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Empowering speech

Luz Mery Narváez Remui, Huitoto
Murui ethnic group, municipality of
Leguízamo - Putumayo (Colombia)



Story: EMPOWERING SPEECH

Luz Mery Narváez Remui, Huitoto Murui ethnic group,
municipality of Leguízamo - Putumayo (Colombia)

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Umbrella project: Putumayo Three Frontiers

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INTRODUCTION

Clear and loud, and facing an audience of 272 persons, Luz Mery Narváez Remui, coordinator, welcomed the negotiation act of the Citizen's Action Dialogue (CAC, *Conversatorio de Acción Ciudadana*), designed to bring together communities and government agencies to discuss and celebrate agreements.

The self-confidence shown by Luz Mery and other participating representatives of the indigenous and small farmer communities leading this act is a result of "An integrated conservation and sustainable development project for strengthening the regional system of protected areas and indigenous territories in the three-state watershed of the Putumayo River", briefly known as the Putumayo Three Frontiers (PTF) project, financed by the European Union and WWF. This project is carried out in the context of the Tri National Program, a coordinated integration and action proposal for conservation and social management in the corridor comprised by three protected areas: the Cuyabeno Fauna Production Reserve in Ecuador, the Güeppi National Park in Peru and the La Paya National Park in Colombia.

The story of change in Luz Mery's life could well be that of Cléber, Riascos, Willy, Juan Leonel, Edier, Hernán or any other of the participants in the capacity building component of the PTF project. I became interested in Luz Mery because she was the only indigenous woman participating since the start of the project in 2009. I have witnessed her progress, achievements and challenges, and her outstanding participation in the

Citizen's Action Dialogue (CAC), which was the mechanism chosen to consolidate the capacity building process among communities participating in the PTF project.

A CAC includes three stages: preparation, negotiation and follow-up. This mechanism facilitates participation, conflict resolution and negotiation, and provides an opportunity for communities to come up with proposals to face challenges and threats, based on civil rights and institutional responsibilities. These proposals became binding agreements during the discussion and negotiation meeting led by the communities, where Luz Mery Narváez Remui and Hernán Serrano acted as moderators.





Following is the story of Luz Mery's life, from her origins and through her infancy, adolescence and adulthood. We will learn about her studies, her encounter with the Huitoto- Murui culture and her different roles in the community. We will evidence her participation in the project and what it has meant: enriching her speech, strengthening her voice, enabling her growth as a human being and becoming aware of her importance as an indigenous woman in the Colombian Amazon, one of the richest regions in the world in terms of biological diversity. Luz Mery's story takes place in the municipality of Leguizamó in the department of Putumayo, bordering both Ecuador and Peru (see Map 1).

Enriching, strengthening and acquiring the power of the spoken word makes sense in many contexts, and is particularly important in this region, inhabited by cultures for which oral communication is essential and necessary for transferring and conserving ancestral knowledge. The spoken word is the basis for transmitting traditional know-how, and constructing and strengthening alliances, networks and relationships within and among indigenous communities, and with other groups.

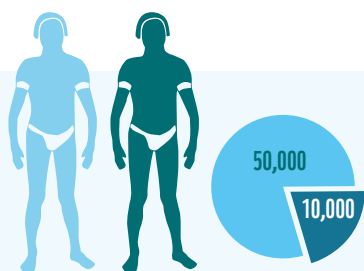
This story has two parts. The first part, before startup of the PTF project, has three chapters following the image of the *manguaré*²: 1. Reconstructing memories, 2. Homecoming and 3. Speaking publicly for the first time. The background for these three chapters—essential for understanding the context and management of this type of project—is the description of the region's complexity and its strategic geographic location in the Colombian Amazon.

The second part starts in 2009 in line with the kick off of the PTF project and includes two more chapters: 4. Enriching the spoken word—the encounter with the PTF project (2009-2011) and 5. Releasing speech to generate actions—the CAC, describing the development of the citizen's action dialogue (from early 2012 to March 2013, when the project reaches its negotiation phase).

Boxes in the first part present data to facilitate understanding the geographic and historical context of the region; those in the second part highlight knowledge acquired during the capacity building process and which confirm or ratify accumulated knowledge in WWF Colombia's Governance Program.

2. Percussion instrument of pre-Columbian origin used for communication. Its sounds can be heard 20 kilometers away; these drums were used by Amazonian indigenous communities to send messages, announce weddings, declare war and even send love messages.

RECONSTRUCTING MEMORIES



Population in the region
went from 50,000 to 10,000
in a period of only 10 years.

Brutalities of the Casa Arana were denounced in 1910. The Huitoto, Andoques, Nonuya and Bora indigenous communities that inhabited the region were forced to abandon their traditional activities to harvest rubber. "Workers were punished with whips and leather belts; men and children were placed in stocks or crucified. Hundreds of indigenous people were executed or burnt alive after being drenched in kerosene" (Gobernación del Amazonas⁴). When the Arana company was liquidated, their facilities were turned over to monks and used for orphanages and hospitals.

At age 9, Luz Mery realized she did not speak Muinica, the traditional Huitoto language. Her mother, Domitila Remui, did not participate in the conversations among aunts visiting them from Puerto Asís and bringing black chilies and *fariña*³ as presents. They were probably remembering past times and the difficulties faced during childhood when they were forced to separate after their father's death.

Domitila was the youngest of five siblings. She was born in 1945 in La Chorrera, a meeting point for the indigenous communities inhabiting the margins of the Igaraparaná River, in the Colombian department of Amazonas and scene of one of the cruelest massacres in the region during the rubber boom. Tapping of *siringa*, the latex of *Hevea brasiliensis*, affected the Upper Amazon watershed and the departments of Caquetá and Putumayo. Rubber harvesting enterprises of the English-owned Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company (with headquarters in London but commonly known as Casa Arana) were established along the Igaraparaná in the early nineties (Gobernación del Amazonas⁴).

Domitila Remui had just turned six when she was handed over to the San Rafael orphanage in El Encanto, located on the margins of the Putumayo River, at the mouth of the Caraparaná River. Here she finished her elementary school and was then hired to take care of the boarding pupils. She hoped she would be transferred to Leticia, capital of the Amazonas department, but in spite of continuous requests, her plea was not heard. At age 24 she decided to run away and escaped on board of a watercraft registered under the name of "La Gaviria" and captained by Melitón Narváez, who later became her husband and father of Luz Mery.

Melitón Narváez's family came from the neighboring department of Nariño. They had come attracted by the rubber boom but were later recruited as soldiers in 1933 during the war between Colombia and Peru. Melitón's name is not among the list of war veterans as he was very young at the time, but his brothers and father did fight the war. Luz Mery's grandfather reached the First Sergeant Rank and she feels proud of being the granddaughter of a war veteran.

