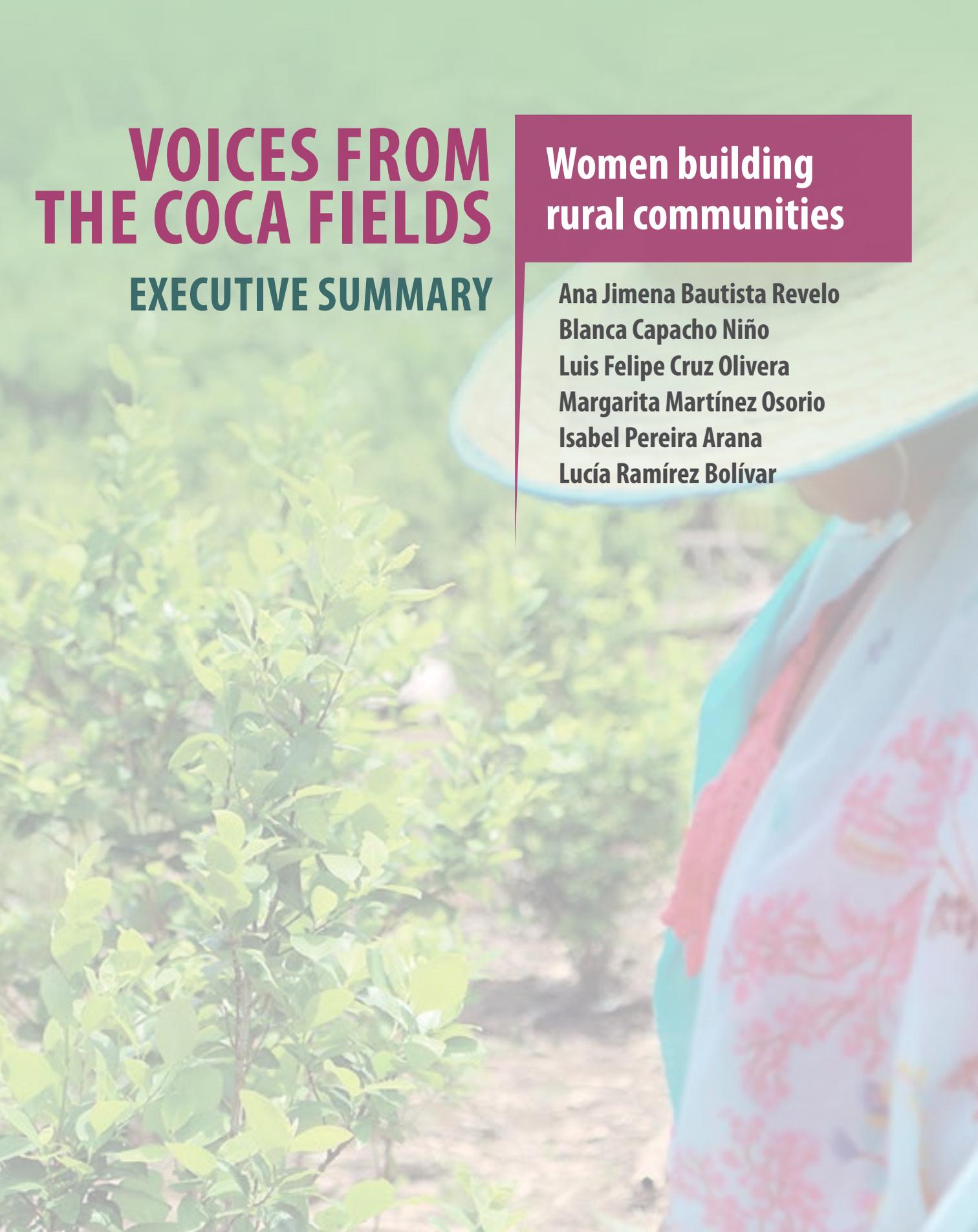


# **VOICES FROM THE COCA FIELDS**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Women building rural communities**

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# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION / 5

“EVERYTHING HAS BEEN ACHIEVED USING THE  
COMMUNITY’S RESOURCES”: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
WOMEN COCA GROWERS AND THE STATE IN PUTUMAYO / 7

THE WAR ON DRUGS IN THE ANDES-AMAZON JUNCTION:  
“IN THEIR QUEST TO ERADICATE DRUGS, THEY ERADICATED  
OUR TERRITORY” / 9

