

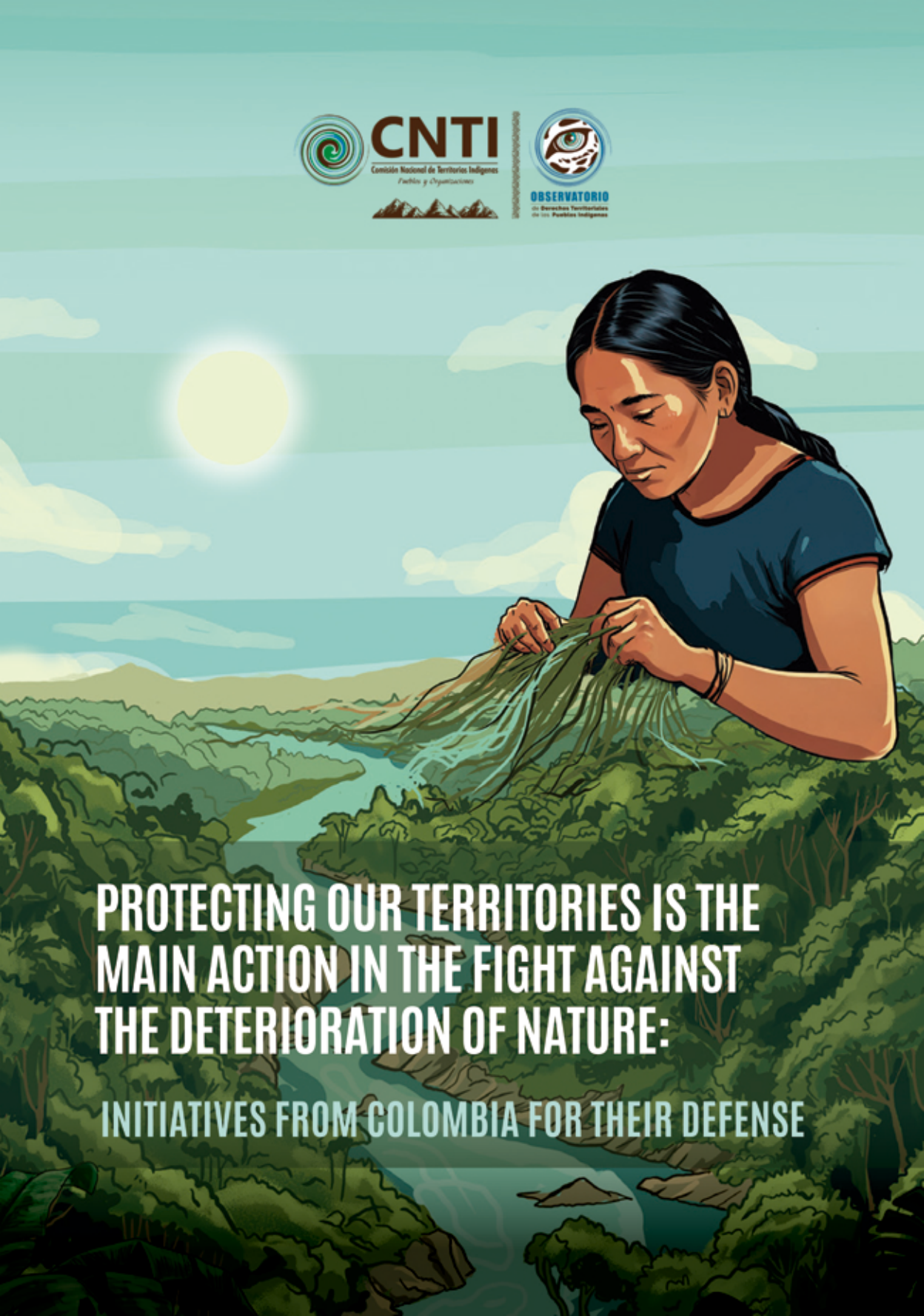


CNTI

Comisión Nacional de Territorios Indígenas
Política y Organización



OBSERVATORIO
de Derechos Territoriales
de los Pueblos Indígenas



**PROTECTING OUR TERRITORIES IS THE
MAIN ACTION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST
THE DETERIORATION OF NATURE:**
INITIATIVES FROM COLOMBIA FOR THEIR DEFENSE



PROTECTING OUR TERRITORIES IS THE MAIN ACTION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE DETERIORATION OF NATURE:

INITIATIVES FROM COLOMBIA FOR THEIR DEFENSE

"The spiritual, symbolic, and cultural value of the territory goes beyond its mere geographical dimensions and is represented in the human body, but also in human knowledge, worldview, and cosmogony. The territory is holistic, it is a whole, it is integral, we cannot separate it. Its mountains, its rivers, all its water sources are part of bengbe uaman luar or our sacred place of origin."

Yudi Jacanamejoy, Kamentsa People







INTRODUCTION

We, the Indigenous Peoples of Colombia, authorities, leaders, and guardians of the territories; of the great snow-capped mountains, moors, forests, savannas, rivers, jungles, and other spaces that make up Mother Earth, raise our voices and reaffirm that without the effective recognition and full protection of our territorial rights, and without the incorporation of our knowledge and authorities in global decisions, there will be no environmental justice or possible future for life on the planet.

In Colombia, we are more than 115 Indigenous Peoples who have resisted, for centuries, the dispossession, violence, and invisibility imposed by the State and mainstream society. As a result of these historical aggressions, today we represent less than 5% of the national population. Even so, we are the guardians of life and territory, protecting more than 35 million hectares—30% of Colombia’s continental territory—thanks to our struggles and collective resistance.

Our territorial rights protect our special relationship with Mother Earth, guided by our knowledge systems, and are the basis of our social, economic, cultural, and spiritual life. These rights oblige the State to guarantee legal and material security over our territories; they are integral and essentially contemplate the possession, ownership, autonomy, and identification of our territories.

At the international level, the emergence of the concept of “sustainable development,” the Rio Convention (1992), and the treaties derived from it: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), occurred simultaneously with the recognition of our territorial



rights under International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169 (1989). However, the environmental international treaties have progressed without recognizing our rights, while economic development continues to put life on the planet at risk.

Although other frameworks have recently emerged, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) and the American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2016), which reaffirm our rights to self-determination, autonomy, and territory, as well as the right to free, prior, and informed consent, these frameworks have not been fully incorporated into global environmental governance.

Human and territorial rights must be the guideline for the interpretation and application of environmental policies. There must be recognition that, we, the Indigenous Peoples are not passive recipients of environmental policy, but rather self-determined peoples, collective subjects of rights, and guardians of territories; and that our own knowledge and cultural practices are essential in defending biodiversity and responding to the climate crisis. It is imperative that States implement their policies with an intercultural approach, guaranteeing respect for self-government and ensuring that all environmental action is oriented towards strengthening the life and survival of peoples, in harmony with Mother Earth.

Although instruments such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) recognize the obligation to respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, in practice they have reinforced a narrative that reduces us to “vulnerable populations” in the face of the climate and ecological crisis. This view places us as passive subjects who must be protected and hides the fact that our territories are coveted as sources of economic value in a global nature and carbon market, where their ecosystem services are celebrated but our autonomies and rights are ignored.

We reject this narrative and affirm that our territorial rights are climate action: without identification, demarcation, titling, land regularization, immediate eviction of those who dispossess our territories, and comprehensive protection measures, there will be no ecosystems that can prevent the collapse of life as we know it on the planet. Recognizing and fully guaranteeing indigenous territories is not an option or a gesture of goodwill: it is a legal and ethical obligation of the international community.

Ahead of COP30, we present seven initiatives with which we demand the reorientation of the global environmental governance system towards the real care of life, based on the voice, vision, and authority over the territories of Indigenous Peoples.



