



Shadow Report on the Implementation of SDG 15.2 in Colombia from a Gender Perspective

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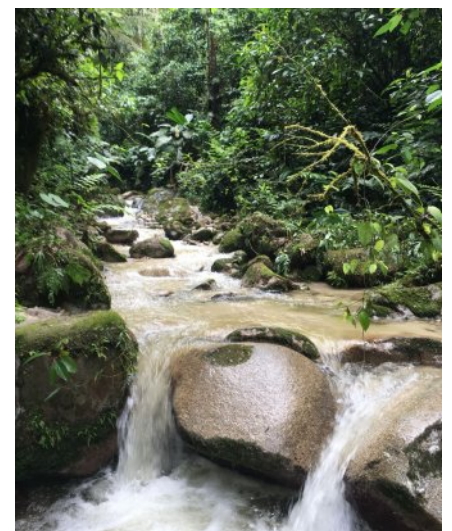
Colombia is the most biodiverse country per square kilometre in the world. **McKay Savage/Flickr**. Other cover photos by **Isis Alvarez**

Executive Summary

Colombia is well recognized as a major player in the proposal and further implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the political level, there has been a strong commitment to delivering a robust strategy to the international community. But, at the national level, there is a reductionist view that brings SDGs back to failed siloed approaches, while realities on the ground demonstrate the complexity of achieving real results. Colombia's national policies continue to support unsustainable development projects and the increasing push for market-based

approaches. While large conservation groups, other private sector conglomerates and elite institutions have been part of the in-country SDG implementation; rights holder groups like women, Indigenous Peoples, and peasants have been excluded from sustainable development policy. Despite the signing of a strong gender-aware Peace Agreement with the FARC guerrillas in 2016, where women are recognized as important agents of change, Colombia's SDG strategy only recognizes women as victims of the armed conflict. Finally, recent figures reveal a worrying situation

of increased deforestation rates as well as an escalation of murders of environmental and social defenders.



Introduction

Colombia is perceived as one of the countries most involved and committed to the achievement of Agenda 2030. It was not only one of the original proponents of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but also one of the first countries to integrate the SDGs into its National Development Plan (NDP), a full year before their adoption by other UN Member States. [1]

By 2016, Colombia had already reported at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) and demonstrated how the national government had set up the 'High-level Inter-Agency Commission for the preparation and effective implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals'. Established in 2015, this commission is charged with overseeing the design, implementation, and monitoring of the Agenda 2030 and also aligning it with other multilateral agreements.

At a recent event about Colombia's advancements on the implementation of the SDGs, [2] President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón presented a 'regionalization' strategy for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Colombia, and the establishment and selection of sub-goals (*Guiding Goals*) for each SDG. For instance, the *Guiding Goal* for Goal 5 on Gender equality was decided as 'Women in State management positions'; while the *Guiding Goal* on Goal 15 on 'Life on

Earth' was 'Coverage (ha) of Protected Areas (PAs)'.

As a cross-cutting proposal for addressing development policies in the country, the government affirms to have made joint efforts in engaging different sectors for effectively preparing and implementing this Agenda, and articulating the SDGs within the National Development Plans (NDP), the new entry in the OECD countries, the **Peace Agreement** and the Paris Agreement through its **Green Growth Strategy**. [3]

For Sustainable Development Goals 12 to 15, also known as the 'environmental goals,' there are several policies and institutional arrangements being executed such as the National System on Climate Change, the National System on Risks and Disasters, the Adaptation Fund, an Integral Waste Management Policy, a Green Growth Policy, and Law 1715 on Renewable Energies. Additionally, in light of the Peace Agreement, major bodies of International Cooperation have directed larger resources to the country such as The Green Climate Fund (USD38.5million), Vision Amazonia [4] (USD120million), Sustainable Colombia (USD200million) - which is a post-conflict Inter-American Development Bank program, the Colombian Presidency Initiative, [5] and the World Bank's Biocarbon Fund (USD20million). However, many of these funds have been met with controversy not only due to corruption, but also because

they haven't met the expected results (see page 4 of this report).

Finally, Colombia has a multi-sectorial approach for civil society engagement with the SDGs. However, it has prioritized large conservation groups, big institutions and the private sector including entrepreneurial institutions and organizations. These organizations are prioritised over grass-roots groups, women, and other marginalized groups. Some of those partners include the following: the Colombia's Entrepreneurs National Association (ANDI), Bogota's Chamber of Commerce, United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), and Association of Family and Entrepreneurship Foundations (AFE) to name a few.