THE HOUSEHOLD AND ARMED ACTORS: SCENARIOS OF VIOLENCE,  
OPPRESSION, AND RESISTANCE FOR WOMEN COCA GROWERS / 12

SOCIAL MOBILIZATION OF WOMEN COCA GROWERS  
IN THE ANDES-AMAZON JUNCTION / 15

THE PEACE AGREEMENT AND DRUG POLICY REFORM:  
THE CHANCE FOR PEACE / 17

“HOPEFULLY THIS IS A TIME OF CHANGE, OF TRANSFORMATION,  
OF RENEWAL, ESPECIALLY FOR WOMEN”: PUBLIC POLICY  
RECOMMENDATIONS / 20



# INTRODUCTION

Drug prohibition in Colombia has been implemented in numerous ways, depending on the location, circumstances, and type of participation in this illicit economy. One population that has been invisibilized by the war on drugs is that of rural women who cultivate coca as a means of subsistence in the context of dire living conditions and ongoing disputes among armed actors.

The invisibilization of women's participation in coca cultivation occurs alongside a growing literature on the gender-related aspects of illicit drug consumption and trafficking. This scholarly vacuum poses a serious concern for the Colombian case in light of the fact that the country's recent peace accord includes commitments by both the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to incorporate a gender-based approach into efforts to address the country's illegal drug problem, particularly crop substitution programs.

Featuring accounts of women coca growers' lives and socioeconomic situations, this report seeks to make their voices heard in order to argue that the drug policy literature should abandon its almost exclusive focus on the elimination of illicit crops in favor of an approach that considers the differentiated impacts of the drug economy and how this economy deepens inequality in a range of contexts.

The analysis focuses on the southern region of Colombia where the Andes mountains and the Amazon basin intersect—especially the department of Pu-

tumayo—as this is an area where violence, colonization, poverty, and state-building converge around coca cultivation, thereby posing unique challenges to the implementation of crop substitution programs outlined in point four of the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC.

The report’s methodology is based on social mapping, in-depth interviews, participatory timelines, and a review of secondary literature. This methodology also reflects a conscious decision to underscore the experiences of women coca growers and make their voices heard in an effort to shed light on the reality of the Andes-Amazon junction. In this way, the report brings together theoretical-methodological approaches that address these concerns—namely, (i) an intersectional approach to gender; (ii) an approach that views the state from a subjective point of view; and (iii) an approach based on voices and life stories as opposed to figures and quantitative data.

*Voices from the Coca Fields* analyzes the numerous vertices in the relationship between women and coca and offers a series of recommendations aimed at better articulating a gender-based approach in the implementation of Colombia’s peace accord.

## CHAPTER 1

# “EVERYTHING HAS BEEN ACHIEVED USING THE COMMUNITY’S RESOURCES”: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN COCA GROWERS AND THE STATE IN PUTUMAYO

Since the colonization era, the Andes-Amazon junction, particularly the department of Putumayo, has been the site of resource extraction activities and strategic battles between various armed actors, making Putumayo one of the most conflict- and poverty-affected departments in Colombia.

Within the framework of the war on drugs, the state’s presence in the region has been largely of a military nature, although its presence in general has been very weak—and sometimes even nonexistent—in terms of guaranteeing the population’s economic, social, and cultural rights, with extremely ineffectual local governments operating in most municipalities.

This context has had a disproportionate impact on the lives and bodies of women, who face additional barriers due to their gender and the lack of recognition and redistribution as rural women, and who have been greatly victimized by the armed conflict.

It is important to point out that, against this backdrop, community building in Putumayo has taken place on the margins of—or parallel to—the state, whereby women coca growers have developed a great deal of agency in their communities as a result of their organizational efforts to improve their and their families' well-being.

## CHAPTER 2

# THE WAR ON DRUGS IN THE ANDES-AMAZON JUNCTION: “IN THEIR QUEST TO ERADICATE DRUGS, THEY ERADICATED OUR TERRITORY”

The second chapter of *Voices from the Coca Fields* explores women coca growers’ relationship with coca, focusing on women from the Andes-Amazon junction. These women’s stories show how the coca economy, in addition to allowing them to overcome shortcomings in the fulfilment of their rights and access to basic goods, has also placed them at the center of violence and vulnerability as a result of the militarization of their lands, the stigmatization of their work, and the presence of armed actors linked to the drug trade.