These initiatives respond to a holistic conception of life: an interconnected weave in which the welfare of each being sustains the existence of the whole. We call upon the actors in global environmental policy to listen to and respect our word, the peoples', as a way to guarantee the survival of Mother Earth and transform global policies towards a horizon of justice, balance, and collective care. We demand that COP30 become a turning point from which commitments are translated into real change, because protecting Indigenous territories means protecting the future of the planet.

PRINCIPLES

Principles of Indigenous Peoples that must be addressed by all policies, actions, and measures that aspire to achieve global and national environmental justice:

- ❖ The territory is a living being, a network of spiritual and natural interdependent relationships that is ordered, cared for, and balanced through self-determination and the exercise of knowledge, legal, and self-governance systems.
- ❖ We, the Indigenous Peoples, exercise our self-determination and autonomy in our territories based on a diversity of knowledge systems and self-governance structures that are inseparable from the ordering, management, and preservation of the natural balance.

INITIATIVES



I. ADOPT A COMPREHENSIVE CONCEPTION OF TERRITORIES, NATURE, AND PLANET EARTH THAT RECOGNIZES THEIR SPIRITUAL AND NATURAL INTERDEPENDENCE.

"From our perspective, in terms of conservation, we are caught in the middle: with little influence, with a more conceptual participation in what conservation and territory mean, but without direct participation in decisions. (...) In the end, everything becomes very political, without the essential and fundamental nuance: understanding the territory as a living entity."

Niver Guerrero, Andoke and Uitoto Peoples

For Indigenous Peoples, the territory we inhabit is our Mother Earth, with whom we maintain a deep, spiritual, and collective bond. Our ancestors, our practices, memories, and identity live in her, interwoven with the beings that shape her: plants, animals, rivers, stones, glaciers, lagoons, oil, and all the interconnected elements that sustain life. When part of this weave is damaged, the entire balance is altered, affecting beings, elements, and also our ways of life, relationships, and existence.

This is why territories should not be understood as areas for resource extraction, even with the excuse of "solutions" for climate change mitigation. What in Western language is called "natural resources" are, for us, beings with spirit, guardians of

the balance that sustains life. The extractive logic degrades the diversity of ecosystems, erodes the sovereignty and autonomy of our authorities, fractures communities, and threatens the continuity of our cultural practices and ways of life. This extractive pressure undermines the ecological integrity of territories and constitutes a direct threat to the physical, cultural, and political survival of our peoples.

Currently in Colombia, extractive projects continue to advance in our territories: approximately 22.5% of indigenous territories overlap with hydrocarbon exploration and production blocks, affecting around 614,000 hectares of our territories. We are confronting these extractive pressures, which fragment our ancestral territories, by caring for what remains of them and maintaining them in balance. So much so that 31% of the world's forests¹ are protected in our territories. In Colombia in particular, our territories are home to 51.22% of the forests, 12.63% of the páramos, 18.21% of the savannas, and 52.11% of the glaciers and snow-capped mountains (Map 1).

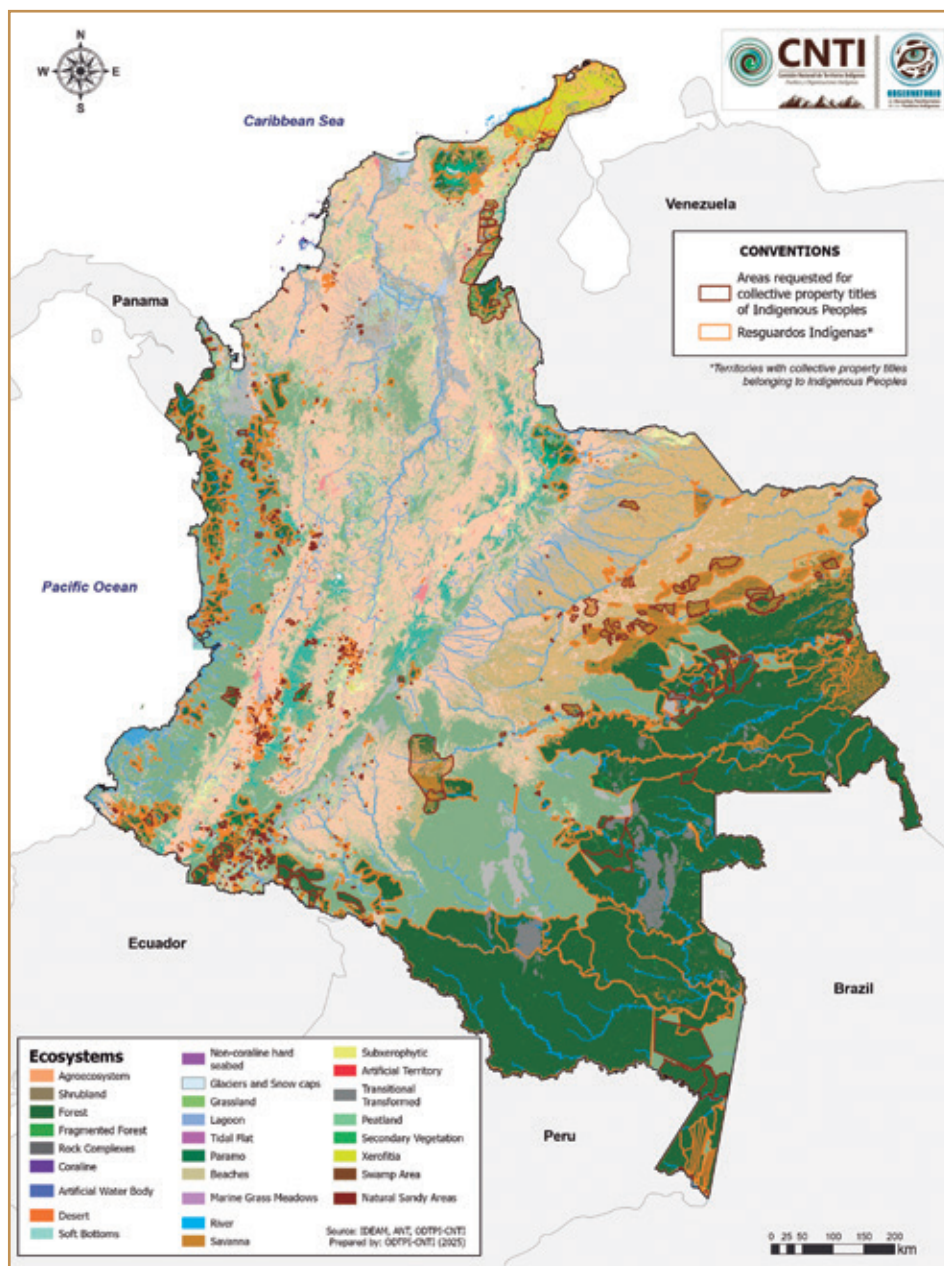
Despite this, the dominant approaches to climate action, biodiversity conservation, and global environmental care ignore our perspectives and ways of relating to the territories. The logic of the scientific knowledge system predominates, fragmenting life and reducing nature to numbers or services. This fragmentation leads to the disarticulation of State policies and actions, the absence of guarantees for the exercise of self-government by Indigenous Peoples, and the denial of our knowledge systems. Therefore, the imposition of these approaches results in continuous violations of our territorial and biocultural rights and prevents recognition of the contributions we have historically made to the care of life and territories.

We are clear that it is not possible to address the climate crisis or environmental crises without healing the relationships that have been broken by the attacks on Mother Earth. As pointed out in the Paris Agreement and the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), it is urgent to transform the dominant approaches, integrating our worldviews, values, and knowledge. Recognizing the Earth and indigenous territories in their entirety also implies respecting our memories, spiritualities, and forms of government and care. Only in this way can paths be opened toward climate and environmental solutions that make real and transformative environmental justice possible.