Brief Assessment and Key Statistics

SDG15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Colombia is the most biodiverse country per square kilometre in the world. Forest cover is estimated at 56% of the national territory. [6] Despite some improvements in reducing deforestation rates, between 2015 and 2016 there was a 44% increase in deforestation (from 124.035ha in 2015 to 178.597ha in 2016), [7] thus jeopardizing the established goal to halt deforestation by 2020. The following main direct causes of deforestation were identified: 1) Land grabbing (45%); 2) Illegal crop harvest (22%); 3) Infrastructure (10%); 4) Forest fires (8%); 5) Livestock farming (8%); and 6) mining (7%). [8]

The national government on its SDG platform [9] affirms that the area of terrestrial ecosystems have been restored increased by 49.5%, from 400,021ha in 2014 to 589,099ha in 2017. Protection of moorlands is high on the national conservation agenda given their importance for freshwater sources, thus 30 out of 37 moorlands present in the country have been delineated. [10]

For target 15.1: **‘By 2020, ensure conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements’**, Colombia has set the following indicators: Indicator 15.1.a: Thousand hectares of Protected Areas (PAs); Indicator 15.1.b: Areas in the process of restoration; and Indicator 15.1.c: Annual loss of natural forests (ha/year) with baseline set to 276.669ha, with a goal set to 0 in 2030. [11]

For target 15.5: **‘Take urgent and significant action to reduce degradation of natural habitat, halt the loss of biodiversity, and by 2020 protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species’**, Colombia has set Indicator 15.5.b: Threatened species rate.

Overall, the *Guiding Goal* chosen by the national government for SDG15 is, ‘Protected Areas Coverage (ha)’; the baseline has been set at 23,617ha with an intended Goal for 2030 of 30,620ha. However, this rather narrow approach of only focusing on PAs will further exert pressures on ecosystems, including forests, that are outside PAs that not only serve as the basis for many peoples’ survival but also help curb climate change. According to the National System of Protected Areas (SINAP), PAs represent only around 10% of the national territory.

Furthermore, the government adopted a Green Growth Strategy as a cross-cutting approach aimed at ensuring that the natural resource base will provide the ‘goods and services’ required for reaching ‘sustainable economic development.’ [12] This approach, based exclusively on the economic aspects of natural resources, is highly detrimental for the livelihoods of people, especially economically marginalized rights holder groups, and for ecosystems which will be discussed in the following section of this report.



Harvesting from oil palms in Colombia. **Solidarity Center/Carlos Villalon**

Gender Aspects of Colombia's SDG Implementation Strategy Plan - Guiding Goal for SDG 5 'Women in State management positions'

According to the National Development Plan (NDP), Colombia believes in the empowerment of women in the Colombian State, and thus is considering gender equality in public policy including new laws on Violence against Women (VaW), and penalties for femicide. Overall, there's ample recognition of women as the main victims of violence, [13] and the Peace

Agreement integrates a strong gender perspective for post-conflict programs in different areas. However, the national government chose as its *Guiding Goal* for this SDG 'Women in State management positions,' (with the baseline set at 43.5%, aiming at 50% in 2030) which shows a very narrow perspective of the government in this respect. In fact, the

government's discourse on gender is quite limited as it simply relates women to victimhood rather than a more empowering and pro-active approach to dealing with women's priorities in the country where their needs and roles are discussed. This simplistic approach will continue to be discussed in the next section of this report.

Progress Assessment and Challenges Related to SDG 15

Colombia's strategy of regionalization for the SDGs is reflected in Colombia's most recent National Development Plans (NDP). The government has supported regions and local governments in formulating territorial development plans (PDT, in Spanish) that take into account the SDGs. [14] So far, most municipalities have done so, but out of 63 PDT analysed, only 34 implemented SDG1 & 15. Thus the challenge remains for local governments to integrate these goals into their own plans. [15]

The 'regionalization' approach in the NDP 2014-2018, gave a specific development focus to each of the regions. [16] For example, for the Llanos region the priority is for environmental protection, agroindustry and human development; for the Caribbean, it is prosperity and

extreme poverty alleviation; for Centre-South and Amazon, it is rural development and environmental conservation. These regional focuses, besides deviating from an already-integrated SDGs agenda, are risky because they bring back siloed approaches regarding development priorities, which means the focus should remain only in the *Guiding Goal*.

For instance, if the priority of a region is not environmental protection, all sorts of detrimental activities can still go on. There is strong evidence that important biodiversity is also present outside Protected Areas, and local initiatives have been crucial in conservation efforts, despite increasing threats and lack of support.

In addition, having both environmental protection and agroindustry as priorities in a single

region is highly contradictory. Usually, agro-industrial activities not only require vast chunks of cleared land but also intensive inputs of agro-chemicals and detrimental outputs of GhG emissions. At the same time, the focus on the Amazon region is supposed to be environmental conservation, but this is exactly the region with the higher deforestation rates (constituting 39% of the country's deforestation in 2016). [17]

Notably, increased deforestation rates in Colombia coincide with the end of the armed conflict. One of the biggest fears of academics and environmentalists has been the fact that a post-conflict scenario would mean further deterioration of natural resources and the environment as former 'no-go' areas would be open for detrimental business activities.