Socially and economically vulnerable on account of being *campesina*<sup>1</sup> women in zones characterized by poverty and unmet basic needs, these women demonstrate how coca cultivation has permitted them to fulfill basic necessities such as food, housing, education, and health for themselves and their families. In some

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1 A *campesino* (male) or *campesina* (female) is a historical and cross-cultural subject in Latin America who lives on and works the land, without necessarily being a landowner, and whose relationship with land is not simply an issue of property but one of cultural identity. *Campesino* culture includes diverse forms of community organization and is closely linked to the natural environment.

cases, coca has also allowed them to earn enough to purchase land, improve their farms, and make other investments in their properties, as well as achieve a certain level of economic independence from their partners. Nonetheless, these women have an ambivalent relationship with the coca plant, for it has also brought war, violence, and pain to their lives.

In Putumayo, the war on drugs—and especially the war on coca—was fought through militarization. As a result, women’s lives were militarized on a daily basis at the hands of the armed forces, paramilitary groups, and guerrillas, who established patriarchal and restrictive social rules. This militarization also meant that the Colombian armed forces branded women and their families as guerrillas and drug traffickers, further eroding trust between *campesina* women and the state.

The war on drugs also involved forced eradication through the aerial fumigation of coca crops. With great sadness, the women featured in this report recall the damage that these fumigations caused not only to their coca crops but also to everyday subsistence crops and other agricultural projects that their families depended on for a living. Moreover, the fumigations caused negative health effects that, to make matters worse, had to be resolved by the communities themselves in light of the lack of accessible health services that could help them alleviate the health problems caused by the chemical spraying.

More recently, the militarized response to illicit crops has been linked to resource extraction. Lands are controlled in an effort to protect the interests of private companies, an act that women coca growers perceive as an attack against local populations and civil society. Moreover, the coca bonanza in the region affected communities’ cultural dynamics, which, on many occasions, went from times of scarcity to times of plenty. This led to a culture of waste and opulence in some areas that ended up damaging the social fabric and instigating acts of violence against the most vulnerable.

In this sense, the context of militarization and the war on drugs deprived *campesinos* in Putumayo of their status as citizens and positioned them as an enemy of the state—an enemy that the government sought to eradicate and criminalize rather than protect and safeguard.

Alongside its militarized response to illicit crops, the Colombian government has invested both its own resources and those from international cooperation in the development of crop substitution programs—such as the Forest Ranger

Households Program—that have had a negligent impact in substituting illicit crops with licit productive activities that enable a sufficient livelihood. According to Putumayo’s Regional Alliance of Social Organizations, these programs’ limited effectiveness is due, among other things, to the fact that their design has not taken relevant communities into account, that they include insufficient technical assistance, and that they lack adequate accountability procedures.

Women’s relationship with coca illustrates their experiences in battling poverty, seeking better living conditions for themselves and their families, and finding economic alternatives in the rural world. At the same time, it shows how coca brought them into contact with a historically absent state, as the coca boom in the region unleashed the militarization of their lands. This relationship with the state via coca cultivation reveals the confluence of counterinsurgency and anti-drug-trafficking efforts, as the war on drugs, together with the state’s efforts to confront guerrilla groups, placed women in the center of the battlefield. Coca cultivation, which emerged as an alternative for women to improve their dire living situations, was attacked by the state and the international community through strategies that exacerbated this precariousness, leaving profound damage and grief. It was not the coca itself—but rather the war against it—that posed harm to these communities.

## CHAPTER 3

# THE HOUSEHOLD AND ARMED ACTORS: SCENARIOS OF VIOLENCE, OPPRESSION, AND RESISTANCE FOR WOMEN COCA GROWERS

The life journeys of women coca growers from the Andes-Amazon junction have been constrained by two social patterns that exacerbate gender inequality and everyday violence: first, women coca growers have, since childhood, been members of highly patriarchal families, and second, the women have had to coexist with armed actors and their violent ways on a daily basis.

With regard to the first aspect, coca-growing families from the Andes-Amazon junction tend to have an unequal distribution of household responsibilities on the basis of sex: more often than not, women are almost exclusively in charge of care work, while also playing an active role in productive tasks on the farm and tasks at the community level. For this reason, women coca growers can be seen as performing three work shifts each day: the “care” tasks, which include cooking, washing, ironing, and caring for family members in general; “productive” tasks related to cultivation, which usually involve transporting crop yields and cooking for farmworkers; and “community” tasks, which involve participating in committees, organizations, and activities related to the well-being of their communities. This triple workday places a disproportionate burden on women, who must put their bodies and lives at the daily service and care of others.