¹ AO Global Forest Resources Assessment (2020)

Map 1. Ecosystems in indigenous territories in Colombia.





II. GUARANTEE THE COMPREHENSIVE LEGAL AND MATERIAL SECURITY OF OUR TERRITORIES THROUGH THEIR PROMPT AND EFFECTIVE IDENTIFICATION, PROTECTION, AND FORMALIZATION AS COLLECTIVE PROPERTY.

“The territory provides all forms of life; everything depends on it. We eat from it, we get sick from it, and we also heal from it. (...) So without the land (the territory), we, that is, the human race, and no other species can survive over time.”

Purepi, Je´ruriwa People

The Earth does not belong to us; we belong to it, and we inhabit it under the mandate it has given us. In this sense, legal and material security over our territories must be understood as the fundamental pillar for sustaining the integrity of our relationship with Mother Earth. This security implies the guarantee to exercise, maintain, and recover our diversity of links and relationships with our territories and sacred spaces: the main basis of our autonomy. The current gaps in the guarantee of legal and material security for Indigenous Peoples regarding our territorial rights accentuate the risks we encounter in the face of the planet’s cultural and environmental crises, while demanding adjustments in the policies designed to respond to them.

There is already a clear international framework that recognizes guarantees for the identification and protection of our territories as an effective and concrete climate mitigation action and as the clear path to the care and preservation of life and

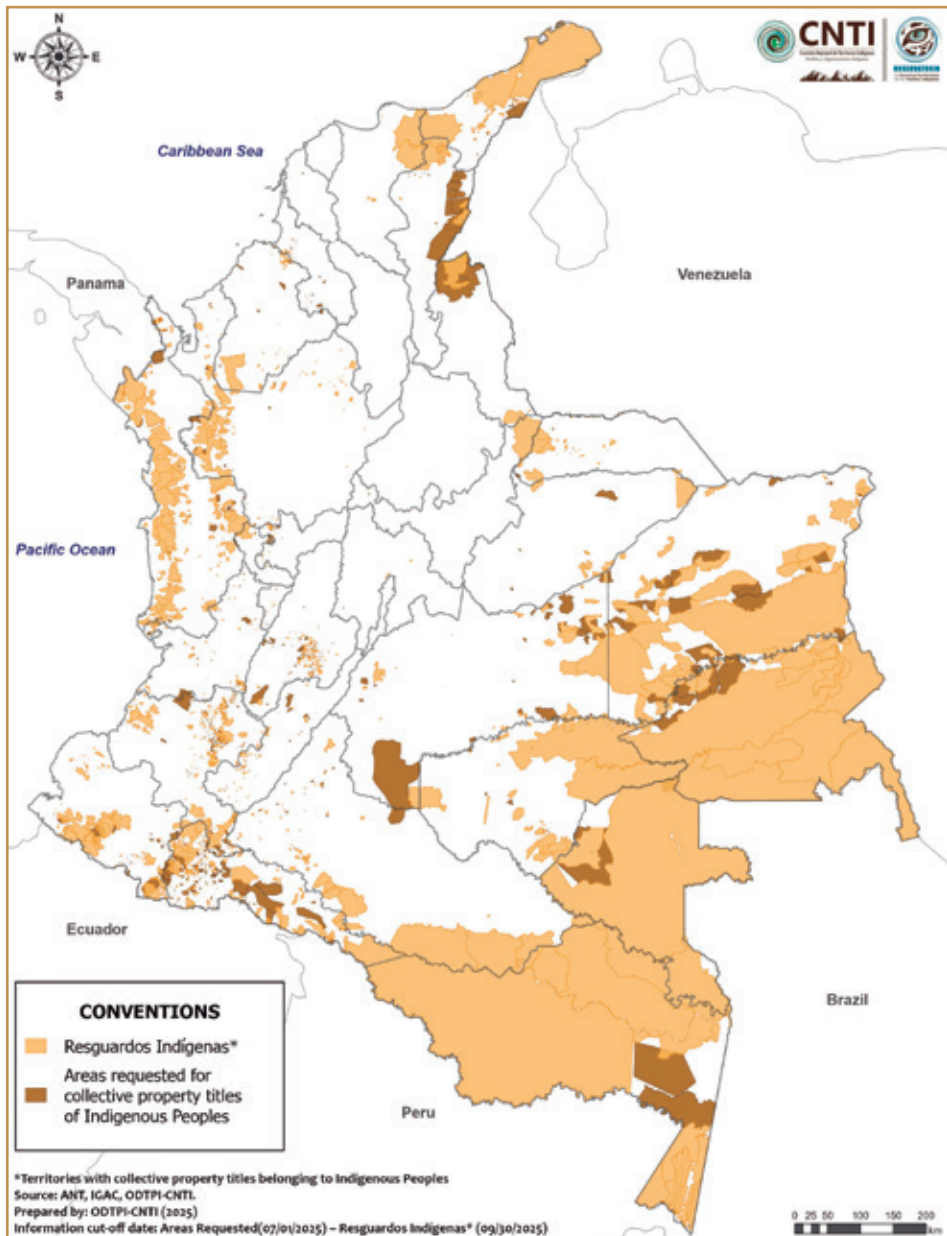


nature. However, regulatory frameworks within States fragment our relationship with the territory. Ensuring the prompt and effective identification, protection, and titling of collective property guarantees the fulfillment of our rights and contributes to global efforts to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework considering a rights-based, inclusive, and pluralistic approach.

Despite this, there are currently historical gaps in the comprehensive recognition of our territories in Colombia (Map 2). On the one hand, to date, the State has not guaranteed the identification of our territories of ancestral and traditional occupation and possession, nor has it taken action or measures to protect our sacred spaces. Likewise, to date, 1,356 requests for legal formalization of collective ownership of indigenous territories remain unresolved². Progress in this processes is a necessary condition for exercising our territorial autonomy. Added to this, even though our property rights over 934 indigenous territories (under the figure of *Resguardos Indígenas*³) totaling 35 million hectares, covering 30% of the country's continental area, have been recognized, the State imposes its eminent domain over the subsoil, water, air, and other integral elements of our territories, prioritizing extractive activities in the name of the public interest.

² The map shows only 35% of the areas requested which correspond to those with a delimited polygon.

³ Territories with collective property titles belonging to Indigenous Peoples.

Map 2. Indigenous Territories in Colombia.



III. RESPECT INDIGENOUS AUTONOMY IN THE CARE OF OUR TERRITORIES, GUARANTEEING THE EXERCISE OF OUR OWN SYSTEMS OF KNOWLEDGE, GOVERNMENT, REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS, AND LAWS.

"Autonomy is not a favor from the State, but rather stems from our very existence. Therefore, even if the State does not want it, we must dare to act as the owners of the territory. We are millennia old, so the State should listen to us about how we want to govern our territory, how we want to decide our own future."

Galois Flores Pizango, Wampís People

"The lagoon has its laws, its rules. The sun has its rules, its light, and its constitution. We ask the laws of planet Earth for strength. Oil, diamonds, and uranium do not belong to us; they belong to Mother Earth. If they were hidden, it was the Creator who did so."

Berito Cobaría Cobaría, U'wa People

From our territory, we exercise autonomy, maintain balance with Mother Earth, and materialize our forms of government and collective care. This territorial exercise is guided by our own frameworks, defined by systems of knowledge that legitimize our decisions and guide our practices of government, justice, and healing. The more than 5,000 Indigenous Peoples of the world demand that our autonomy be respected: the right to govern over the entirety of our territories.

