

Colorado State University Libraries
Center for Collaborative Conservation
Seminar and Discussion Series

Transcription of Environmental governance in multicultural areas: lessons learned from two Colombian communities, 5/1/2012

Collection: Spring 2012

Title: Environmental governance in multicultural areas: lessons learned from two Colombian communities

Date: 5/1/2012

File Name: CCC_2012_Spring_Velasco.mp4

Date Transcribed: November 2024

Transcription Platform: Konch AI

BEGIN TRANSCRIPTION

[00:07 - 02:23] Marcela Velasco: So in, do you hear me in the back? All right. So in my research, I focus on governance at the local level in Colombia and increasingly in areas that are either multicultural or territories where there's one ethnic group sort of controlling or supposedly should be controlling that area. I often get asked with what is, you know, why is this type of research so important? You know, because it's very regional study. Very small communities that I'm looking at. It connects to the wider issue of, of governance of forest communities across Latin America, governance in indigenous communities across Latin America, and understanding how they're setting up these organizations and, you know, the types of challenges and obstacles, and successes that they're having. So some general information. Latin Americans, Latin Americans may change share of greenhouse gas emissions come from land change. This means deforestation. So using deforestation to for agriculture, for cattle ranching, mining, hydroelectric projects, etc. So this is the main issue for the region in terms of climate change. It also has, especially for America, one third of the world's forest biomass. So it's a very important area. And it's not just any type of forest. These are very biodiverse. It's an important sort of, it's kind of a system. Hydroelectricity is the region's main source of energy, so policymakers tend to claim that this is, you know, a good alternative energy. But it leads to a lot of problems, both environmental and with the communities affected by the projects. And if you're following the news, there's increasing, increasing contention between hydroelectric companies and indigenous communities in Chile and in Brazil and the Amazon and in the Patagonia, where these projects are affecting their ancestral lands, threatening to flood their lands, you know or displacement from their land.

[02:23 - 04:30] Marcela Velasco: So this is a very contentious issue socially, and politically, and also environmentally. And there's also a political aspect to this. A lot of Latin American countries, 20 or 30 years ago were authoritarian. So they may transition to democracy. This is not the case of Colombia. I'm going to describe briefly the Colombian political scene, brief history of Colombian politics, but certainly Bolivia, Brazil, Peru. These were authoritarian governments that made transitions to democracy. So bring back civilians to power. And one of the things that they did was to devolve land and land rights to a lot of these traditional communities. So they, this is the one statistic- 149 million hectares of forests were devolved to communities, many of them traditional, either indigenous, in the case of Colombia, black, traditional black communities or peasant communities. So I'm connected to this as well. The, the transition to democracy, devolving these lands to their original owners was made part of a social justice objective and sort of killed two birds with one stone. And it is a suit that the, you know, the communities in these forests, in these regions know how to conserve them. So to kill two birds with one stone, social justice and conservation. So in general, the research project was on looking at two small communities in one country. It kind of connects to this wider agenda of understanding, you know, governance issues in, in this community, in some of these communities. And some of the findings can be generalized. And, you know, to other areas in Colombia especially, but across the region. So basic information about Colombia. I mean, I could spend two hours here, but very [laughs] briefly. It's it's a big country in the region, 44 million people.

[04:30 - 07:13] Marcela Velasco: So this is the third largest country after Mexico and Brazil. 58 percent of the population is Mestizo. 20 percent is white. But as, a lot of, most of the country [unintelligible], but doesn't matter what the color of their skin or ancestry it tends to be, most people identify as mixed, mixed race, mixed culture. But 80 plus indigenous groups. 60 different languages spoken. This diversity is mostly located in the Amazon, Amazonian lowlands, and they are roughly 2 percent of the population. So, around 1 or 2 million people. And anywhere between, between 10 and 20 percent of the Colombia's population is of African descent. Why between 10 and 20 percent? The 2005 census, which asked people to self-identify found that 10 percent of Colombians identified as black. But social movement activists believe that the, the statistic is higher. That that that the questions in the census were not worded correctly. And so people, due to that a lot of people were missed. So, anywhere between 10 to 20 percent. And so this makes Colombia's black community the largest Spanish speaking black community in the world. So this is another important thing. A million of them. So anywhere between 10 and 20 percent. So this is anywhere between 4 or 9 million people, a million of which of them have claims to ancestral lands. Now, this is a very long history. These are communities that go back to either marooned communities, communities of people who bought their freedom or escaped from slavery and moved to very remote areas to breed, you know, to recover their communities. And many of them have either direct connections to these, to this

history or is very important in their, in the way they're organized. So this is why some black communities in Columbia have claims to tribal lands and they've gained political rights as a tribal communities because they organized around collected lands, and they made strategic alliances with Indians around those areas to protect and resist colonization and enslavement and these kinds of things.