3. Traditional food in the Amazon region; coarse flour extracted from bitter cassava.

4. Gobernación del Amazonas: www.amazonas.gov.co/nuestromunicipio.shtml?apc=mtxx4 (reference) http://www.corpoamazonia.gov.co/region/Putumayo/Municipios/Ptyo_Asis.html



Communities in both El Encanto and La Chorrera suffered the abuses of rubber extraction by the Arana family. The sadly famous Casa Arana dispossessed of lands and subjected all colonists that owned local exploitations, and enslaved the indigenous people to consolidate the business empire. The Peruvian Amazon Rubber Company established its main offices in 1913 and had commercial relations with the United States, England, France and other European countries. A commission of the British Parliament opened an investigation to determine the degree of responsibility of the English company; the investigation resulted years later in closure of the enterprise.



Puerto Asís, bordering the Putumayo River, has the largest population in the department. The oil boom accelerated growth in the region. A study conducted by DANE (1985) found that 16 or 17 oil barrels were extracted daily, representing close to 55% of the product value in the economy of the Putumayo department. Discovery of oil wells forced successive subtraction of areas in the Amazon region, declared since 1959 as the great forest reserve, to allow the development of oil fields. Currently, Puerto Asís has the largest markets in the region and is responsible for 40% of commercial transactions in the department.

5. Municipio de Puerto Asís, PBOT Diagnóstico General (59 pag-1919kb)

Melitón was interested in sailing and found a job aboard a watercraft of the period. He later became captain of the boat and had the chance of meeting many people along the banks of the Putumayo, Amazon and Manaos rivers. He would exchange beans, rice and pasta, among other foodstuffs, for plantains, cassava, fish and even turtles of the *Chelonoidis denticulate* species, known as *motelo* and for which there was a high demand on the Peruvian side of the border. This was the era of bartering.

Melitón and Domitila decided to live aboard La Gaviria and had eight children. The two oldest (boy and girl, respectively) were born in La Chorrera, followed by Luz Mery who was born in El Encanto on 20 January 1977. Before Luz Mery's first birthday, the mother insisted that the family stop being navigating nomads—running risks with the small children—and establish itself in Puerto Asís. Promoted by the oil boom and coca cultivation, the town had the largest growth in the department of Putumayo and became a main destiny for migrants from different parts of the country. Luz Mery and family arrived at the prosperous port after a six-month long river trip initiated in Leticia, 2,220 km behind. Puerto Asís was her home during her childhood as well as for the five brothers that followed her.

She went to an elementary public school for girls (*Escuela Urbana de Niñas "Divina Pastora"*) administered by Franciscan nuns. She appreciates having been taught social behavior and conventional norms, as well as love for her region—a deeply rooted feeling in Luz Mery.

The oil economy, the growing colonization, coca cultivation and its strategic frontier location, also brought violence to Puerto Asís and the region as a whole in the mid eighties. Due to threats and trying to protect his family, in 1989 Melitón moved to Puerto Leguízamo⁵, located 480 km from Puerto Asís, also along the Putumayo River and in the borderline between Colombia, Peru and Ecuador. Luz Mery was then 12 years old. She remembers that it was difficult for her to embrace the change because she missed her school activities and friends.

Leguízamo occupies 50% of the area of the Putumayo department and is one of 58 municipalities in the Colombian Amazon region. It was originally inhabited

by the Siona indigenous people. Given the different human settlement processes in the region, the municipality of Leguizamo currently has a multicultural population, including indigenous peoples, mestizo small farmers and afro descendents. Migrants from other regions arrived during the initial phase of the rubber and quinoa exploitation. Military bases were established following the conflict with Peru. Later on, during the decade of the 70's, migration was driven by commercialization of furs and wood, while it was coca cultivation that attracted a large number of persons from other regions of the country during the decade of the 80's.

Different organizational processes of the indigenous communities were taking place at the same time as events described in this region. “Predio Putumayo”, the largest indigenous reserve (1,329,391 ha) in the country was established in 1988; it holds 3,600 inhabitants of the Huitoto, Murui, Muinane, Bora, Ocarina, Andoque, Karijona, Miraña, Yucuna, Cabiyaí, Inga, Siona, Letuama and other ethnic groups. This territory is located in the jurisdiction of the municipalities Leticia (Amazonas) and Puerto Leguizamo (Putumayo) and was the result of a four-year effort led by indigenous organizations that settled the region from time immemorial. The Zonal Organization of Indigenous Communities of Putumayo (OZIP, *Organización Zonal Indígena del Putumayo*) had been created two years before by representatives of the indigenous communities in the department.

Putumayo's geographic characteristics—area covered by forests, located in the border line of three countries, and access to mayor rivers—have facilitated illegal activities related to cocaine production and have created a corridor for drug dealing, which in turn explains the presence of the Armed Forces. The government policy to fumigate and eradicate coca crops is another effect of growing illicit crops which is reflected in the displacement of population to other parts of the country and to neighboring countries.



The armed forces have been present in Puerto Leguizamo for many years: the Sixth Division of the National Army; the Marine Infantry Battalion No. 60 (BAFLIM – 60) of the South Naval Force of the National Navy; the Twenty Seventh Brigade assigned to the Army's Sixth Division; and the National Police, that reports to Region No. 2, and Police Station No. 2, called “*Sencilla brillantes*”.

HOMEcoming



For the Huitoto-Murui and Muinane peoples, the world is conceived from the point of view of the *maloca* house. Important to them is knowledge and its transmission, guidance for social coexistence, uses and rituals in the practice of *mambeo* (chewing coca leaves) among the wise elders, and sowing the land by the grandparents. For the Siona and Corebajú peoples, the sacred ayahuasca plant is the spiritual base of their world.

In Puerto Leguísimo, Luz Mery's mother had the opportunity of reencountering the Huitoto culture. She recognized many old friends originally inhabiting the Igaraparaná and Caraparaná river margins (land of the Huitoto Murui peoples) and who had fled to Leguísimo since the rubber boom era and the war between Colombia and Peru.

The Huitoto people organize themselves in clans. On arriving at Puerto Leguísimo, Luz Mery found out that she belonged to two clans: on the grandmother's side, the Jeya + Imereya Clan, the people of *boruga* (paca); and on the grandfather's side, the Jeya Aimeni Clan, the people of Chucha (opossum) guided by Ka + Moo Buinaima (the almighty god).

Two or three families would get together on Sundays to eat *casabe*⁶. Later on, more families joined the group. They would share home-made food and stories told by the grandmothers; children and adolescents would listen carefully. A strong feeling of identity with her Huitoto Murui culture grew in Luz Mary. She remembers their concern over conserving their culture and their fear of the armed forces. Not speaking the Murui's native language, Muinica, was Luz Mary's mayor constraint.