In Colombia, evidence shows that our knowledge and governance systems have been fundamental to the care and preservation of the diversity of life in forests, moorlands, rivers, lagoons, and the sea, as well as in the various natural spaces

and corridors of our territories. One finding that illustrates this is the pattern of deforestation in Colombia: between 2013 and 2018, the average annual rate of deforestation was lower in indigenous territories with collective property titles (0.28%) than in nationally protected areas with the highest level of protection (0.47%)⁴.

Despite this, political frameworks continue to be insufficient and even contrary to the full recognition and incorporation of our knowledge and rights in the design of mitigation actions in response to the climate crisis and for the conservation of biodiversity. Based on a restrictive interpretation of biodiversity conservation, which is alien to the standards for protecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples, States such as Colombia continue to promote conservation measures that overlap with our territories, without full guarantees of respect and protection for our territorial rights, autonomy, and self-government. At least 9.22% of the country's protected areas overlap with Indigenous territories with collective property titles, that is, without considering the ancestral or traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples. In addition to this, the areas of the more than 40 Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) promoted by the Colombian government in recent years overlap with 83 indigenous territories with collective property titles, without considering the ancestral or original territories of Indigenous Peoples (Map 3).

Adding to this situation is the energy transition, presented as an alternative to the fossil fuel-based model and a solution to mitigate climate change. However, its implementation has driven a new wave of global extractivism. The production of electric cars, batteries, wind turbines, and solar panels has skyrocketed the demand for minerals such as copper, nickel, lithium, cobalt, and other critical minerals, intensifying pressure on our territories.



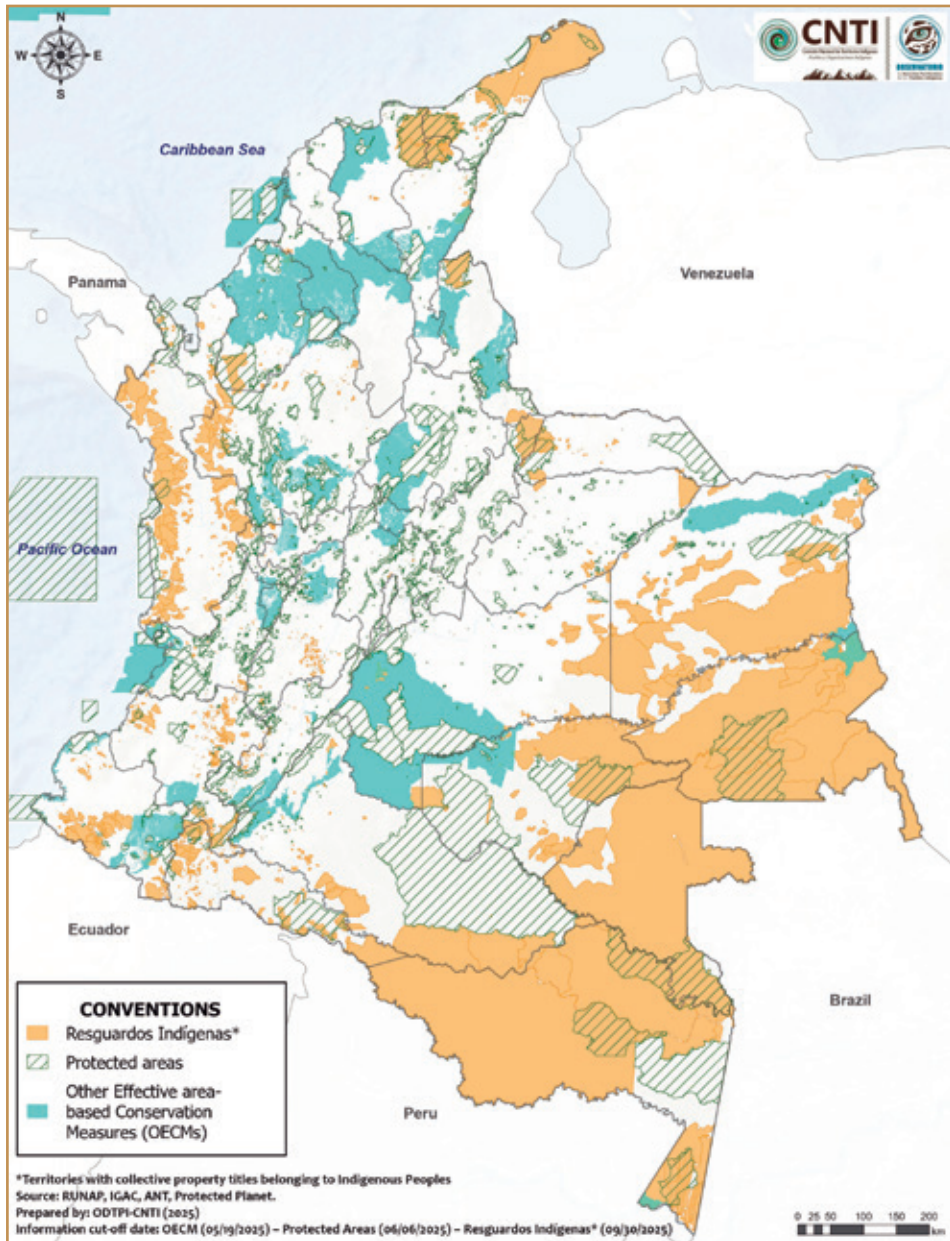
⁴ Tamayo, E., Gómez-Valencia, B., Morales, P & Ochoa-Quintero, J. M. (2020). El rol de los territorios indígenas en la contención de la deforestación.

In Colombia, this demand has led to the proliferation of mining concessions and “clean” energy infrastructure projects that overlap with indigenous territories, generating serious environmental, social, and cultural impacts. Under the discourse of transition and sustainability, wind farms, solar parks, and connection lines are being promoted without our free, prior, and informed consent, disregarding our own systems of knowledge, land use planning, and governance. Far from representing a truly just transition, these projects reproduce the same colonial logic of dispossession and territorial sacrifice, negatively affecting water availability, limiting our livelihood activities—such as agriculture, fishing, and shepherding—and disrupting our cultural routes and sacred spaces.

Faced with this situation, we demand urgent measures of justice and structural reparation. States must suspend any decision, license, or permit authorizing extractive or energy projects in our territories that do not have the consent of the peoples who inhabit them. The full and effective application of the right to free, prior, and informed consent is not an option or a formality: it is an indispensable condition for guaranteeing the legitimacy of any project that affects our territories. Without respect for, and guarantees of, our rights, biodiversity conservation and energy transition will not be just; they will simply be a new form of dispossession.



Map 3. Indigenous territories with collective property titles, protected areas, and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECM) in Colombia.





IV. PROTECT THE LIVES OF OUR PEOPLES, AUTHORITIES, AND TERRITORIES, SAFEGUARDING THEIR INTEGRITY, INTERDEPENDENCE, AND INDIVISIBILITY.

"It is very important to take care of it (the territory) because then, where are we going to live?, then, where is the water going to come from? If we have nowhere to live, then we will cease to exist. (...) (We will continue) to take care of the territory, perhaps not for ourselves (...) but for all the generations that will come after us, because we will preserve and care for it until the last Indigenous person is left standing."

Tumi, Nasa People

"We talk about how there have been many disharmonies and imbalances in our Mother Earth. We say that she is sick (...). We need to help her heal. To heal the spaces of life, to heal Mother Earth, to heal the water (...). And we will have to ask Mother Nature herself how she wants us to heal her or how we can reconcile with her. Because it is not up to us to decide: that it is a ritual, that it is a walk, that it is an offering, but rather we will have to ask her herself how she feels healed. We as Peoples have already begun the work; we have been doing it for many years."

