons of the IAT peoples and community organizations in this period of deep crisis, contrasts with the prevailing pessimism in the cooperation institutions, metropolitan centers of power and the prevailing economic reactivation approaches, that take for granted the convenience of returning to the status quo prior to the pandemic, knowing that this social, economic and political model has generated a global climate collapse, which already makes the planet an unlivable place, especially for indigenous, afro-descendant, traditional peoples. and community organizations from the global South.

Faced with indifference, makeup activities and the absence of strong public policies to respond to the global crisis, the IAT peoples and communities; the best stewards of the planet's forests, propose proven and feasible alternatives, based on their traditions, knowledge and practices that constantly demonstrate the way forward to get out of the global ecological and climatic collapse. Its organizational and institutional strengthening, embedded in their natural, cultural and political heritage, and the benefits it generates to protect and revitalize nature, livelihoods and food security, constitute a fundamental contribution to solving the climate crisis facing the planet (Kaimowitz, 2021).

Achieving the centennial balance that combines protecting and using the resources in the territories as "space of life" is directly related to the spiritual, social and cultural baggage of the peoples that inhabit those territories and in practices nurtured in traditions, memories, values, backed by the authority of older men and women, whose legitimacy, strength and authority lie in being linked to spirituality, tradition and the territories in their integral dimension.

The sustainable management of forest and aquatic resources and food security is not just a technical issue, it is a comprehensive approach where the spirituality of peoples and organizations is deeply involved. In the exchanges and dialogues, the organizations representing peoples with an African matrix from Colombia, Brazil and Kenya repeatedly presented the relationship between territories, biodiversity, collective memories, organizational strengthening, food security, culture and spirituality. This relationship takes shape in the terreiro as a meeting place for Afro organizations in Brazil and their connection to Candomble. Another example is that of the remnants of forests, which protect from desertification in the province of Amhara, Ethiopia, where the spiritual approach has for centuries nurtured the decisive contribution of religious groups, in the conservation of primary forests and aquifers in the areas in their custody (Dodds, 2021).

Culture, values, traditions, spirituality, formation of legitimate authorities, social relations of production such as the exchange of workforce, or reciprocity and the ethnic-community heritage, mainly constituted by the territory and its resources are the center and source of culture, tradition and formation of socially recognized legitimate authorities, which are opposed to structures of nation state apparatus, which have power and legality, but little authority or legitimacy before the peoples and communities (Arendt, 1961).

The construction of legitimate authorities, values and the capacity to resist of the communities are based on the experiences, traditions, wisdoms and ancestral knowledge rooted in the respective territories and biodiversity. The older generations are key links in the tradition of the territory. They are bearers of memories, wisdom and knowledge, social and productive relationships, as well as for future plans. The tradition linked to the natural and cultural heritage, far from being a burden or hindrance, constitutes a decisive factor that imprints ascription with meaning, will to live, character, spirituality and dignity of the communities and peoples incardinated in their territories and resources, such as in the case of the African structured societies in Brazil, where the terreiro is a condition to constitute the Quilombo, through the spirituality of the Candomble.

Hence, the main challenge of the accompanying and cooperating entities of the IAT peoples and communities would be to support their efforts to recover and protect their territories and biodiversity as natural, cultural and productive heritages, generators of livelihoods, food security, quality of life, memories, traditions, collective affiliations and inclusive leadership.

This ontological affirmation of achieving individual and community fullness in ancestral territory and biodiversity, common to indigenous, afro-descendant and traditional peoples, contrasts with the version of civil and political society that the concept of individual and mono-ethnic citizenship entails, in the nation states of the global South. The natural, cultural, political and productive legacy embodied in the territory of the group, becomes the integrating and structuring factor of the people or community that inhabits it. The territory thus becomes in the proposals and negotiations of IAT peoples and Community organizations, an integral, encompassing entity, crucial for their operation, and organizational and institutional strengthening

For IATC organizations, the territorial approach is part of a holistic vision where the set of constitutive factors are interrelated. The expert member of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues of the UN, Dr. Mirna Cunningham Kain, explains that the holistic approach in programs that include indigenous peoples implies contemplating a series of components as a whole, which must be considered in the conceptualization of a program and in each of its stages. The components comprise a territorial and collective approach, an intercultural approach, an intergenerational approach, and a gender perspective. The territorial and collective approach includes biodiversity and Mother Earth as key factors and is based on the notion of Good Living for Indigenous Peoples. This approach is materialized through consultations that respect the collectivity of indigenous peoples, their way of conceiving and mobilizing through the territory, collective decision-making mechanisms, including the link with Mother Nature (Cunningham, 2013).

In that sense, organizational strengthening is inextricably linked to the territory and its resources. Institutional strengthening, including forms of inclusive leadership and medium and long-term integral sustainability, necessarily go through the possession, use and management of the territory and its resources.

That is the fundamental proposal that emerges from these exchanges and dialogues. Such emphasis on the territory, being part of the traditional worldview, continues to be the Copernican transformative proposal, put forward by the IATC organizations in this process.

The main threats to this natural, cultural and political legacy include the expansion of government control, expropriating public policies, cultural nullification, and inadequate resource management. The expropriation and lack of recognition of traditional territories and their authorities, together with external pressures, especially extractive and commercial activities, have caused erosion of territorial biodiversity and culture. With globalization, these pressures have reached extraordinary levels. For this reason, it is imperative to guarantee the existence of mechanisms designed to protect traditional forms of wisdom and knowledge. This implies respecting and strengthening the integral and encompassing character of traditional knowledge systems.