These are remote areas where the government has historically been absent, many of which used to be controlled by actors of the conflict. But according to figures in the official government's online platform for SDGs - different to those provided by the Institute of Hydrology, Meteorology and Environmental Studies (IDEAM, in Spanish) - annual deforestation rates decreased by 103,430 ha (from 282,027ha in 2010 to 178,597ha in 2016). [18] Thus, when considering a longer time span, rates seemed more 'favourable' to the governments' efforts.

In Law 1753/2015 of the Green Growth Strategy, it is clear that an economic pillar dominates the environmental and social pillars of sustainable development. It does not recognize the role of men and women in rural communities, despite their contribution to Colombia's unique and rich biodiversity. National policies allow for environmental destruction as long as there is a payment made to 'compensate' for the damage done (i.e. biodiversity offsets). This implies that the high level of endemism due to the wide variety of temperature zones, climates and microclimates along the Colombian geography is completely disregarded. The law does not contemplate that the same biodiversity present in an area devastated by mining, for example, will not be found nor compensated for in any other area. Therefore, this flawed approach based on biodiversity offsets with Payments for

Environmental Services (PES) should be reconsidered. In fact, PES schemes only seem to benefit the same companies who have caused destruction as they have the economic power and technical knowledge to enter into these agreements. For indigenous and rural women, who have substantially less formal land titles than men, this will greatly impact their livelihoods. Their lack of land tenure rights, perpetuated by patriarchal systems in many societies, makes women more vulnerable to discrimination, evictions, displacements and associated violence. Thus, their participation in proposals for Payment for Environmental Services and REDD+ schemes is more difficult, and their historic lack of participation in decision-making processes adds to this problem. [19]

For instance, the project 'Vision Amazonia,' has received important international funding mainly for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+). It has been met with criticism from Indigenous representatives of the CRIMA organization (which include representatives of the Uitoto, Muinane, Andoque and Nonuya ethnic groups), as they affirm they were not consulted about the project and they were only involved in 1 out of the 4 stages of the project. [20] A strategy that is purely founded on market-based mechanisms, will not be beneficial for indigenous peoples and local communities. In Brazil and Peru, there are documented cases of REDD+ contracts signed by

indigenous peoples and local communities that have stripped them from use and access rights to their forests. [21] Due to the complexity of these projects, it is difficult for community peoples to participate in them and have a clear understanding of the contracts they are signing.

So far, access to SDG capacity building and overall participation in SDG government plans has only reached the elite organizations and institutions, while leaving out smaller organizations, social movements, indigenous peoples and women's groups. There is a severe lack of civil society representation. When only dealing with elite powerful groups, conflicts of interest are inevitable. In 2016, Colombia was the world's 4th largest producer of palm oil. According to the Federation of Palm Oil Producers (FEDEPALMA), in 2016, 483,733ha of palm oil plantations were planted. But, it is widely known that there are numerous illegal palm oil plantations which are often linked to conflict areas. Hence, there is a clear correlation between palm oil, land grabs, displacements and violence. [22] Even today, in the 'post-conflict period,' paramilitary groups are still associated with palm oil plantations while land restitution, a point in the Peace Agreement, demands those lands are given back to peasant farmers and former local dwellers. Regarding biodiversity, a study in the Llanos region, demonstrated that the population of birds in palm-oil planted areas has decreased 90%, while other harmful effects such as food crop displacements and soil erosion

increased. [23] For peasant farmers, including women who often depend on free access to natural resources for food, water and other non-timber forest products, this means loss of livelihoods and possible displacement as well. Despite these facts, the Federation of Palm Oil Producers (FEDEPALMA) is a close ally of the WWF, a partner of the government in SDG implementation.

In a recent SDG event for the Latin American & Caribbean region, the Colombian government reported that **'many Colombian companies are committed to the 2030 Agenda; these trans-Latin companies have taken the flag of sustainability for its growth and consolidation in national and international markets.'** [24] Among these companies is Medellin's Public Enterprises (EPM, in Spanish), currently involved in a major scandal due to the project called Hidroituango, where a dam was built in an geographically unstable area without prior consultation with the communities. The Dam

is currently under threat of collapse and over 25,000 people have already been affected. [25] It is important to highlight that the area where the project is located is recognized as a conflict area. It is believed that the place where the dam was filled with water, is one of the biggest mass graves in the country. Many activists and opponents to the project have been murdered. In fact, two years after the signing of the Peace Agreement, the number of assassinated social and environmental defenders has sky-rocketed with over 261 leaders killed. [26]

Overall, there is a huge gap between the Peace Agreement, the National Development Plan, and other regional and local Territorial Plans for the SDGs implementation and monitoring. For example, while the Peace Agreement has mainstreamed gender across different areas, the Colombian government keeps on dealing with Gender issues as an *isolated* SDG and fails to integrate the gender perspective in all other aspects of the Agenda. The government took the same approach to the

Millennium Development Goals. As indicated, it is important that there is recognition of Gender aspects of the conflict, and the government should go beyond the simplistic view of 'women as victims,' and integrate a more robust take throughout all of the 2030 Agenda implementation.