This unequal distribution of labor within coca-growing families becomes a source of oppression and violence for women, for several reasons. First, even though a large portion of maintaining and caring for the household falls on women's shoulders, decision making in the family tends to be performed by men; men decide, for example, when, how, and in what to invest the family's resources. Second, women's lack of decision-making power is due, in part, to the fact that their household work is taken for granted—their role as caregivers and servants is seen as innate, which means that their care work is neither traded nor redistributed and that this work is not recognized as such. Third, women coca growers' traditional role as servers and caregivers has meant, for many, having to endure sexual violence at the hands of family members in light of the perception that their bodies and lives are available for and at the service of others.

Against this backdrop, coca cultivation has provided women with an opportunity to increase their bargaining power within the household and to surmount situations of abuse and violence. Income earned from coca cultivation allows them not only to overcome poverty but also to gain independence in the management of their resources, which has given many women the chance to leave abusive husbands or renegotiate their workloads within the home. It is thus critical that public policies on illicit crop substitution take into account the opportunities granted to women by coca cultivation, as well as the way in which women's involvement in this crop has allowed them to escape deeply violent situations. To achieve this, these policies must abandon a familist perspective in which families are seen as a harmonious and uniform whole and instead embrace a view that acknowledges the unequal power relations within families that can make women vulnerable to violence and oppression.

In addition to the household setting, another source of violence that transverse the lives and bodies of women coca growers in the Andes-Amazon junction is the daily coexistence with armed actors. Both men and women in the region were the target of many forms of victimization, including forced displacement, threats, dispossession, and—largely for women—sexual violence. Thus, women coca growers in this region have a special memory of the second paramilitary wave that occurred between 1997 and 2006, when communities had to live alongside paramilitary groups on a daily basis and abide by their restrictive and violent social rules.

Paramilitary groups, in their quest to gain control of the illegal economies operating in the region and to eliminate guerrilla enemies, permeated the territory

with an anti-subversive discourse, massacres, and the daily subjugation of communities. Coca growers were branded as guerrillas in light of the history of guerrilla groups in the region and their traditional monopoly on the coca trade. The bodies of these farmers thus became the target of paramilitary groups, and for women in particular, sexual violence was used as a strategy of subjugation and terror. Additionally, within the framework of their patriarchal households, some women who were victims of sexual violence by armed actors were also censured and revictimized by their own families.

The violence inflicted on women coca growers at the hands of armed actors illustrates the need to forego an approach that sees these farmers merely from the angle of criminality and punishment. Indeed, women coca growers from the Andes-Amazon junction are direct victims of the armed conflict, a fact that should be taken into account by public policies that respond to the urgent need for programs that provide reparations and care for victims in this region.

## CHAPTER 4

# SOCIAL MOBILIZATION OF WOMEN COCA GROWERS IN THE ANDES-AMAZON JUNCTION

Social mobilization in the Andes-Amazon junction is centered on the demand for recognition of its inhabitants' rural identity and citizenship. In other words, for more than five decades, political actions by rural inhabitants have been aimed largely at claiming residents' right to live under the social rule of law—not by the law of the police or army but rather by that of hospitals, roads, health, and well-being. The long history of strikes, marches, blockades, protests, committees, and electoral participation shows communities' efforts to openly confront the meaning attributed to the region by the state, a meaning that brought with it physical and symbolic violence against coca growers.

Within this context, women coca growers participate in a dynamic of intersectionality. These women have a unique individuality, as well as a unique relationship with the collective. They are *campesina* women who share an experience of “putting themselves last” and placing the needs of their children, spouses, communities, and organizations before their own. Their concerns begin and end with the family and the community, and rarely do they focus on themselves. Their daily household routines oscillate from caring for family members to preparing food, before moving on to the everyday concerns facing the neighborhood—the lack of roads, the upkeep of meeting spaces, and the organization of fundraisers and bazaars, which often involves selling goods that they prepare themselves.

Women contribute to the development of their communities at the same time that they bear on their shoulders the inequitable and patriarchal weight of rural society, which limits their participation in interactive settings. Within co-ed organizations, it is difficult for women to request the floor, be heard, and be taken seriously by their male counterparts. Further, when tasks within these organizations are divided into management and execution functions, the women are assigned execution, meaning that their role as caregivers transcends the household and becomes a part of collective work as well.