[07:13 - 09:41] Marcela Velasco: So that's why in the, in my research, I look at black communities as part of, you know, ethnic or multicultural communities. It is a presidential country, unitary, participatory democracy. It's been democratic at least since 1958, meaning that they've been electing governments every four years. And everything else can be, you know, challenged. But it's- it hasn't been under some military dictatorship or these kinds of authoritarian governments. There was a, a new constitution was negotiated in 1991. So 20 years ago, and this new constitution, which had representation from the indigenous social movement, which also brought representation of the black communities, gained territorial autonomy for many of these groups. So, so it's a pluralistic government, a pluralistic polity and multicultural plural national country with autonomous territorial entities. So this is why about 38 percent of the country's territory is supposedly under the control of these traditional community. The other final thing is had a long lasting armed conflict dating back to the 1950s. These are some of the main groups. This is a long history. I spent hours here explaining this. So the M 19 went into peace talks 20 years ago. So they're not no longer functioning as a guerrilla. The ELN has been pretty much militarily defeated by the military, but the Farc is still standing. So at this point I think is the longest, long, long last, the longest guerrilla group in, probably in the world, definitely in our hemisphere. They've suffered a lot of transformations in the 60s and 70s, sort of a political movement that received significant support against a pretty oppressive government that had concentrated power and land and these kinds of things. At this point, as the government has made democratic openings, they're losing a lot of their legitimacy, and they've been mostly connected to more illegal activities and less they have, they enjoy fewer, less support and they've had a terrible presence in indigenous and black communities.

[09:41 - 12:08] Marcela Velasco: They see them as a threat to their, you know, to to control because they seek to control land as well, to either use it for, you know, for economic activities, to recruit people to protect themselves from the government. And a lot of these lands coincide with the lands of ethnic minorities, and so they've been a big problem for them. The armed conflict in Colombia. There's a lot of really terrible statistics, statistics none more terrible than the fact that about 4 million people have been displaced from their lands. This is one of the worst cases of internal refugee issues in the world next to the Congo and some of the armed conflicts in, in Africa. And so in our hemisphere is probably the it is the worst one. So for a million people are internal refugees, meaning

that they have been evicted forcefully from their lands. By, by, mostly by paramilitaries. I forgot to mention the paramilitaries. These are right wing organizations that emerged around the 1980s to contain guerrilla activities and to sort of carry out the government's agenda without any constitutional controls. And they've been very violent and, and they continue to function. So 4 million people have been forced to leave their land. About 4 million people have left the country. So this is just shows you like what? Very complicated situation. A big problem with coca production and drug trafficking. And finally, in 1999, the US government under the Clinton administration devised this military project to pacify Colombia to address the issue of cocaine drug trafficking and guerrilla violence. So Colombia is the largest recipient of US military aid in the Western Hemisphere, and for a long time, it was the third largest recipient of military aid in the world, after Israel and Egypt. So these are some of the, you know, basic kind of facts about the country. And the map, so it's here in the what is this, north west, north western Columbia. And I have something I want to show you. [changes slide]

[12:21 - 15:14] Marcela Velasco: Okay. So this is a map of the natural areas. So most of the green that you see are forests, either natural forests or second growth forests, et cetera. These are the Amazonian lowlands right here. These are tropical grasslands. The Andes mountains are run this way. And here. So the Andes in the south of Colombia break into three, into three ranges. And so there's valleys in, in the middle, in between the, the, some of the ranges. And then we have the Pacific lowlands, which is one of the most humid, biodiverse rainforests in the world. So it's sort of like the Andes constituted a a natural barrier between the Amazon and these forests. So a lot of endemism and and species that you only find here, kind of resulted from this. So, and these are mangroves, mangroves, mangrove forests and also in the Caribbean coast. So as you can see, there's a lot. It's a very diverse country in terms of its natural wealth, et cetera. And there's a final thing I wanted to show you. Oh, I don't, I can't have, I can't access these. So a map about coca cultivation that I wanted to show you. So before Plan Colombia started. So I'm sure you've heard the bubble effect on the war against drugs. Coca was mostly grown here in the South. So as coca production was repressed in Bolivia and Peru, it kind of moved here to the south of Colombia. With the planned Colombia military strategy repressing production here, the only thing that they achieved was to move production to other areas throughout the Amazon and the lowlands. So I had a map showing you how it, most of the country at one point was, has coca cultivation. So for indigenous communities and black communities, coca cultivation became a problem. Like these people trying to, you know, leaving these areas would start to move into their lands to grow, grow these crops. Any questions so far? So this is just sort of way of background information.