Her participation in the clan and her relationship with the leaders and elders, allowed her to be informed and care for the important changes in Colombian politics that took place two years after arriving at Puerto Leguísimo. The new Political Constitution of Colombia was approved in 1991; national ethnic groups were given the opportunity to promote and strengthen their organizations. The group in which Luz Mery's family was involved took advantage of the new legislation. After a lot of paperwork and several meetings and negotiations with the Department of the Interior in Bogotá, the Urban Town Indigenous Council (*Cabildo del Casco Urbano*) was established in 1994; 20 families, including the Remui family, belonged to this council.

From 20, the Cabildo grew to 150 families composed of both indigenous peoples and mestizos. The intercultural conflict became a mayor concern. The non-indigenous families did not share certain cultural traditions, such as *cahuana*⁷. The crisis led to the disintegration of the Council; an initiative led by the grandmothers resulted in the creation of a new Council, the *Cabildo Comuya Amana*, in the urban zone of Puerto Leguísimo. This Council came to be known as the "rebellious council" due to all the circumstances and conflicts that led them to separate from the larger group.

6. A circular type of roasted bread made from cassava flour or tapioca.

7. Traditional drink made from cassava starch.

Colombia has 87 indigenous communities, 31 of which inhabit the Leguízamo area (DANE-DDTS, *Aspectos Básicos Grupo Étnico Indígenas 2010*), comprising approximately 1,192 families and a total population of 7,134 of different ethnic groups: the Sionas, Muinane and Huitoto Murui, forced to leave the department of Amazonas; the Korebajú (Coreguaje), who settled the Consará Reserve; the Kichwa, who migrated from Ecuador fleeing slavery in the gold mines; the Nasa (Paeces), who migrated from the department of Cauca; and the Ingas. Nineteen communities are legally constituted and occupy an area of 47,325 ha. The remaining 10 communities do not own land and 2 of them live in the urban area (Luisa Fernanda Carbonell, *Indígenas del Municipio de Leguízamo, Putumayo – Colombia*), one of which is the Cabildo Comuya Amena.

Most members of the Cabildo Comuya Amena were widows, who dedicated themselves to recovering their cultural traditions, such as children's indigenous songs. However, due to space limitations, they could not develop productive activities, even though they had a 17-ha *chagra*⁸ located along the banks of the Putumayo River, in the Saladito county, 20 minutes away from Puerto Leguízamo, where a few of the group planted mainly plantains and bananas, cassava, yam, chilies, pineapple, ice-cream beans, and medicinal plants.

The Cabildo Comuya Amena belongs to the Association of Traditional Authorities and Indigenous Peoples Councils of the Municipality of Leguízamo and the High Reserve Putumayo Land (ACILAPP, *Asociación de Autoridades Tradicionales y Cabildos de los Pueblos Indígenas del Municipio de Leguízamo y Alto Resguardo Predio Putumayo*). Twenty-one communities of the Huitoto Murui, Inga, Nasa, Coreguaje and Siona peoples make up this association.

Other organizations present in the Municipality of Leguízamo are the Association of Traditional Authorities of the Kichwa People in the Colombian Amazon (OPKAC, *Asociación de Autoridades Tradicionales del Pueblo Kichwa de la Amazonia Colombiana*), the Association of Indigenous Councils of the Siona People (ACIPS, *Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Pueblo Siona*), all of which are part of OZIP.



8. Land for growing their crops.

SPEAKING PUBLICLY FOR THE FIRST TIME



Traditional authorities of the ZIO-A'I Foundation called "Knowledge Union", visited in 2000 the indigenous communities living along the Putumayo River. The objective was to make a spiritual trip toward traditional knowledge. Life plans were elaborated for different groups, among them the Murui people (es.scribd.com/.../Murui-Muinane-Nasa-y-Corebaju-Plan-de-Vida-Acilapp).

Establishment of the murui council was an opportunity for Luz Mery to gain experience in organizational and community activities. She was recognized for her ability to express herself and her speed in taking notes to help the Council's secretary.

Luz Mery continued studying in Puerto Leguizamo in a close relationship with nuns, with whom she had been related to since early childhood. She participated in the church choir and in prayer groups; therefore her first public readings were biblical texts. This experience helped her find ways to explain what she wanted to say and improve her communication skills. Thus she was chosen to present reports and read documents in community meetings. But she wanted to improve her skills, to be more eloquent and precise, and be better understood. She felt there was a lot she could still achieve.

In December 1996, at the age of 20, she finished her high school. The following year, with the support of her parents, Luz Mery went to Mocoa (the capital of the Putumayo department) to study Systems Technology in the Higher Education Technological Institute of Putumayo (INESUP, Instituto Tecnológico de Educación Superior del Putumayo). Here she joined a drama club called Macondo where she practiced body movements and gestures, and learned to follow a tight schedule. She auditioned imitating different animals (birds, tapir, boas, alligators, peccary, arrau turtles) and was selected to represent a bird character nicknamed "Muchi". In this role she travelled to Popayan, with a crew of 19 actors, to participate in the theatre festival to which the department of Putumayo had been invited.

Lack of economic resources forced her to interrupt her studies in Mocoa and return to Puerto Leguizamo in 1998. Upon her return at the age of 22 she was appointed secretary of the indigenous council until 2000. Her responsibilities included working with the grandmothers in the chagra. She also participated in the preparation of a life plan for the Murui people.

Afterwards she started working at the mayor's office as indigenous culture activist. Here she met her partner with whom she has two children: a girl (2002) and a boy (2003). For a while, she interrupted her work to take care of her children, but continued to work as a representative of the indigenous community. Her kids now study in a public, non indigenous, institution, but Luz Mery has made sure they do not lose their indigenous identity, culture, customs,



9. Government system for identifying and classifying potential beneficiaries for social programs (*Sistema de Identificación y Clasificación de Potenciales Beneficiarios para los programas sociales*). Survey designed to identify and classify persons unable to meet their basic needs, to which they have a right and that should be provided by the State (dwelling, education, and health, among other).

and collective work practices. She highlights the importance of participating in community activities, becoming well-known, asking and clarifying issues, and analyzing situations.

Later on she worked as a systems analyst and managed the data bases of the four indigenous communities in her municipality. In 2004 she worked with the municipality's public services company (EMPULEG); here her responsibilities were billing, collecting, and resolving complaints. She also served as assistant to the social activist in matters related to social policies. In this capacity she worked with several women groups and with the SISBEN⁹. Whatever her post, Luz Mery continued to be in contact and participate in activities organized by the indigenous council and by ACILAPP.