In other words, being a woman is often disadvantageous in terms of being able to choose sides, participate, speak, and take charge in social movements. Civil society organizations that struggle against the material inequities experienced by rural populations do not necessarily include gender inequality as part of their struggle. It is a battle that women must wage within all of the collectives (family and community settings) to which they belong.

## CHAPTER 5

# THE PEACE AGREEMENT AND DRUG POLICY REFORM: THE CHANCE FOR PEACE

Chapter 5 demonstrates that the programs and measures outlined in points one and four of the final peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC (regarding comprehensive rural reform and solutions to the illicit drug problem, respectively), in addition to constituting key components of stable and lasting peace, offer a unique opportunity for drug policy reform to incorporate a gender-based approach.

Point four of the peace agreement acknowledges that illicit crops have persisted in certain rural areas as a result of poverty and a weak state presence and notes that the roots of inequality in the Colombian countryside lie, in part, “in the deepening of [these areas’] marginalization, of inequity, and of gender-based violence, as well as in the lack of their development.”

In light of this, the peace accord stipulates that the causes and consequences of the illicit drug problem must be addressed through the formulation of policies that are rooted in human rights, public health, gender, and rural development. The parties to the accord thus agreed to guarantee access to land and better incomes among illicit crop farmers, as well as access to public goods and services such as health, education, housing, and dignified work. To this end, the peace agreement

establishes the need to undertake comprehensive rural reform and to establish a Comprehensive National Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops.

By generating agricultural opportunities, this national program seeks to help illicit-crop-reliant *campesino* communities improve their living conditions and overcome poverty. The program is oriented toward the structural transformation of rural areas where illicit crops are present through the implementation of substitution activities that are participatory and coordinated with local residents.

With an eye toward effectively achieving the substitution of illicit crops, in 2017 the Colombian government issued Law 896, which formally created the ten-year crop substitution program. This law outlines the various components of the program, identifies the national and local bodies responsible for its execution, and determines who its beneficiaries will be, among other things. Nonetheless, it does not incorporate a gender-based approach, as it does not establish concrete measures for ensuring women's effective participation and the inclusion of their unique needs in the implementation of substitution activities. As of July 2017, only 26% of those farmers who had signed collective agreements for crop substitution were women.

National and international political pressure stemming from increased coca cultivation in Colombia has meant that the program's implementation has been conducted largely in isolation from the measures for comprehensive rural reform outlined in point one of the peace accord. As a result of this dynamic, the harmful and distressing experiences of women coca growers on account of the drug policy remain alive and well. Today, women coca growers face a situation in which their key source of livelihood is being eradicated and there are no immediate solutions to help them survive the transition, nor are there structural changes to help them overcome the poverty and vulnerability of the rural world.

In this sense, the inadequate implementation of the commitments outlined in the peace accord could have dire consequences for women coca growers, as the failure to provide alternative labor options with the same benefits in terms of independence, education, and social mobility poses an imminent risk of further deepening poverty in these rural communities.

Moreover, point one of the peace accord proposes a "comprehensive rural reform" that facilitates progress toward a structural transformation of the countryside and, ultimately, "integrates rural areas, eradicates poverty, promotes equality,

ensures citizens' full enjoyment of their rights, and thus guarantees the nonrepetition of conflict and the eradication of violence." Point one acknowledges the critical role played by women in rural development and the rural economy, which is why it incorporates equality and a gender-based approach as key principles of this reform.

Rural-focused development plans are currently being formulated, and the Agency for Territorial Renewal, which is in charge of those plans, has yet to divulge the method for their implementation, so it is unclear how the gender-based measures will play out. Despite these gaps, Coalition 1325, a coalition established to monitor the implementation of United Nations Resolution 1325 in Colombia, has included several recommendations in its annual report aimed at ensuring that women are prioritized within comprehensive rural reform efforts and promoting their active participation in these activities. Among other things, the coalition recommends that at least 50% of lands adjudicated by the government be awarded to rural women, that property titles be issued in the name of both members of a couple, and that security measures be crafted with women's participation to address the particular risks faced by women.

The measures outlined in points one and four of the peace accord—especially those aimed at supporting communities that grow illicit crops—present a unique opportunity for the Colombian government to strengthen its presence in these areas through its civil institutions and, in turn, make amends to coca growers for the many decades of abandonment and repression, as well as to advance in the protection of their fundamental rights and the promotion of their well-being and good living.