[15:14 - 15:27] Speaker 1: So when you say the bubble is [unintelligible] does that mean that some farmers aren't [unintelligible] it's a job centre across [unintelligible].

[15:27 - 15:42] Marcela Velasco: Just move. If you repress the, the production here, they would just try to they would move somewhere else and maybe new people joined. So that's what they refer to as the, the bubble effect. Okay.

[15:43 - 15:53] Speaker 2: The grass is [unintelligible] something that is unclear.

[15:53 - 18:14] Marcela Velasco: But this is natural, natural tropical grass. They go from Colombia to Venezuela. And the vegetation and the, the wildlife looks a lot like the Amazon, but there's more open. Mm-hmm. All right. So ethnic groups in Colombia are local authorities to 25 million hectares of tropical forests. So a lot of these lands are, are in there, supposedly under their control. This I kind of tried to come up with a statistic. It's 38 percent of forest reserves in the country, and which means it's this 25 million hectares would be about 2 percent of the world's tropical rainforest. So, but the problem here that concerns me. Finally, my research is only 18 percent, as of 2007, only 18 percent of ethnic territories had organized their governments. So as you can see with this armed conflict and other factors, it's been very difficult for communities to organize their, they're, you know, organized their, their, themselves. So problems were autonomy rights, lack of implementation. There's very little political will to support these communities in their process of organizing their local governments. Government priorities as we speak- armed conflict, containing drug trafficking and attracting foreign direct investments. These are the government's priorities. So there's been very low political will to empower and work with ethnic authorities. And people complain this about, about this constantly to set up these rights that they gained in the 1990s that they need to work with the, you know, governments at different levels and violence against communities has been one of the biggest issues. In fact, the Constitutional Court in 2009 warned that there was a process of cultural annihilation in Colombia, unless the executive branch and the national government took matters into, you know, to took, started to act on behalf of these communities.

[18:15 - 20:45] Marcela Velasco: So where, you know, where do people, where are people able to uphold their autonomy rights? So there are places, regions in Colombia where communities have successfully established their governments and have achieved some of these objectives. In regions where social movements were active and led capacity building efforts, they- so you get this sort of grassroots activism. Where people share knowledge and experience. So there's regions where there's a lot of work from, you know, different communities helping other communities to set up their, their organizations. So sharing knowledge and experience, linking them to national and international supporters, either in sort of NGOs and other civil society organizations and governments. So some European governments have been very supportive of native communities and communities that have been strong enough to resist violence. That have been able to somehow, with the support of

others, by networking to stand together and resist either coca, the drug traffickers, the guerrillas, the the military, the government's own forces and paramilitaries. So this is rare. It's a rare combination. And so the social movement activism and then local governments that are willing to support. There are local governments the municipalities or the regional authorities. Sometimes there's government insiders who are who are in solidarity with these groups. And then finally innovative leaders, people in the ground who have been able to lead their communities, in a more sort of positive or path and mainly to oversee government actions. I'm finally able to coordinate customary and statutory laws, because this is the success of mixing both, you know, the laws that the right scheme and the Constitution, with your own laws. So it's not normally leaders who are able to sort of lead their communities in that way. And so there's a lot of collaboration here.

[20:45 - 22:53] Marcela Velasco: We're talking here about collaboration. So I find that there's, in my, in the paper that I'm writing on this experience, the point that I make is that there's been a grassroots collaborative process that improved governance in, governance of natural resources as well as other, you know, justice and wealth, well-being of the communities. And this was mostly the result of grassroots collaboration, sort of social movement activism designed to increase local capacities. And this has been going on since the 1970s, and it just changes and adapts to new realities, to new laws and rights and to, to new types of governments, because governments do change. It's so not only does it improve governance of natural resources, it increases legitimacy. Especially in areas where there's multicultural actors. So that's sort of my, my, my my main finding here. Now, this is where I did the research. The research included two field visits. This is roughly the areas where I-, that I visited. So as you can see, it's in the Pacific lowlands. This is the black community, and this is the indigenous community. They're very different. Why did I choose them? Because they've been actively participating in these types of collaborative processes at the grassroots, grassroots level. They- there's innovative, innovative leadership. And at least in this case, and to a certain extent in this, in the black community, a lot of cooperation with local authorities. So that's what sort of led me to choose these communities. It's been it's increasingly more difficult to travel and do research in this region, because a lot of the armed conflict has moved to this area. It wasn't so ten years ago. So another, it's safe to travel here, but here it's increasingly complicated.