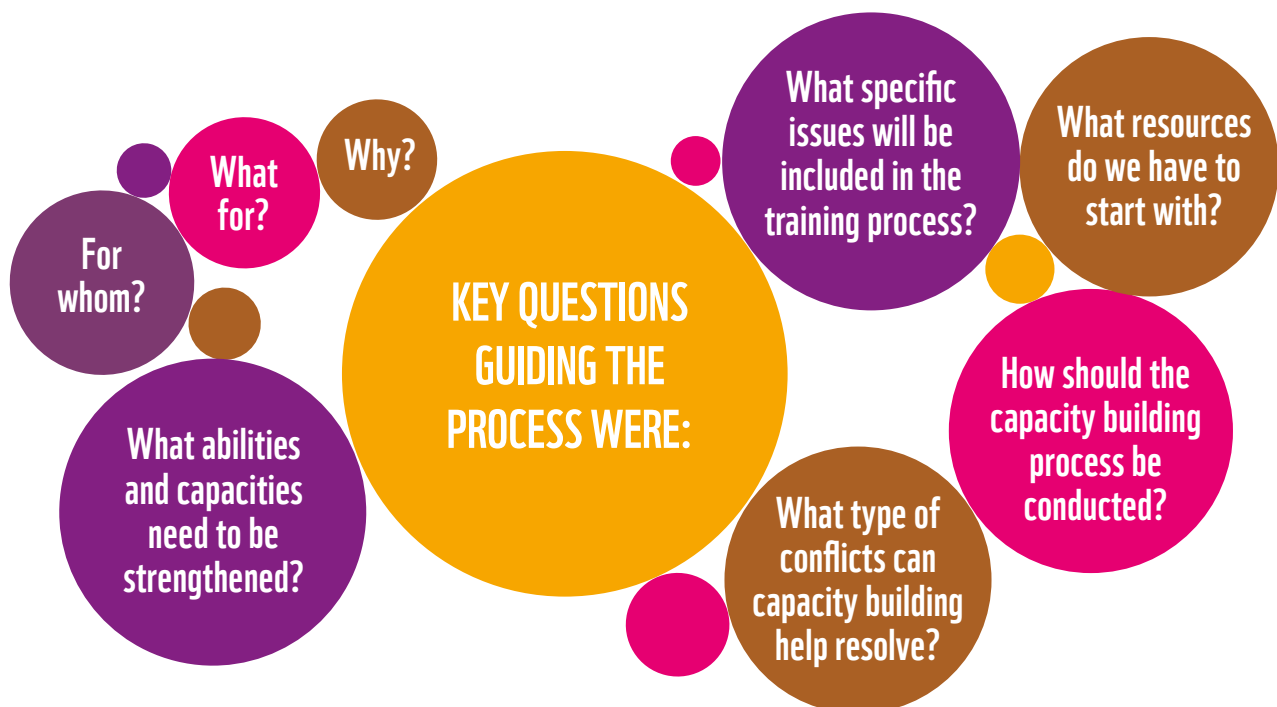
ENRICHING THE SPOKEN WORD -THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE PTF PROJECT

SUCCESS OF CAPACITY
BUILDING PROCESSES IS
DETERMINED BY THEIR
RELEVANCE TO THE
NATURAL AND CULTURAL
CONTEXT IN WHICH THEY
ARE DEVELOPED.

Capacity building of key actors is one of the PTF project's strategies. One of its objectives is to "design and implement a strategy for promoting participation of and providing training to civil society and government agencies in

administering protected areas and their buffer zones". Following this objective, and under the leadership of WWF's Governance area, in 2009 a group of delegates from the indigenous and small farmer organizations of the municipality of Leguízamo and the La Paya National Park, and the PTF Project team prepared a capacity building proposal.

The purpose, focus and content of the training proposal were defined after collectively considering a set of key questions. Luz Mery participated as the ACILAPP delegate. She recalls this was the opportunity she needed to improve her discourse abilities and her capacity to defend her thoughts.



Answer to these questions helped understanding needs and actual conditions that the process needed to approach: establishing objectives, focusing, defining strategies and foreseeing results. Also, this collective discussion helped in understanding the complexity of the cultural, economic, political, social and environmental context.

Reflecting on these questions was also an opportunity to analyze and value the region's natural and environmental potential due to its location in the Amazon—a region harboring the largest tropical forest in the world, with an enormous environmental and ecological importance, and providing essential functions in the adaptation to and mitigation of climate change phenomena. The process also unveiled the pressure due to inadequate exploitation of natural resources, an insensitive and overwhelming change in the use of the soil, and total neglect on the part of the State. Protected areas in this region represent an opportunity for natural resource conservation, but also require backstopping and support in achieving their mission.

Collectively considering the natural, cultural and social environment enabled the design of a participatory training proposal, based on local conditions and needs. In executing the proposal, participants applied and adopted six core themes:

- (i) Territorial planning;
- (ii) Sustainable systems in the Amazon;
- (iii) Environmental conflict management;
- (iv) Political and citizen training;
- (v) Communication management and
- (vi) Training of trainers.



Objectives, content and methodology of these themes were part of the training agenda in the capacity building process, which later matured into the CAC, with representatives from the different indigenous and small farmer organizations in the municipality. Staff from La Paya National Park and Tropenbos Colombia played an important role in the successful development of this process.

These concepts and the comprehensive approach in the training process provided tools for Luz Mery when she was elected Council Governor (2010-2011). She highlights the usefulness of becoming familiar with legal procedures, and with both citizen and indigenous organizations rights, which helped her resolve situations faced by the indigenous organization. These topics were analyzed, along with the corresponding legal instruments and mechanisms, in the fourth thematic concept.



Luz Mery capitalized on this knowledge to prepare the internal regulations of the indigenous organization. Lessons on communication tools, handling of events and training methodologies also enabled her to replicate what she has learned. Constantly applying her training keeps the new knowledge alive. Her ability to express herself, her vocabulary and her dialogue have been enriched; the indigenous community acknowledged this by electing her council governor.

Analyzing her roles and new abilities, Luz Mery feels that the Murui women need to participate more, express their thinking and provide input to the organization. She has contributed by joining committees and recovering traditional knowledge of the Murui chagra.

Her improved networking and communication skills resulting from the training process enabled her to represent her community in other arenas. In 2010 she was selected to participate in an event organized by the Ministry of Education, in the context of the “Educational Revolution” project. This activity gave her the chance to travel to El Encanto, where she was born and where she was able to compare what she evidenced with the stories told by her mother. The one-way trip, which took her 6 months when she was one-year-old, now takes 3 days both ways.

Luz Mery is sure that her family and the community can count on her and she is happy to provide help. This points to the importance in capacity building processes of involving participants that belong to an organization where they can later apply what they learn. Two other participants in the process now have important posts in their respective organizations: Juan Leonel Gómez was recently elected governor of the Lagarto Cocha Indigenous Reserve and Uriel Machacury was appointed secretary of the OPKAC.