Silvia Jimena Ruiz, Kishu People

Colombia is a country where defending the land is paid for with one's life. Therefore, no state or global environmental policy can forget that territories and eco-systems exist and are alive today because we have deployed our knowledge and ancient forms of government to maintain them. In the face of multiple threats, we who live there are the ones who resist, the ones who remain, and also the ones

who directly suffer the consequences: murders, threats, dispossession, and aggression. This aggression is not partial, but comprehensive, directed both against us and against the territory itself.

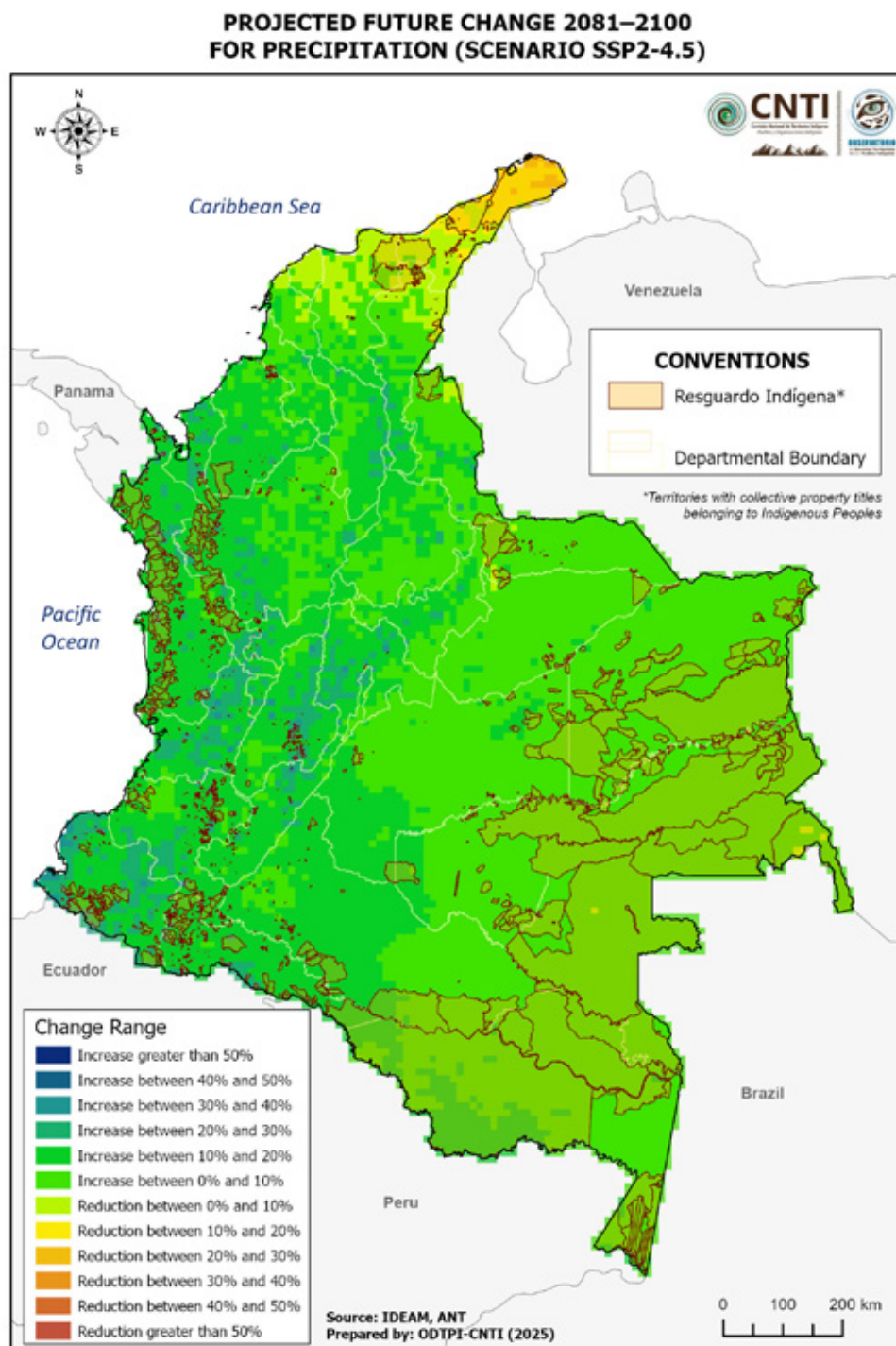
For centuries, our territories have endured cycles of structural violence originating in colonization and perpetuated by multiple actors who have attempted to dominate our territories, exploit our resources, and erase our identities. The attacks are not only individual: they are territorial, structural, and sustained. While global initiatives for the climate and biodiversity multiply, murders, threats, forced displacement, and dispossession are on the rise in our territories. According to our System for Monitoring Sociopolitical Violence against Indigenous Peoples (SIVOSPI)⁵ during the period of 2016 to 2025, 771 indigenous brothers and sisters had been murdered in Colombia while defending their lives and territories.