[22:53 - 25:11] Marcela Velasco: So this was one community that where I could actually go, without worrying too much about, although they've faced major issues of guerrillas in their territory and that kind of thing. So the indigenous community is [unintelligible]. They are embedded Sami people. The embedded Sami people are, this is their ancestral lands, the Pacific of Colombia, Panama and Ecuador. And there's about 20,000 of them in Colombia. So it's one of the most, one of the strongest ethnic groups. And then the second community is [unintelligible]. It's the [unintelligible] in the Pacific

coast. So they've been working, like I said, the reason I chose them, they've been working in this sort of grassroots collaborative processes where they, they're participating in what's called the Inter-ethnic School for Conflict Resolution. This is an itinerant school that has been working since, functioning since roughly 2007 and has so far graduated, quote unquote, two cohorts. And each cohort is of about 40 people. They're mostly from the Pacific coast, which is very diverse. So it includes peasants, Indians and blacks. And they go to different meetings to discuss a range of issues from. Conflict, history, laws, Indian rights, black rights. All of these things. So these are some pictures of some of the events and they're in different communities I, these are not my pictures. These are um, so sitting around discussing issues with leaders from different communities. So here, for example, they're discussing the forest laws, the some of the reforms on natural resources that the government was, was debating or negotiating at the time. Here, this is in another community. Here he is. He's a leader. [inaudible] he's describing to visitors to his community how they have been organizing and the history of their government, etc.

[25:13 - 27:28] Marcela Velasco: This is a work with women, who are producers. They have, you know, they they they have these plots of land that they are cultivating. And what, what's interesting about them is they're working with the Indian women. So it's Indian and black women working together in the same ancestral territory, which they share. And this is an example of, you know, activities they do to discuss leadership or different issues. My, so my field work started in 2011 in Karmata Rua. The indigenous community held one of these workshops. And this is a group of people who visited them. So at the end of the workshop, a picture was taken. And so in the back you see an aerial footage, aerial picture of their community. And they have school, health health services programs for the elders. They have programs for youth, for women. They have a coffee cooperative which has been certified organic and fair trade. So they're very proud of this. What else? Work, they have work with, they work with traditional doctors. And in fact, a lot of them participate in, you know, workshops with the university to to look at issues of traditional knowledge of species and in their territory. So Karmata Rua was this, one of the communities I studied. And they're very important because they are sort of a success story. So many communities visit them to see how they've done things. This community has a very important, a very long history of social movement organizing. They began, they they organize to reclaim their land in the 1970s and 80s. A lot of, they suffered a lot of repression, lost a lot of their leaders, who were killed by landowners who had completely taken over their ancestral land.

[27:28 - 29:51] Marcela Velasco: And so the indigenous community was sort of, you know, cornered in the worst piece of land. And so by the 1960s, they were just facing extermination. So they began to organize in the 70s. And it was, it was very repressive. But they were able to recover part of their

land in collaboration with local, friendly local government authorities in the regional government. Not to diminish the social movement activism, but they combined and by 1986 they recovered part of their ancestral lands. They are now trying to expand their territory. They're buying up new lands in other parts of the region, and they have a reforestation and conservation project in the huddle, which is, is sort of high altitude mountains, high altitude rainforest or cloud forests. In 1998, they held this very important event in our constitution. They negotiated a constitution for, for them and they to develop their customary law. And they collaborated with municipal judicial authorities. So now the justice system, the local like ordinary justice system, and the customary authorities kind of work together when issues come up, because there's some things that customary law cannot deal with, like major crimes like murder and rape, those kinds of things. But other things you can deal with, in the community. And when I was there, they were they were, they had finished developing an environmental code, and they they're collaborating with municipal authorities who were also doing their own environmental code. So all of this history of social movement activism and collaboration with regional authorities has produced in their case, you know, a good example or maybe a positive example of, of local autonomy that synchronizes or harmonizes both customary and statutory rights and has led to the empowerment and recovery of this community.