During the midterm evaluation of the PTF Project in 2011, Luz Mery traveled to Quito (Ecuador) in representation of the communities participating in the Project. This experience enabled her to understand the project’s international dimension and to get to know what other communities are doing in Ecuador and Peru. She highly valued the training received and shared experiences with indigenous authorities. She presented and discussed several aspects of capacity building related to governing autonomy, leadership, and participation, and to highlight the relationship with protected areas.

RELEASING SPEECH TO GENERATE ACTIONS-THE CAC

Along the Putumayo River, the training session ends when the sky turns an orange red and the sun starts its descent into the horizon.

It has been a long day exchanging ideas and learning new concepts. Grandfather Pablo Nofuya Gaitán, traditional authority of ACILAPP, participated with Luz Mery in the workshop facilitated by Fabio Londoño Rojas, lawyer specialized in social law.



**KNOWLEDGE
DIALOGUE—A WAY TO
RECOGNIZE AND VALUE
DIVERSE KNOWLEDGE
AND EXPERIENCES IN
ORDER TO CARRY OUT
ACTIONS THAT HAVE BEEN
SHARED AND CONCERTED.**

The workshop addressed the ten principles of the Colombian Political Constitution. The comments made regarding these principles by the grandfather are very important for Luz Mery, since he represents the knowledge and authority of his people. These principles make reference to the State and the State's function in assuring the rights of its citizens. Discussion and analysis have mainly addressed two articles: the second one, which determines that “the State's essential goals are to serve the community, promote overall prosperity and guarantee the effectiveness of those principles, rights and duties enshrined in the Constitution”; and the seventh one, whereby the “State acknowledges and protects ethnic and cultural diversity”. Participants highlight aspects of self governance, acknowledgement and importance of the indigenous peoples, and relevance of cultural practices associated with production systems, such as the chagra which is a space devoted to producing food, conserving and transmitting their ancestral knowledge, and reinforcing the indigenous view of the world.

Luz Mery comments the seventh principle, which states that “Spanish is the official language in Colombia, but that languages and dialects of the ethnic groups are also official in their territories”. She points out the need to recover and strengthen indigenous languages still in use and which are important for ancestral communication and preserving their culture.





PUTUMAYO THREE FRONTIERS PROJECT

The Putumayo Three Frontiers project developed the CAC as an opportunity for reinforcing the capacity building component: a methodology where lessons learned in specific proposals can be applied to solve problems and generate changes in the relationship between the community and the State. The Puerto Leguizamo CAC was organized by the leading agencies of the PTF project in Colombia: La Paya National Park, Tropenbos Colombia and WWF Colombia. The three organizations articulated their actions in order to implement training activities.



**STRATEGIC ALLIANCES
ARE FUNDAMENTAL
IN THESE TYPES OF
PROCESSES SINCE THEY
COMPLEMENT CAPACITIES
AND GUARANTEE GREATER
EFFICIENCY.**

Issues related to political and citizen training are particularly important for Luz Mery. She states that it is this knowledge that has strengthened her capacity to participate, using legal tools that make her words and arguments more appropriate and strong. It is here that she constructs the voice required to demand and discuss with different actors. Awareness that her speech is based on legal rights and the understanding of reality makes words flow freely and confidently in establishing a good dialogue.

This is the goal of the Citizen's Action Dialogue as a mechanism to promote participation, based on rights established by the 1991 Political Constitution of Colombia.

WWF has used the CAC methodology for effective governing in several parts of the country¹⁰ (Annex 1). These experiences have resulted in important lessons on how to combine two basic aspects: environmental conflicts and citizens' rights. The concern is how to resolve environmental conflicts based on environmental rights.

The CAC methodology is developed in three stages:



10. In 2003 for the protection of mangroves and *piangua* (mussel, *Anadara tuberculosa* and *Anadara similis*) in the coast of the department of Nariño, in 2006 for the territorial planning of the Guiza River watershed, in 2007 in Coello and Fúquene, in 2009 in Mocoa, in 2011 in Urabá to control the legality of lumbering, and in 2011 in the department of Tolima (Coello River watershed).

11. Territorial planning (Lina Parra and Jefferson Rojas), Amazon Sustainable Systems (Heraldo Vallejo, Rocío Polanco and Saulo Usma), tools for citizen participation (Fabio Londoño Rojas), communications management (Ferney Díaz and Stefany Olaya) and environment conflict management (Carmen Candelo Reina and Beth-Sua Carvajal).

12. Indigenous community house that represents the universe; place where they gather to establish contact with their spiritual world, share and transmit knowledge, and make decisions.

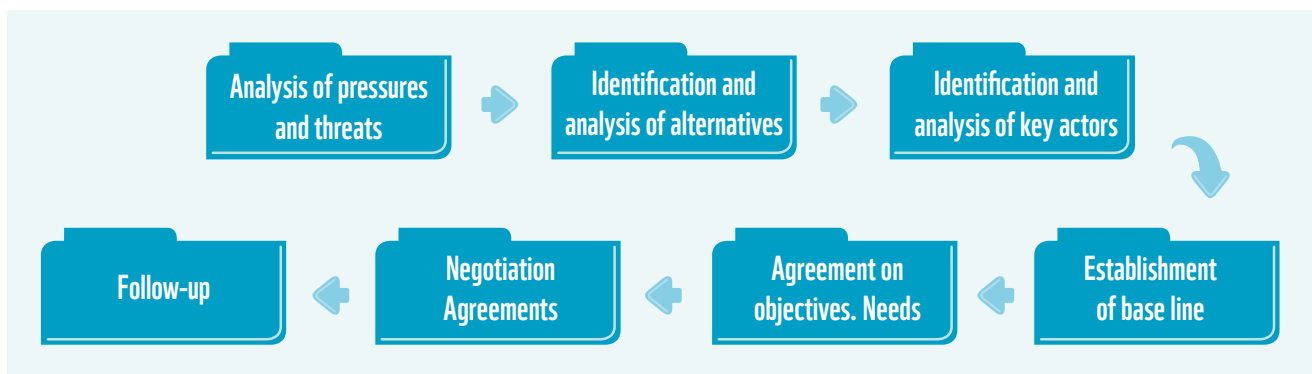
Preparation in the Puerto Leguizamo CAC started in February 2012 with the training agenda, under the responsibility of an interdisciplinary team¹¹. Training was combined with regular exchange meetings, some of which took place in ACILAPP's Maloca¹². Negotiations on the 13th and 14th of July 2013 consolidated this stage. The process then entered the follow-up stage. Luz Mery and 29 other persons (15% women) participated in the three stages, in representation of indigenous and small farmer organizations in the municipality.

The group collectively selected the issue of territorial planning among the six core themes as the central issue to be discussed in the CAC. The group also agreed on paths or phases to understand and analyze all the elements that backstop territorial planning, from a holistic and interdisciplinary approach, in order to provide grounds for dialogue and negotiation.