## WHAT TO DO ?

Such a question with a long political history, challenges all the participants in this intense and fruitful process. It is addressed to the participating organizations, their peers, the philanthropic community, allies and companions in this fruitful dynamic of revitalization, affirmation, exchange and reflection of the IAT and community organizations to achieve their organizational and institutional strengthening.

The basic objectives of the BUILD-CCARC project, aimed at facilitating communication and exchanges between IAT peoples and community organizations, associated with the BUILD program, continue to be fully valid and their implementation in the current context is more mandatory and urgent than ever. As in the current climate collapse, in the case of the IAT peoples and community organizations proposals, it is necessary that the discourse be translated into concrete responses and actions.

The conception of organizational and institutional strengthening, as well as the formation of inclusive leaderships, with the incorporation of youth and women, and the ecological, social, cultural, economic and political sustainability of the medium and long term have been reaffirmed from the perspective of the IATC in the centrality of the natural, cultural and political legacy territorialized, linked to the communities and their traditions, mediated by the memories, knowledge and authority of the elderly.

How to design strategies, work plans and actions that dialogue, incorporate, articulate and implement plans and actions with other programs or initiatives promoted by the Ford Foundation and philanthropic community? The proposal of continuity to this initial phase of accompaniment promoted by the BUILD project, presented in March 2021 to the Ford Foundation, proposes to constitute a nodal platform, which articulates and supports different initiatives of organizational and institutional strengthening, as well as other central issues that have clearly emerged throughout this process. Educational and training activities to develop capacities continue to be crucial for the functioning of IATC organizations so that they can improve their skills to formulate proposals, projects and guarantee functional financial and accounting structures, which guarantee accountability to their communities and cooperating partners.

Basic and ordinary issues must be worked with the support of the technologies to which access is made to ensure planning, evaluation and monitoring, as well as in the design of decision structures and communication capacities with cooperation institutions, governments and the philanthropic community to contribute to improve internal governance and the construction of inclusive leaderships that promote generational renewal with gender equity and accountability.

The proposed platform would place special emphasis so that other initiatives of the BUILD program and the set of programs of the Ford Foundation agree on actions that incorporate the territory, biodiversity and its resources, as natural, cultural, productive and political patrimony in their approaches. An example of this would be working and collaborating with initiatives such as Inter-Connected and Spring to respond to the challenge of building inclusive forms of leadership, generational renewal, transition and succession with the participation of youth and women, as well as to formulate alternative models of integral sustainability and accountability. Through programs such as Inter Connected, it would be feasible to join efforts to design plans and actions that include capacities to facilitate encounters, elaborate narratives, rituals and healing processes to cultivate a world in which they invite and make it possible to grow and flourish together.

The growing erosion and undermining of the multilateral and international institutional framework that supports and provides follow-up to the legal system of the rights of indigenous, afro-descendant and traditional peoples is evident. For the participating IATC organizations, it is of primary importance to contribute to revitalize with new narratives, concepts and actions, such institutional framework and political spaces for the affirmation of rights at the international and multilateral level.

In the Permanent Forum of Indigenous Peoples of the UN, voices have been raised demanding the need to face the challenges implied by the rapid loss of biodiversity and cultural diversity, as well as the deterioration of the rights of indigenous peoples over their traditional territories and resources. In this context, IAT C organizations participating in this process, could add to the need to formulate an international treaty to protect the collective bio-cultural heritages of indigenous peoples, afro-descendants, traditional and community organizations.

Likewise, they must implement regional and national strategies to negotiate new national agreements, linked to the real exercise of basic rights, especially their physical security, as well as demand legislation that guarantees the participation of the IAT peoples and community organizations in the power structures of their respective nation states. The challenge is to continue efforts to strengthen IAT C organizations based on the shared well-being of people, their communities and the planet.

### Other possible actions for IATC organizations, based on the results of COP-26 and related events are the following:

- ◆ Establish and consolidate relationships with traditional allies, supporters and new allies, based on the effective contributions of the IATC, to the survival of the human and planetary species;
- ◆ Deepen the concept of integral sustainability including the protection of biodiversity, territorial economy and sustainable management of territorial, natural, cultural and political patrimony in order to contrast it with the rentier and extractive economic model, exploiter of natural resources that characterizes the nation states of the global South, which constitutes a decisive factor in global warming and the climate crisis.

### In 2021, resilient youth spoke out forcefully on these issues:

We cannot eat coal, drink oil or breathe so-called natural gas”, declared Vanessa Nakate, a young activist originally from Uganda and in resistance at the COP26 summit and she continued:

“

if the pandemic taught us anything, it is that nature is in control . Yet we continue to destroy our fragile ecosystems and our climate at an excruciating rate. The Covid should serve as a warning to the world ... It should be remembered that a warming of 2 ° C, would imply a death sentence for countries like mine ...

”

(Nakate 2021).

The resilience and transforming force of indigenous, afro-descendant, traditional peoples and community organizations are essentially linked to their insertion in their territorial living spaces. Undoubtedly, the most important message and contribution of this intense and fruitful period of exchanges and reflections is that the IAT peoples and community organizations, with the long-term support of the Ford Foundation, have demonstrated that their contributions to the well-being and sustainability of the planet are clear and substantial. These contributions are not recognized by the mainstream societies of the planet and it is at this juncture, urgent and necessary, to recognize and accept the value of such knowledge, traditions and experiences for the common survival of the species. Similarly, it is unavoidable to deepen and elaborate on the relationship between worldview, spirituality and territorial sustainability of the IAT C. These approaches constitute a strong ethical invitation and provide arguments to assume our individual and collective responsibility towards the present and immediate future of the biodiversity including the human species of our planet.

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