[29:51 - 32:03] Marcela Velasco: So the more young people are speaking the language, there's also a cultural recovery around this. So this is something that elders feel very proud of. This is the map of Karmata Rua. So this is the original community here that they recovered in the 80s and-, 70s, 80s. In 2005, they bought these two new pieces of land. So now they have about 1,000 hectares of land at their, in, you know, in that they're trying to manage. So this is a road, it takes about two hours to get here by road. And then this is about a five kilometre walk to, to get to these new lands that they fought. So in our field trip with authorities from different regions of Colombia, they visited their projects and government and, you know, their experience. And then we all went and visited these, these territories, these new pieces of land that they were adding. And so people could experience firsthand how they had organized and what they were doing and etc. So this is the Karmata Rua, the main settlement. So you can see some of the houses here. Cloud forests especially there's they're still conserved in the higher parts that than from the lower levels, it's just all agriculture, coffee. This is radio station. The Health clinic that they built there. This is a church that also is used for community meetings. And this is the neighboring town that they're negotiating with the municipal authorities. So it's a mestizo town and it's about five or- I forget how many kilometers like a 5 or 10 minute car drive. So they're very close together. And about two years ago, the municipal authorities gave the indigenous council an office in the government office, which is unheard of in, in, in Colombia.

[32:04 - 34:05] Marcela Velasco: Some pictures of the exchange, so here, these are some of the visitors. He's actually one of the government in the justice programs. In the, in the in the community in Karmata Rua. This, these are pictures of the visit to the new territory that they bought. So we got, we drove in these, these are, these are very typical buses in Andes in Colombian, in the Andes. So, so some pictures of the walk up to the new territory that they bought. And then the sign as we entered the territory, says, "Hey, friend, where are you going with that rifle? This is an Indian reserve. And we banned hunting and commercial logging in this territory." And they have actually been enforcing this. And some of the campesinos and non-Indians who are living around the area are happy with, and sort of collaborating with, with this. They've been building some of the, you know, new settlements up there. 200 hectares are going to be devoted for agriculture. So they're going to build a school and some facilities for the new settlers. So it's Indian settlers going back to their lands, which were, you know, taken away from them in the 1800s or so. And this is the governor and my partner in the project. This is Aquilo [unconfirmed name], and here are some members of the civic guard. And mostly what they do is environmental. You know, they they they they, they, they sanction the use of natural resources and sort of oversee the territory. Most of them are very young, but there's also women and elders. So in this picture, you just it was mostly the the younger ones were available in this meeting.

[34:06 - 36:30] Marcela Velasco: And presentation of their experience to, to visitors to the program. This is Aquilo speaking to the visitors about the [unintelligible] and that project. And, now let me move on to the next community. I don't know how I'm doing with time. So the second community is on [unintelligible], and this is an example of challenges of local organizing. So this community has been, was affected in 2001 by an environmental, the, there's a hydroelectric dam upriver. The river that they live from. And it was built in the 1960s, and in 2001, they deposited 500,000 square cubic meters of sediment. Rough, pretty much killing the river. And this was, this has been done with only about a month ago. Finally, the national authorities ruled in favor of the communities. So they've been using all kinds of legal stunts to not address the, their their responsibility here. The EPSA is a, was privatised. It was a government owned company and it was privatised and sold to Spanish investors. And so all these changes in property of the company kind of convolute the legal process. And so it's part of the neoliberal model that to, to adjudicate conflict, you just have to resort to these courts and to have the courts, you know, rule in favour of you. You have to deploy really powerful lawyers and lobbies. So a protracted legal battle that, like I said, about a month ago, the, the national government, one of the, the ruled in favour of the community, but they'll probably come out with some other strategy, I don't know, and continue protecting this. And this whole case has led to divisions of leadership. There's a lot of money to be made if you win this battle, this judicial battle.