In the interest of guaranteeing the relevance of the processes, the starting point was a collective discussion on pressures and threats to the territory. The analysis led to identifying alternatives for confronting and mitigating these threats, followed



by an analysis of actors to identify those key persons that could be involved in the execution of the proposals. Finally, the group agreed on which aspects needed to be prepared for the negotiation. The following graph explains the route and highlights the guiding theme in the processes.



**KNOWLEDGE DIALOGUE—AN
APPROACH AND PRACTICE THAT
FACILITATES STRUCTURING
PERSPECTIVES AND CONCEPTS,
VALUING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND
LINKING IT TO THE ANALYSIS
AND DECISION MAKING PROCESS.**

Right from the onset, the region's current conditions are set forth by the group: destruction and depletion of natural resources, as is the case for the entire Amazon region and is requiring special attention. The main threats and pressures identified with participants are: inadequate land use, mining, extensive cattle industry, ignorance regarding the legislation, crops for illicit use, presence of armed groups, new production practices using foreign technologies that are imposed on the region, inappropriate fishing practices, weakness of local governments, presence of multinational firms, overexploitation of natural resources and climate change.



**ORGANIZING
STAKEHOLDERS IS THE
MEANS TO DEFENDING
AND ACHIEVING
BOTH PERSONAL AND
COLLECTIVE INTERESTS.
THUS, THE ORGANIZATION
FACILITATES DEMOCRACY.**

The consequence of these conditions is an enormous loss of natural resources, to the point that some species have been included in the list of “vulnerable” and “critically endangered”¹³ of extinction, such as the silver arawana (*Osteoglossum bicirrhosum*) and the tiger catfish (*Pseudoplatystoma punctifer*).

In the process of analyzing pressures and threats, these are organized to determine causes and effects in order to identify alternatives and paths to achieve change. Results are linked to a multitemporal analysis exercise that the Tri National program conducted in the corridor formed by the three adjacent protected areas (see Map 2). Based on these results, which were discussed and analyzed with the communities, transformation of the Amazon region and the fragility of its ecosystems were collectively considered. Transformation undergone by the region can be evidenced in the tri national corridor: 186,080 ha deforested in 1990; 222,036 ha in 2000; and 316,744 ha in 2010. The same study estimates that 611,000 ha will have been deforested by 2030¹⁴.

Other studies agree that the situation is alarming. According to IDEAM¹⁵, deforestation in the Amazon is growing: 2,567,326 ha of forest have been destroyed in the past 20 years. The department of Putumayo lost 215,896 ha¹⁶ of forest in the period 1990-2000.

Participatory analysis of the situation, getting people to understand the deforestation tendency analysis exercises and combining these skills with discussion on services provided by these ecosystems and the importance in the life of the community, motivates and promotes the quest for solutions involving the actors themselves. This approach generates collective action and is exactly what the project is looking for: following the path proposed, to advance step by step toward negotiation of alternatives that satisfy and protect the interest of participating communities.

Based on the interest of their organizations, participants organized themselves into seven groups. The CAC methodology calls these groups *pregunteros*¹⁷. They were given the responsibility of looking for and organizing the information to support and defend the interests of the communities regarding the issues described below:

13. Mojica, José I. Libro rojo de peces dulceacuicolas de Colombia / Edited by José Iván Mojica [et al.]. 1 ed. Bogotá:

Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt, 2012.

14. Gestión de Información Geográfica para Análisis de Bienes y Servicios Ecosistémicos Corredor Trinacional Putumayo La Paya, Cuyabeno y Güepí dentro del proyecto: Application of a decision support system at regional level to identify environmental service provision and vulnerability.

15. Instituto de Hidrología, Meteorología y Estudios Ambientales de Colombia. www.eltiempo.com/.../ARTICULO-WEB-NEW_NOTA_INTERIOR. 13/03/2013





1 TERRITORIAL CONFLICTS

Territorial aspirations of indigenous and small farmer communities inhabiting the region are characterized by complex territorial dynamics, and are affected by the phenomenon of migration (already described in this story) and the superimposition of different existing occupation models: Forest Reserve Zone derived from Law 2 of 1959, under the competency of the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development; La Paya National Park, established in 1984, under the competency of the National Parks of Colombia; ethnic territories (indigenous reserves) under the competency of the Directorship of Ethnic Groups of the Department of the Interior; and the municipality with its Basic Territorial Zoning Plan under the competency of the Municipal Councils.

2 SUSTAINABLE AMAZON SYSTEMS

Promoting production systems taking into account soil conditions (including physical and chemical aspects), climate, biodiversity, and cultural diversity in the Amazon region. Promoting traditional production systems such as the *chagra* where knowledge and practice of the indigenous culture is enshrined and materialized in the *chagra*'s "vital spaces". Also, restructuring of the region's cattle production system

16. <http://www.amazonas2030.net/es/bosques-amazonas-amenazados-por-la-ampliacion-de-la-frontera-agropecuaria>

17. Literally, "those who ask questions". The *pregunteros* are the representatives of the organization in charge of presenting issues and attaining agreements during the negotiation act.

and fishing planning of rivers in the municipality, in view of the great diversity of fish and the pressure they are being subjected to. Sustainable systems conceived for supporting food security and autonomy, incorporating the local traditional economy based on agriculture, hunting, fishing and elaboration of handicrafts.

3 MANAGEMENT OF WETLANDS

Inventory and characterization for planning and management of these ecosystems.

4 INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF SOLID RESIDUES

To deal with the current state of sanitary emergency in the municipality and guarantee environmental and public health conditions.

5 INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

Capacity building to provide tools to indigenous and small farmer organizations so they can participate more effectively and have greater incidence on decision-making processes that affect them, at the municipal, regional and national levels. The year the PTF project started (2009), the Colombian Parliament ruled Judicial Proceeding 004 that requires that fundamental rights of the indigenous peoples be protected or they could be physically and culturally exterminated due to the armed conflict¹⁸. The Ethnic Safeguard Plans were prepared to address this issue; these plans are tailored to the specific social, cultural, political and economic characteristics of each group. These management tools have been reviewed and linked to the CAC process in each of the themes in order to contribute to their viability.

6 PERTINENT EDUCATION

Community participation in formulating the municipal educational plan (PEM, *Plan Educativo Municipal*), in improving infrastructure of the schools, and in involving teachers in the process to legalize the land where the main school in Leguizamo was built. Formally owning the property would facilitate government investment in the school.

7 COMMUNITY COMMUNICATIONS

Founding and running the community radio station, using a participatory approach.

18. Sentenced T-025/04



EARLY ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS DURING PROCESS DEVELOPMENT IMPROVE AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING AND GAINING SELF CONFIDENCE, AND INCREASING MOTIVATION AND COMMITMENT TO THE PROCESS.