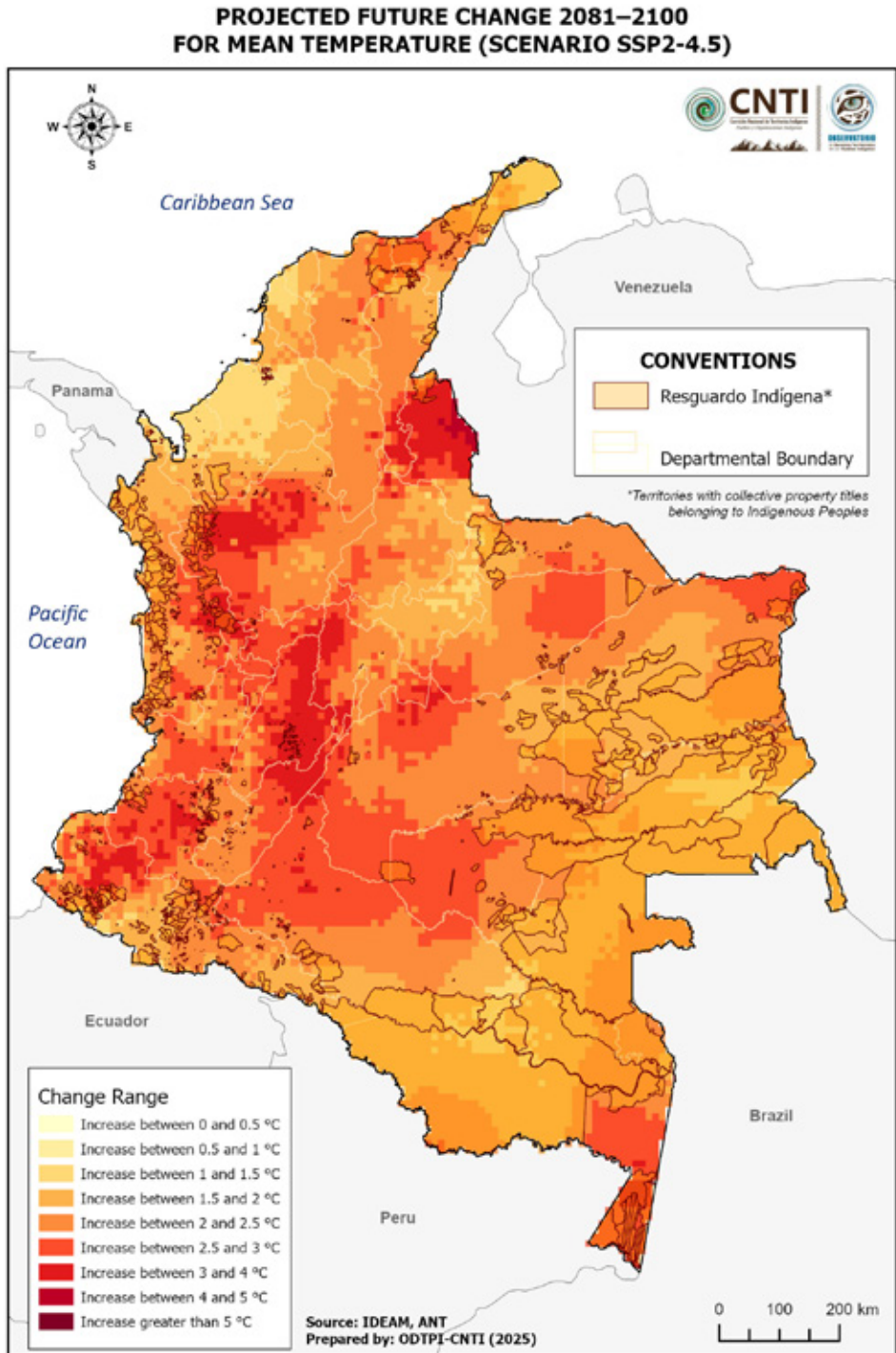


The climate crisis adds to the historical violence. The national entity that monitors climate change in Colombia warns that, under a scenario of moderate climate change mitigation, by 2100 precipitation will change dramatically (Map 4a, Map 4b): there will be indigenous territories where precipitation will decrease by between 40 and 50%, and others where it will increase by up to 40%, opening up scenarios of droughts and floods that will have an impact on the livelihoods and health of our communities, peoples, and territories. At the same time, the average temperature will increase throughout the country, with some territories seeing an increase of more than 2°C. A scenario is also projected in which climate change mitigation actions are insufficient. In this scenario, changes in precipitation and temperature would be much more drastic and would have a greater impact on the country and our territories (Map 4c, Map 4d).

5 Created by the ODPI of the CNTI to systematically and rigorously record and analyze acts of sociopolitical violence against Indigenous Peoples after the signing of the Final Peace Agreement, with the aim of monitoring, alerting Indigenous organizations, and highlighting the lack of protective measures by the state entities responsible for guaranteeing the human and territorial rights of Indigenous Peoples.

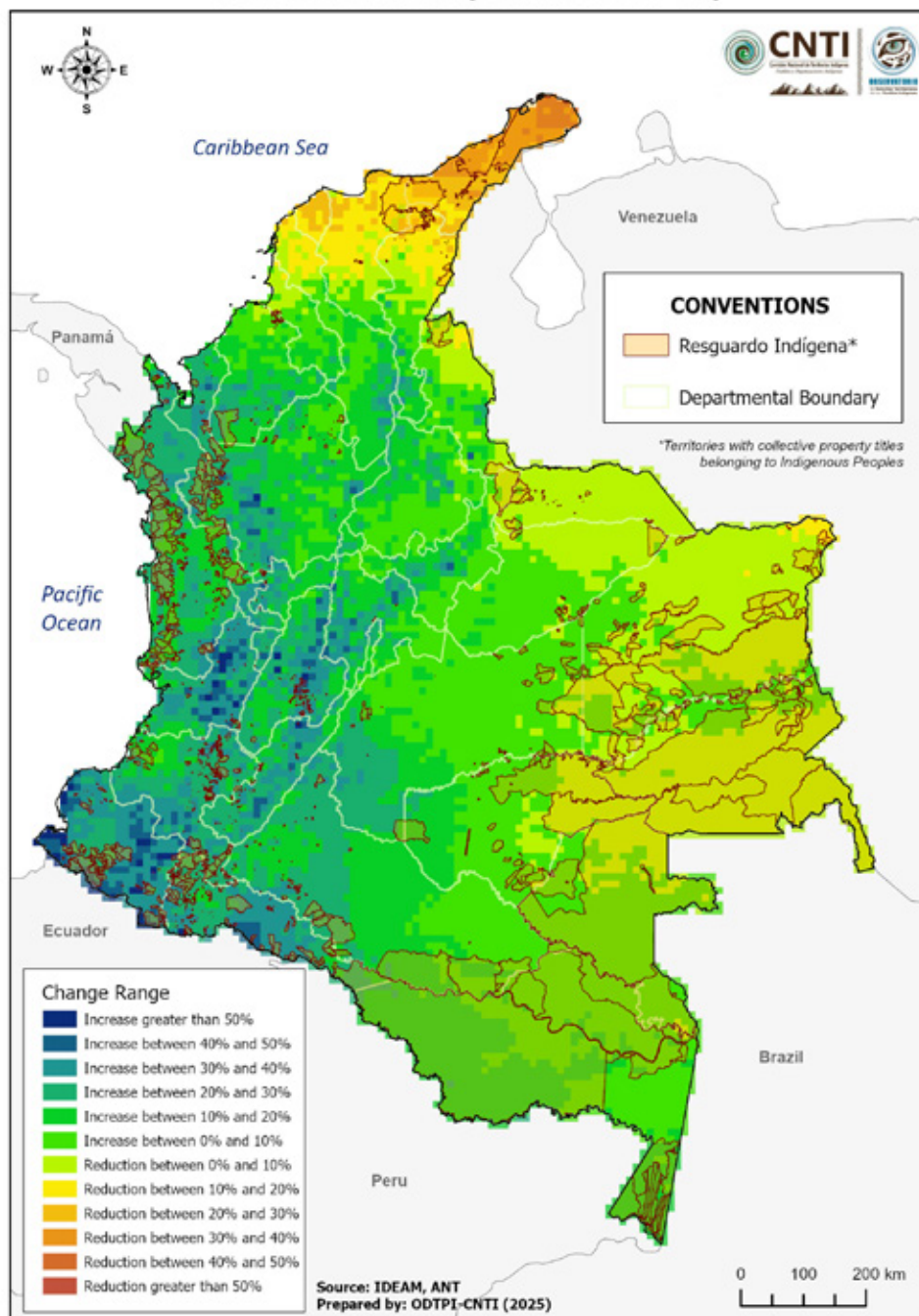
Map 4a. Projection of changes in precipitation in Colombia for a future scenario.