Women coca growers in the Andes-Amazon junction are aware of the important historical moment that Colombia is currently witnessing, and they are committed to the task of constructing collective agreements on illicit crop substitution as a form of peacebuilding. These women and their organizations are actively mobilizing in order to map out their needs and expectations in the face of this new turn that Colombia's drug policy appears to be taking.

## CHAPTER 6

# “HOPEFULLY THIS IS A TIME OF CHANGE, OF TRANSFORMATION, OF RENEWAL, ESPECIALLY FOR WOMEN”: PUBLIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The experiences of women coca growers reveal extreme injustice and discrimination, characterized by their socioeconomic status as *campesinas*, a lack of recognition as rural residents and as women within a patriarchal society that reinforces gender-based stereotypes and violence, and stigmatization as guerrillas or drug traffickers as a result of the fact that they grow coca. These hardships exist within a context that is disadvantageous in and of itself, as the southern part of the country suffers from a weak state presence, lingering dynamics of the armed conflict, and the powerful interests of extractive industries.

In light of these circumstances, the Colombian government should uphold the following principles with regard to women coca growers and the implementation of the peace accord:

- The effective fulfilment of the country’s drug policy requires addressing shortcomings in the redistribution toward and recognition of women coca growers.

– The peace accord offers a great opportunity for state-building from a civilian perspective in coca-growing regions; to this end, the accord should be implemented through a gender, *campesino*, and redistributive perspective. In the international sphere, Colombia's drug policy should emphasize the state's human rights obligations toward its citizens and should encourage the direct participation of coca-growing communities given that they are one of the main victims of the war on drugs.

Specifically, the government should adopt actions aimed at (i) the incorporation of a gender-based approach to peacebuilding and the reconstruction of rural communities' trust in the state, particularly in areas with the presence of illicit crops; (ii) implementation of point one of the peace accord (on comprehensive rural reform) through a gender-based approach; (iii) implementation of point four of the peace accord (on resolving the illicit drug problem), especially the Comprehensive National Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops, through a gender-based approach; and (iv) the incorporation of measures directed toward guaranteeing women's security and preventing violence against them.

The following recommendations in particular are aimed at promoting the effective participation of women coca growers, enhancing existing organizational processes, and providing security assurances in the post-conflict context

1. The state should spare no effort to ensure rural women's increased involvement in the various settings aimed at implementation of the peace accord. This requires the following:

– The division of care work between men and women should be democratized (see recommendation below).

– Participatory measures should include a security strategy that is designed and applied using a gender-based approach.

– Gender parity should be embraced as a principle of the participatory scenarios emanating from the peace accord.

– Organizational settings for rural women (whether co-ed or for women only) should be strengthened, with the aim of empowering women to participate in public settings in an informed manner and without fear of speaking. In this regard, prior to these public events, it is also critical to facilitate discussion settings for women only.

- Transportation solutions that facilitate women’s travel to roundtables and decision-making forums should be secured.

2. In light of the greater burden of unpaid care work borne by rural women—especially women who are linked to the drug trade out of economic vulnerability—the state should take actions aimed at democratizing reproductive work within the household and within communities. To this end, it should ensure that the strategic objectives of the National System for the Care Economy include an emphasis on rural areas with the aim of lightening the disproportionate care-related workloads faced by women and redistributing them to men so that women have the chance to actively participate in the design and implementation of substitution programs, in Development Programs with a Territorial Approach (PDETs for their initials in Spanish), and, in general, in various settings for political and community participation. These measures should include, among other things, the following:

- Educational activities aimed at the renegotiation and redistribution of care work among family members, the community, and the public sector, with the goal of promoting and facilitating women’s participation in various community, organizational, and political settings.

- Inclusion of the Colombian Family Welfare Institute and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection as members of the National System for the Care Economy.

- Provision of government-run care services—such as daycare centers and community kitchens—in relevant regions, directed at children, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

3. Crop substitution and alternative development programs should take into account the diagnoses, principles, plans, and strategies emanating from community planning processes in regions with illicit crops, paying special attention to communities’ proposals related to the implementation of gender-based approaches. To take an example, the 2035 Comprehensive Development Plan for the Andes-Amazon Junction contains a diagnosis of coca crops in the region and uses a gender-based approach to suggest alternatives to these crops.