Luz Mery joined the group in charge of managing solid residues, since she had worked before in EMPULEG. During preparation of the CAC, she prepared a Fundamental Right to Petition addressed to the mayor's office. Her purpose was to apply lessons learned about instruments for citizens' participation, to collect information about the status of solid residues management and to structure the contents of her presentation in front of the institutions during the negotiation act. She received a prompt reply. Her success was a good example of the usefulness of receiving training and learning to use tools of citizen participation. Other participants also had positive experiences. This increased confidence in the process.

An important aspect in each theme is the legal framework in which government institutions operate and the responsibilities of all citizens, as expressed in Article 8¹⁹ of the Colombian Political Constitution. In addition to being backed up by the Constitution, there are several laws and regulations that can be used to make these obligations and responsibilities obligatory.

In this same line of thinking, another exercise was reviewing the planning instruments of each of the institutions identified in order to verify the connection between legal and political mandates, as reflected in programs, projects and specific actions. This exercise seeks to determine the relevance, coherence and viability of the petitions of the community in institutional proposals and endeavors.

Each of the seven themes described were included in a document called Question (*Pregunta*²⁰) which was the tool for the *pregunteros* during the negotiation act in Puerto Leguizamo on 13 and 14 March 2013. This negotiation act consolidated the preparation stage of the CAC, which lasted a year and included 25 institutions of the national, departmental and municipal levels. These institutions were competent in each theme and had been identified from the beginning during the stakeholder analysis phase. In a forum of 272 persons, 30 agreements were signed. Representatives of the indigenous and small farmer communities gained confidence, had command of the themes and discussed with the institutions to reach agreement on the themes mentioned above.

19. The State and its citizens are obliged to protect the cultural and natural richness of the country.

20. Document that discusses the issue of negotiation, includes an analysis, and supports the alternative from a technical, political, normative and socioeconomic point of view, binding the institutions that are competent in the field. The document ends with a call for commitment in following procedures, meeting deadlines and investing resources.



THE BASELINE IS NEVER ZERO. PROPOSALS NEED TO BE ARTICULATED TO ONGOING PROCESSES IN ORDER TO BE WELL POSITIONED, RELEVANT, AND SUSTAINABLE.

A METHODOLOGICAL TOOL USED BY CAC IS THE EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES THAT ENABLE A TWO-WAY TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE, BASED ON REALITY AND SHARED EXPERIENCES.

The team selected Luz Mery as coordinator²¹, in representation of the indigenous communities, of the CAC's negotiation act for her outstanding qualities as participant, her capacity to communicate both verbally and non verbally and her ability to relate to others. She shared this role with Hernán Serrano, in representation of the small farmer communities. They worked together to be prepared for this role. During the process, they had the opportunity to visit the negotiation act of the CAC conducted in Ibagué (Tolima) in September 2012, where they were able to share experiences, ask questions and observe the development of this type of event.

Luz Mery, EMPOWERING HER SPEECH, inaugurated the event: "On behalf of local territorial authorities, of the organizations and of the communities in Leguízamo, we want to welcome and thank you for being here. Leguízamo is the biggest municipality in Putumayo, occupying 47% of the area of the department. It is 100% Amazonian and lies in the frontier of three nations: Ecuador, Peru and Colombia.

"This event is a historic milestone in the sovereignty of our peoples and in the ability to construct collectively by making participation a reality and achieving impact, factors embodied in the citizens' action dialogue, a mechanism included in Article 40 of the Political Constitution of Colombia and which I quote: *all citizens have the right to participate in the configuration, exercise and control of political power.*"

Following, Hernán Serrano, explained the methodology of the event and the rules of the game. He then addressed the different themes that each group of *pregunteros* had developed, guiding participants toward reaching agreements that set forth solutions to problems analyzed in the process.

Luz Mery is an example of progress, of the changes achieved in this process, both in terms of the persons that participated as well as the issues addressed, as demonstrated in each of the 32 agreements signed. One of these was the establishment of the Land and Production Round Table, whose objective is to advance in solving one of the most complex problems in the region addressed in the negotiation: territorial conflicts related to allocation of titles, defining land ownership, enlarging and legalizing indigenous reserves, and reducing the area of the forest reserve. In addressing this issue, the purpose is to advance in property planning and look for alternatives for the mestizo families; also, solving occupation conflicts within the protected area (the La Paya National Park).

21. The negotiation act coordinator serves as moderator and supports the *pregunteros* responsible for each theme. The coordinator is also in charge of clarifying doubts in order to reach agreements.



**INVESTMENT IN CAPACITY
BUILDING PROCESSES
OF STAKEHOLDERS AND
INSTITUTIONS IS ONE OF
THE MOST EFFECTIVE
WAYS OF GUARANTEEING
GREATER PARTICIPATION,
IMPACT AND EFFECTIVE
COMMITMENT WITH
CONSERVATION.**

Participants in the round table are the Rural Development Institute (INCODER, *Instituto de Desarrollo Rural*, the leading authority in land issues), Corpoamazonia (the regional authority in environmental issues), the Mayor's Office, National Parks, the Department of the Interior, the Office of the Governor of Putumayo, the Office of the High Counselor for the Regions and Citizen Participation, the Presidential Program for the Indigenous Peoples, and the Ombudsman Office. All these institutions articulated efforts to fulfill one of the guiding principles of complementarity in institutional mandates²², and established tasks and responsibilities, and allocated resources and time.

The ability of the *pregunteros* in dealing with the themes resulted in other key agreements in the negotiation in relation to: the establishment in the Municipality of offices of the Colombian Agricultural Institution (ICA, *Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario*); the development of a work plan to recover and promote native seeds; the installation of an office of the National Aquaculture and Fishing Authority (AUNAP, *Autoridad Nacional de Acuicultura y Pesca*) and the commitment to initiate a fisheries zoning plan; an alliance among Corpoamazonia, the Municipality, the Governor's Office and the Federation of Livestock Breeders (FEDEGAN, *Federación de Ganaderos*) for initiating livestock restructuring. These and other agreements established are proof of the effectiveness of the process in a region that has been characterized by isolation and scarce State presence. This achievement has been highly valued by participants and institutions participating in the process.

²². Article 4 of Law 1551 of 2012, whereby regulations are established to modernize the organization and operation of the municipalities.

These results are in line with the approaches of the Tri National Program and the PTF project in terms of "having impact on public, environmental and sectoral policies that value biodiversity and conservation areas, the rights of the indigenous peoples, and environmental goods and services".

**REALITY IS COMPLEX
AND SOLUTIONS
MUST REFLECT THIS
COMPLEXITY.**

The core theme of communications management had two purposes. On the one hand, the development of a training agenda, focused on strengthening communication skills and tools of participants, verbal and non verbal, for managing themes and relations, which are necessary to master dialogue and exchange of ideas. Also, to construct and execute a communications plan to strengthen the identity of this CAC so the process would be well-known in the region.