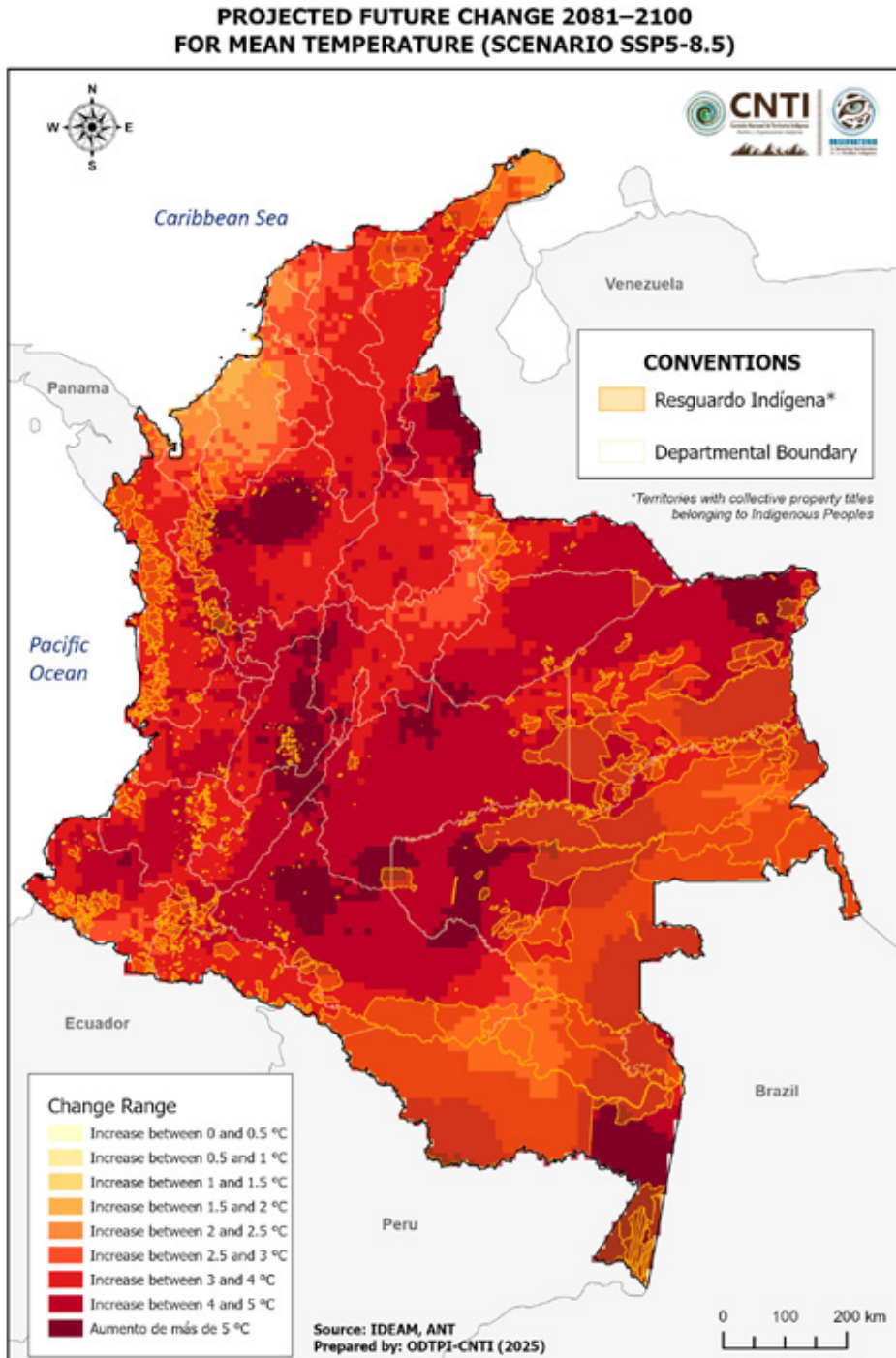


Map 4b. Projection of changes in temperature in Colombia for a future scenario.

Map 4c. Projection of changes in precipitation in Colombia for a future scenario.

**PROJECTED FUTURE CHANGE 2081–2100
FOR PRECIPITATION (SCENARIO SSP5-8.5)**



Map 4d. Projection of changes in temperature in Colombia for a future scenario.

These changes pose threats not only to nature but also to our spiritual and collective health: by altering water calendars and life cycles, the harmony of our practices will be disrupted and the integrity, interdependence, and indivisibility of our territories compromised. For example, in seasons of drought and high temperatures, our territories will be affected by the reduction of water sources for consumption and for the *chagras*⁶. They may also be impacted by fires that destroy crops, grazing areas, and in general all the beings with whom we share the territory. In contrast, rainy seasons and floods will increase the presence of disease-carrying animals that will affect hunting, small farms, livestock, and community life. Riverbanks will no longer be available for our settlements and for cultural and goods exchange.

All these impacts will generate food and livelihood crises for our communities, putting our survival and that of our territories at risk. Colombia's glaciers and snow-capped mountains—such as those in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (*Chundwa*, in the Iku language) and the Serranía del Cocuy (*Zizuma*, in the U'wa language)—are among the ecosystems most affected by climate change.

Given their extremely high spiritual and cultural value for the Kogui, Arhuaco, Wiwa, and Kankuamo peoples, and for the Great U'wa Nation, the accelerated retreat of the ice confirms a profound imbalance that these peoples have been warning about, and which today, through their spiritual strength, they continue to preserve. Today we face a great threat; our ways of caring are not enough to solve the problem that others have caused and must now take responsibility for. We must act now.

Despite this reality, State policies do not include effective measures for our protection. Those of us who defend life with words, staffs of knowledge, prayers, medicine, and spiritual offerings continue to have no guarantees against violence and the impacts of crises generated by mainstream society.

⁶ Swidden, an area of land cleared for cultivation by slashing and burning vegetation with great cultural importance for Indigenous Peoples of South America.





V. GUARANTEE THE EXERCISE, SURVIVAL, AND INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF OUR KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AS THE FOUNDATION OF THE BIOCULTURAL INTEGRITY AND CONNECTIVITY OF OUR TERRITORIES.

“In order for us to continue existing as indigenous peoples, and for humanity to continue existing, there must be harmony between the territory and the biodiversity within it, especially given all the talk about the climate crisis. We must all contribute, not to adapt, but to solve this climate crisis.”

María Pastora Juajibioy, Kamentsa People

“A third guideline is our own practices, such as water sowing or land management according to the phases of the moon. In some territories, the chagra⁷ is referred to as a whole: highlands, midlands, and lowlands. This practice organizes the territory and guides decisions. In conclusion, these principles—Higher Law, Natural Law, spirituality, and our own practices—are the basis for guiding the recognition of indigenous territories.”

Aura Erazo, Pastos People

Our own knowledge systems are an essential pillar for the spiritual, cultural, and ecological balance of indigenous territories and the planet. However, funds allocated to climate change mitigation and adaptation and biodiversity conservation tend to prioritize actions based solely on standardized scientific knowledge, ignoring our own sciences, knowledge, and ancestral and traditional techniques that are essential for maintaining the balance of our territories.

⁷ Swidden, an area of land cleared for cultivation by slashing and burning vegetation with great cultural importance for Indigenous Peoples of South America.



In Colombia, forced displacement persists and its impact on Indigenous Peoples is disproportionate. In 2009, the highest constitutional authority warned of and described the factors that constitute the risk of physical and cultural extinction of 34 Indigenous Peoples, and many others in the country (Auto 004). The State's lack of commitment to overcoming and preventing the conditions and gaps that shape and reproduce structural factors of violence and dispossession puts at risk the continuity of our ancestral knowledge, which is fundamental to the care of life and the protection of our territories.

It is through the words and experiences of the elders, *taitas*, *palabrer*os, *mamos*, *sagas*, *curacas*, wise men and women, and other traditional authorities of the Indigenous Peoples that ancestral knowledge is transmitted to Indigenous children and youth. This exercise of intergenerational transmission is vital to ensure the care and healing of the territory, as well as the preservation of collective identity as peoples, spiritual and community leadership in fulfillment of the mandate to care for life. Through this mandate, the deterioration of Mother Earth's cycles is prevented, the restoration and protection of nature's vital cycles is contributed to, and sacred spaces are safeguarded, which are vital to ensuring compliance with the principles and mandates of Origin, the Good Living⁸ of Indigenous Peoples, humanity, and planet Earth as a whole.



VI. ENSURE THE FULL, EFFECTIVE, AND DECISION-MAKING PARTICIPATION OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY AND FINANCING, RECOGNIZING THEIR ROLE IN CARING FOR NATURE.

“I believe that we Indigenous women are the fundamental pillar in the care, use, management, and control of nature. (...) we know how to manage our own traditional ecological calendar, and from that comes the defense of our territory as indigenous women. We women have such an important task: to help our new generations become and remain defenders of the territory.”

Clemencia Herrera Nemerayema, Murui Muina People

Indigenous women are givers of life, custodians of seeds, and guardians of ancestral memory. For millennia, we have passed on our knowledge from generation to generation, intertwining knowledge with nature and the spiritual world, the foundations of our communities. We are teachers, sharing the wisdom necessary for the care of our territories and the knowledge that allows us to maintain balance in all its dimensions.