4. As a guiding principle of its drug policy in the coming years, the Colombian government should abide by the commitments outlined in point four of the peace accord, which states that the forced eradication—including fumigation—of illicit crops shall be used as a last resort. Communities’ low level of trust

in the state in these regions should forewarn against repeating costly and ineffective solutions such as aerial and land-based spraying. In this regard, the government should continue to uphold Resolution 0006 of the National Narcotics Council from May 2015, which suspends the use of aerial fumigation using glyphosate, and should also refrain from carrying out aerial or land-based fumigations that rely on other agrottoxins.

5. To address the lack of official data on women's involvement in coca cultivation and processing, agencies charged with monitoring illicit crops should adjust their annual censuses to include questions disaggregated by sex and type of work, which will allow them to generate reports on the number of women involved in illicit crops, as well as on the type of involvement in these crops.

6. In light of the fact that point 4.1.2 of the peace accord seeks to encourage and strengthen activities that explore, reflect on, and analyze women's relationship with illicit crops, a rural women's observatory should be created with the following key objectives:

- Development of a baseline that allows for the future monitoring of results of the Comprehensive National Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops and its coordination with PDETs with regard to rural women, particularly those who cultivate coca. This baseline should document, among other things, (i) women's enjoyment of their economic, social, and cultural rights; (ii) women's relationship with land, taking into account their involvement in productive and care-related activities as they relate to the exercise of the right to property; (iii) the relationship between poverty, drugs, and gender-based violence; and (iv) the criminal records of women coca growers.

- Creation of tracking indicators that take gender into account and that allow the government to monitor implementation of the Comprehensive National Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops and its coordination with PDET.

- Monitoring of the execution of gender-sensitive budgets for the purposes of implementing the Comprehensive National Program for the Substitution of Illicit Crops.

7. Taking into account the security risks—especially those related to disputes over territorial control—faced by communities where crop substitution activities will be carried out, the government should adopt a security strategy based on a differentiated and gender-based approach that considers the specific risks

faced by women and members of the LGBTI community. In this regard, the strategy's formulation and execution should ensure the participation of at-risk communities. Further, the government should allow neutral third parties such as the Public Defender's Office, the United Nations Verification Mission, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to accompany substitution activities in areas with volatile security conditions. The development of this strategy should also include a space where women coca growers and harvesters can participate, with the aim of identifying the specific risks they face and the specific measures that should be implemented to ensure their safety.



**C**olombia's response to the drug problem has focused on repressing the lowest-ranking members of the drug trade—drug users as well as *campesinos* who grow coca—which has led to disproportionate levels of incarceration and has involved the forced eradication of illicit crops through the use of agrottoxins. This response, in addition to failing to make a noticeable dent in the world's cocaine supply, has had disastrous consequences for the safety, social development, and human rights of communities living in coca-producing areas. Moreover, even though the cocaine problem in Colombia has been analyzed from diverse angles, these analyses too often overlook the experiences of women.

This executive summary of the book *Voices from the Coca Fields: Women Building Rural Communities* explores the experiences of women coca growers in the southern part of Colombia where the Andes mountains meet the Amazon basin. Using an intersectional approach to women's experiences, it explores how rurality, gender, the armed conflict, and illegality affect the life trajectories of women coca growers in this region, an area that was subjected to late colonization and is home to illegal armed actors, violence, poverty, and a weak state presence. Coca cultivation in this Andes-Amazon junction has provided the main source of income for campesino families at the same time that it has affected women's roles in family and community life and has increased their vulnerability vis-à-vis armed actors. This executive summary presents the book's main conclusions, exploring the interactions among *campesino* identity, the social and political demands of women, the impacts of gender-based violence in rural Colombia, and the country's drug prohibition.

In this Andes-Amazon junction, the war on drugs and the country's internal armed conflict have bumped heads while also unveiling the gender inequalities present in Colombia's rural areas. These inequalities have played out for *campesina* women in various ways: violence in their daily lives, the fumigation of both coca and subsistence crops, and stigmatization as a result of being coca farmers. But for these women, coca is also a source of income that gives them a certain level of economic independence and allows them to improve their and their families' living conditions, as well as invest in education, housing, and community infrastructure.

Colombia's peace accord presents a historic opportunity to learn from past mistakes with regard to controlling illicit crops and to respond to the social and political demands of coca-growing communities. Within this context, it is also time to acknowledge, hear, and value the contributions that women coca growers have made in the public and private spheres in terms of building communities and peace in Colombia's most forgotten areas.