In consequence, several products, an image and a logo were designed using a participatory approach. The image is formed by various symbols from the region: a ceiba tree (which is an impressive species in the landscape of Putumayo) growing between two rivers (Putumayo and Caquetá); the trunk is formed by a hand, as a symbol of human presence; behind the tree is a woven fabric representing the culture of the Amazon and also related to the message of the process: WEAVING BONDS, ENVIRONMENT, FRONTIER AND CONSERVATION. This message involves the environment context, the location in the frontier, and the purpose of the process: conservation of both cultural and natural diversity. During the two-day meetings, these symbols could be seen in billboards, posters and T-shirts.

Agreements were signed by the representatives of the institutions and by the communities. Luz Mery and Hernán were the coordinators, and Nohemy Rodríguez Rubio was the secretary. The Ombudsman Office, the Office of the Attorney General and the Municipal Attorney acted as witnesses or guarantors of these agreements, in representation of the Office of the Public Prosecutor.

As mentioned, the CAC was developed in three stages. Preparation was started in February 2012 and became a reality in the act of negotiation conducted in March 2013, giving way to the third phase of follow-up with the purpose of verifying compliance of agreements. To this end a committee was established; the eight persons integrating the committee were selected based on criteria that had been previously discussed with the group of participants and with a proposal on principles of collective work. These guidelines were designed to base actions on values and adapt them to the context. The action plan would be designed based on the agreements reached and the needs that may arise during execution.

Again, Luz Mery was selected to be in the follow-up committee. She accepted the designation and said it would be a big challenge, but also an opportunity to continue growing and learning how to ask questions, discuss ideas, strengthen

her arguments in order to continue working on behalf of the community's environmental, social and cultural interests in the region. She feels ready to empower her speech. These are some of her thoughts regarding the CAC:



"THE PROCESS HELPED ME LEARN MORE ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS IN THE AMAZON REGION AND THE CARE REQUIRED TO CONTRIBUTE TO CONSERVATION AND ADEQUATE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES. TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE IS VERY IMPORTANT TO THIS END".

"THE PROCESS TAUGHT ME TO FULFILL MY TASKS WITH RESPONSIBILITY".

"I AM VERY INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE POLITICAL CONSTITUTION IN ORDER TO BE MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT RIGHTS AND REGULATIONS AND BE ABLE TO APPLY THEM APPROPRIATELY".

"WHAT YOU LEARN, THE TRAINING YOU RECEIVE, IS THE ONLY THING THAT YOU CAN SAY 'THIS IS MINE'".

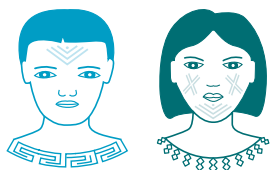
"WE ARE CAPABLE OF INTERACTING WITH EACH OTHER, OF SPEAKING UP AND HANDLING SITUATIONS".

"I UNDERSTOOD THE IMPORTANCE OF ESTABLISHING CONTACT WITH GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS, AND UNDERSTANDING THE ROLES THEY PLAY IN THE REGION. FOR EXAMPLE, THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LA PAYA NATIONAL PARK TO THE REGION; OR BEING AWARE OF THE VALUE OF INTERACTING WITH OTHER COMMUNITIES AND INSTITUTIONS".

"BEFORE, I FELT I WAS NOT PREPARED, BUT NOW I THINK I CAN ASPIRE TO BEING A MEMBER OF THE CITY COUNCIL".

"IT IS CONVENIENT TO THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK; YOU NEED TO HAVE ACCURATE ARGUMENTS".

"I HAVE LEARNED TO CONTROL EMOTIONS, TO BE PRUDENT AND TOLERANT, TO HAVE RESPECT FOR WHAT OTHERS HAVE TO SAY, AND TO KNOW WHEN TO REMAIN SILENT".



What other participants have to say:

Jimmy Alexander San Juan, representative of the Siona indigenous community: “The CAC was important for its results: the interaction between indigenous peoples and small farmers, what we learned about the laws and the institutions that have duties to meet our needs as citizens and as members of the indigenous communities. We experienced personal, organizational and community growth”.

Hermilson Fajardo Vásquez, member of the Huitoto–Murui indigenous community and secretary of the board of the Tukunare community: “The dialogue is a tool to break the silence. We are the main actors. This process is like the first kiss, you never forget it”,

Nohemy Rodríguez Rubio – President of the Community Action Council: “The CAC gave us the appropriate tools for approaching the State. I was able to identify myself as part of the process”.

Jose Yilmar Cuéllar, President of the Small Farmers Corporation of Putumayo – CORCAP: “This process placed us in the exact place to analyze the conflicts we have in the Amazon”.

Hernán Serrano, Citizen Overseer: “We have improved our participation, and thus we are constructing our region and the country because we are all part of the community and we are all committed to improving our welfare. Life in the territory depends on our abilities and skills. That’s why education is so important to mitigate conflict; in other words, to construct social capital through education with a relevant educational model”.

Cléber Yanangomez, of the Kichwua indigenous community: “It seems we are a fundamental part of the municipality. When the first agreement was signed, I felt assured, like when you catch the first fish”.

Wilson Horta, Corregidor of Mecaya “This process made me feel part of the Putumayo municipality. I am thankful for the training received that enabled me to get to know the regulations and the responsibilities that each institution has”.

Arturo Riascos, small farmer sector, San Antonio County: “The CAC strengthened our capacity to confront ideas, express our needs and propose solutions”.

Miguel Angel Rubio, Mayor of the Municipality, describes the CAC as “an important exercise in incorporating the region’s objectives in constructing the municipality”.



Once again, the CAC is an interactive process that requires responsibility in an environment of dialogue and respect. It is the manifestation of the sovereignty of the people, as expressed in Principle 3²³ of the Constitutional Letter and it is an example of how to construct peace; it requires that the groups who participate in it be confident in the process. All this can be achieved by being responsible in strengthening the capacity of stakeholders.

The task ahead is that of follow-up, and maintaining the process alive by strengthening alliances established, among communities and between communities and institutions, and by complying with agreements in order to advance with a participatory focus to solve problems. To this end the voices of men and women in the municipality of Leguízamo need to continue to be empowered and released.

23. Sovereignty resides exclusively in the people, which public power emanates.





"It was beautiful and a meaningful experience to apply what I learned at the training workshop. I enjoyed it from the beginning till the end. Hence, I want to thank Luz Mery, her stories encouraged me to learn more about the region and about the participants of the *Putumayo Tres Fronteras* process. As well, I am grateful to my colleagues of WWF-Colombia and the project team at Puerto Leguizamo: PNN La Paya, TROPENBOS and WWF."



Why are we here.

To stop the degradation of the planet's nature environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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