Through the teaching of language, the transmission of collective memory, and the sustaining of ways of life. For example, in some Amazonian villages, we are in charge of the *chagra*, the care of seeds, and the use of plants in traditional medicine. Women guarantee the material and spiritual reproduction of life in the territories: many of us are teachers and spiritual leaders, or caregivers of children, youth, and the elderly, accompanying the community weave from birth to political and spiritual formation. Furthermore, our role as guardians of life transcends the family sphere: it extends to the active defense of the territory, political organization,



and the leadership of collective processes, making us pillars of cultural survival and biodiversity conservation. This is why our role is essential in the construction and implementation of just, contextualized, situated, and locally rooted solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss.

Despite the importance of our role, we have historically been made invisible by the multiple intersections of oppression we face: being women, being indigenous, and lacking economic resources. As a result, our participation, leadership, and work in national and international advocacy spaces continue to be restricted. For example, according to the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC) in Colombia, women's political participation within their own government systems in some regions does not exceed 20%, despite representing 50.1% of the indigenous population.

We demand that the full and effective participation of indigenous women in policies that affect our territories be guaranteed. This requires a fundamental transformation of environmental governance mechanisms, with real and binding guarantees that ensure the representation of indigenous women at all levels of decision-making. Our knowledge, expertise, and leadership must occupy a central place, overcoming the structures that have reproduced gender, racial, and territorial inequalities and violence, which today continue to limit our voice in matters that are decisive for the future of our peoples, humanity, and planet Earth.



VII. GUARANTEE OUR BINDING PARTICIPATION IN ACCORDANCE WITH OUR OWN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS, WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGENDA.

“Finally, in international and national decision-making spaces and in indigenous consultation, the message is clear: stop talking and start acting. There must be decisiveness, agility, and, above all, financial resources.”

Aura Erazo, Pastos People

International and national policies, including climate and biodiversity policies, must respect our own systems of government and authority at all levels of decision-making. There can be no legitimate environmental agenda if those of us who maintain ancestral and original ties to the territories and their diversity continue to be marginalized from the spaces where the direction of the planet is defined.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation policies have been designed and implemented without regard for our plans, priorities, participation, autonomy, and self-government. Historically, less than 1% of the resources allocated to climate mitigation and adaptation have directly benefited Indigenous Peoples. The protection and legal security of our territorial rights, despite being fundamental to addressing environmental crises, has not been a priority in global agendas and commitments.

Market-based climate change mitigation mechanisms such as carbon certificates and Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) projects are imposed as “green solutions” but reproduce the same colonial logic of dispossession. In 2024, Colombia’s highest constitutional authority (Ruling

T-248) recognized that the Macuna, Barasano, Eduria, Tayuyo, Tuyaca, Itano, and Carapana peoples had their autonomy and self-government violated by companies that implemented REDD+ projects implemented without free, prior, and informed consent.

This same ruling highlights an undeniable truth about the carbon markets promoted by the global North: commitments to tackle the climate crisis are not being ambitiously fulfilled. Instead, compensation mechanisms have been used that ignore the holistic view of the territory and the planet, based on economic exchanges and irresponsible investments in our territories, in most cases without complying with the international human rights framework.

Colombia's highest constitutional authority also warned about the lack of a differential indigenous approach in State policy and the inadequacy of control and monitoring mechanisms for these initiatives. What has happened reflects a structural problem that is repeated in many territories, where global climate measures are implemented without respecting our own systems of government and authority and their inseparable link with nature. These "solutions" were not designed with us, nor for us, and they do not prioritize the importance of these systems and links in the preservation and care of life.

It is essential that the policies respect our organizational processes and our role as special public structures and authorities of government with knowledge and expertise in the care of the territory. Territorial autonomy is the basis for the proper execution of economic resources allocated to climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as the fulfillment of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework goals and the financial mechanisms derived from them. Currently, the existence of a large number of intermediaries prevents these resources from being executed autonomously and directly in a way that positively impacts our peoples and territories.

Ensuring respect for our territorial autonomy means rethinking the management of international treaties so that our authorities have a collective and influential participation in the discussions that produce decisive global policies and actions for the care and defense of life, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and the Escazú Agreement, among others.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

In line with the seven initiatives outlined here, we present recommendations for decision-makers and global environmental policy actors aimed at promoting an effective transformation of the environmental agenda, based on full respect of our territorial rights.

1. Recognize our territories and systems as essential for nature preservation and climate action, acknowledging their spiritual, cultural, and relational importance, as well as the solutions we have implemented in harmony with nature's cycles.
2. Restore, recover, and rehabilitate rivers, streams, lagoons, moors, forests, and all ecosystems that are part of the water cycle in indigenous territories, incorporating actions from our knowledge and governance systems.
3. Ensure the identification of the territories of ancestral and traditional occupation and possession of Indigenous Peoples, respecting our own institutions and systems.
4. Consolidate, in coordination with our own systems, information on the identification of indigenous territories as a binding input for policy decision-making.

5. Ensure that the just energy transition is a true cultural transition that seeks to care for life and moves from relationships of dispossession to respect and care for our territories, as well as advancing the comprehensive reparation of loss and damage⁹.
6. Design conservation, restoration, and climate action measures with us and not over us, ensuring that all indigenous territories remain as living territories and not areas of exploitation.
7. Reparation mechanisms and financial funds must guarantee ecological restoration and the strengthening of our own economies in the face of the impacts of extractivism.
8. Promote the recognition of acts of systematic violence against indigenous (territorial) defenders as crimes against humanity, in accordance with the Rome Statute and standards for the protection of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.
9. Guarantee access to and protection of our sacred spaces, and include measures for the recovery, restoration, and rehabilitation of territories affected by armed conflicts and environmental crises.
10. Guarantees for the exercise of our own systems and structures, as well as the exercise of our authority as the legitimate environmental authority in our territories, under our own legal systems and, where appropriate, coordination with States within a framework of pluralism in national policies.
11. Design and implement direct financing mechanisms from international treaties to strengthen the processes of Indigenous Peoples, such as the Cali Fund of the Convention on Biological Diversity.
12. Maintain the holistic, integrated, and balanced nature of non-market-based sustainable development approaches created by Article 6.8 of the Paris Agreement.
13. Transform instruments such as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), and National Action Plans to Combat Desertification and Drought (NAPs) to integrate principles such as Good Living¹⁰ and territorial and biocultural rights from our knowledge systems.

⁹ Refer to the negative and inevitable consequences of climate change, which may be monetary or non-monetary, such as loss of life and livelihoods, degradation of land and cultural heritage, among others.

¹⁰ Buen Vivir

14. Create mechanisms within instruments such as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), and National Action Plans to Combat Desertification and Drought (NAP) from our own ways of valuing and caring for the territory, which ensure coordinated, effective, coherent, and respectful implementation of our own knowledge systems and regulatory frameworks.
15. Adapt spaces for participation in the various platforms of indigenous representation within global environmental governance, to facilitate the participation of indigenous women and incorporate the plurality of their voices, based on the knowledge and experiences that sustain life, into international environmental agendas.
16. Provide economic resources for the implementation of political training schools for indigenous women and youth, aimed at strengthening their leadership in the defense of the territory, the transmission of their own knowledge, and the construction of proposals in the face of environmental crises.
17. Finance processes led by indigenous women, fully respecting their rights and traditional knowledge.
18. Ensure the participation of our authorities in existing international spaces, such as the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) of the UNFCCC, the Subsidiary Body for Implementation of Article 8(j) of the CBD, the Indigenous Peoples Forum of the UNCCD, and other global advocacy spaces.
19. Guarantee and promote spaces for the exchange of our knowledge systems among different Indigenous Peoples in Colombia, South America and around the world, in order to highlight our contributions to the care of nature, as well as for the collective construction of our own solutions.



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