An important highlight of the Peace Agreement regarding environment and gender, is that it achieves a good balance of social, environmental and economic pillars in the different sections negotiated. For instance, on point 1.1.10: **'Halting the agricultural frontier and protecting reserves'**, references to rural communities' participation (both men and women) are very clear. For example, the role that communities inhabiting or neighbouring areas of environmental importance can play; these communities should be supported for planning their own development plans, including community forest restoration, and other initiatives that are in line with halting the agricultural frontier and environment conservation. [27]



Women2030 training for trainers in Colombia. Isis Alvarez

Conclusions and Recommendations

A Guiding Goal for SDG15 that looks only into Protected Areas coverage, leaves out the opportunity of sustainable use for many forest-dependent communities. The national and local governments that have used biodiversity conservation strategies with Protected Areas as a basis, should recognize that this sole measure may be insufficient to ensure the full ecological representation and well-connected systems that Aichi Target 11 of the CBD calls for. [28] And, there is need to look into other effective Area-based Conservation Measures such as Indigenous Peoples and Local Community Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCAs). [29] Currently, these areas are not recognized as Protected Areas, but they provide invaluable contribution to the effective and sustained in situ conservation of biodiversity. [30]

The strategy for regionalization, as well as the Guiding Goals, needs to be integral considering the very nature of the SDGs, and stop replicating a Millennium Development Goal approach (also known to have been siloed). A good example is the case with Gender. A more integral approach would also consider women's empowerment at all other levels of society, and not just aim at reaching the well-educated sector. Most targets on Goal 5 are 'being left behind,' and do not focus on the needs of local and rural women, or integrate Goal 5 with

all other goals. The government should go beyond the simplistic view of 'women as victims,' and integrate a more robust take throughout all of the 2030 Agenda implementation.

The strong focus on market-based approaches for nature conservation will only benefit economically powerful players. There is need to create different strategies that ensure participation of marginalized sectors of society. In the case of rural women, their lack of access to markets and other related opportunities (such as education), will leave them at a greater disadvantage whenever market-based approaches are put in place for the purposes of nature conservation and climate change mitigation. For example, as REDD+ programs have shown to fail to benefit women and increase inequalities. [31] Government programs involving civil society also need to work with smaller organizations, women groups, social movements, trade unions, and have more representation from civil society rather than only economically powerful actors such as large conservation NGOs and the private sector.

The Colombian government should be demonstrating in their reporting, the strategy for integrating both Agenda 2030 and the Peace Agreement, and be more explicit about the points of convergence. So far, there is a

clear disconnect between both agendas. In fact, there is a clear lack of planning on the government's behalf regarding the 'post-conflict scenario,' given the correlation between the end of the conflict and the increase in deforestation rates and overall natural resource depletion.

Overall, the Colombian government doesn't seem to have legitimate intentions for engaging in a Sustainable Development Agenda. In fact, recent figures show that Colombia's main exports relate to the mineral and fossil economy. Moreover, unsustainable practices such as fracking, are now in the government's primary agenda, especially in the light of recently elected right-wing President Ivan Duque. Besides, in the face of the Hidroituango scandal (the hydro-dam wrongfully built for energy exports), the government hasn't called for a dismantling of the dam, something that affected communities are asking for. The government has ignored the increased number of social and environmental defenders being murdered and persecuted, and has even dared to refer to these systematic killings as 'passion-related crimes', while destructive unsustainable projects continue to be promoted, such as 'Nueva Esperanza' a conventional energy project away from renewable and clean energies which are called for in Agenda 2030.

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- [2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=378&v=yZOer_cZBB4
- [3] CONPES 3918 - Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social (CONPES) - Estrategia de implementación de los ODS en el país
- [4] <http://visionamazonia.minambiente.gov.co/>
- [5] https://www.apccolombia.gov.co/sites/default/files/archivos_usuario/2016/colombiasostenible-new-dec2-web.pdf
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- [8] Ibid.
- [9] <https://www.ods.gov.co/goals/15>
- [10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=378&v=yZOer_cZBB4
- [11] <http://www.minambiente.gov.co/images/CONPESODS.pdf>
- [12] CONPES 3918 - Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social (CONPES) - Estrategia de implementación de los ODS en el país
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