[36:30 - 38:38] Marcela Velasco: So some leaders have been, you know, maybe maybe badly advised by lawyers following more personal strategies, which end up dividing the community. There's been a lot of government corruption. Local authorities have not done their job properly to document what's going on and offer, you know, support to the community. And there's been a lot of environmental suffering as a result. So a lot of it cannot be proven because there hasn't been scientific studies. So this is typical of what goes on with traditional communities. So there's an oil spill or et cetera. And people kind of agree that the rashes that they have or the cancer that's increasing or etc., or the animals dying is a result of this, but then the authorities and the courts want scientific evidence which may or may or may not be available. So it's an issue of who represents the majority here. Especially because the communities have been divided. ONUIRA is the organization that I want to work with. And they, I guess they've, they're winning the battle of who represents the majority. This is a social movement organization. It's called the, the Organization of United Blacks in For the Interests of the [unintelligible] River. They were founded in the 1980s. And they've been unifying the community. And this year or last year when I was there, they finally got most of the communities in that territory to unite under them and follow, to follow, like this whole process, and sort of ended up marginalizing the 2 or 3 communities who were badly represented, represented, and they're kind of working to see how they can work with them through different processes. So, ONUIRA is also, has been doing a lot of political work, but also environmental work. So that's what makes them interesting. So a lot of grassroots organizing.

[38:38 - 40:42] Marcela Velasco: And they, they began what they call the resurgence campaign. Resurgence is the black social movements in Colombia, meaning revival of that that tradition, that history of their ancestors, their enslaved ancestors, that recovered communities and lands for them. So they've been doing a lot of grassroots organizing and leading this resurgence campaign. And they did this beautiful sort of symbolic action, which was the saying goodbye to the river. So they organized a sort of caravan of votes, and they, they navigated the river as far as they could. And this got a lot of attention and of people outside the community so that they could educate them and inform them about what had happened in this community. This is the [unconfirmed name]. He's the leader of ONUIRA, and this is the person I worked with. So here, he's in Karmata Rua visiting Karmata Rua experience with the indigenous communities. And in this picture around this time, he was talking about, like all he had learned from visiting Karmata Rua and some of the lessons that he was going to take back to his community. So after we were done here, I actually went with them to, to Anchicaya with a traditional doctor from, from the indigenous community. And we visited various communities discussing what had gone on at that meeting and some of the lessons learned from Karmata Rua. So some pictures of Anchicaya. Now, this is in the Pacific lowlands. And most of the communities live, there's different types of communities. Some are communities next to the river, the

river beds. These are not my pictures. So this is the hydro, picture of the hydroelectric and the river up in, you know, the the the source of the river or upriver. This is the mangrove community. So pictures in the mangroves.

[40:42 - 42:43] Marcela Velasco: So this is a very diverse territory that covers mangroves and rainforest. And, and also the river. So, and the communities vary depending on where they are. So these communities live from mangrove fishing and fishing in the, in the ocean. And the previous picture that I showed you, these people live from agriculture and fishing in the river, but the environmental damages from the hydroelectric affects all of them. So some pictures from that from, from that experience. This is one of the bigger towns. Some of the meetings, pictures of some of the meetings that we held. And here you can actually see the banner of, part of the banner from their campaign, the resurgence campaign. And this is [unconfirmed name], the traditional doctor from the indigenous community who came with us. And he most of the time was talking politics. But during his off hours, he was doing a lot of healing and discussing sort of, you know, traditional remedies with some of the. She's, she's a midwife with, you know, different like, that was not part of my project, but it was very neat. And this is one of the communities that, about three years ago, there was battles here. The army and the guerrillas sort of battled it out, and they were, this community was abandoned. So although it's safer now, 2 or 3 years ago, it was affected by armed conflict. I, I, I'm going to finish now or, you know, leave some time for questions. And I covered a lot and, but the main point here is that collaboration at the grassroots level is very important, can produce very important governance outcomes.

[42:50 - 42:50] HOST: Thank you for your time. [applause]

[42:50 - 42:50] Marcela Velasco: Thank you.

[42:50 - 42:54] HOST: Now, some questions. [inaudible]. [Marcela chuckles]

[43:04 - 44:28] Speaker 1: Thank you for your presentation. It's, it's interesting to me [unintelligible] organizing and in my community with grassroots. And it seems like a lot of the elements that you're talking about in terms of position of leadership, destruction of the environment, local government not supportive of grassroots communities and all. All, all of those are elements of like what I see in our own indigenous communities. I'm from Arizona, so, you know, that's, this is like what we're faced with down there, where you have grassroots communities who are trying to tell tribal governments that instead of giving away the natural resources because there's been a lot of destruction to the environment, meaning water, the land, air and health of the people, you know, it's just not

connecting. So it seems to me that, like, we're, we're on this path and, and of what these communities went through.

[44:29 - 44:29] Marcela Velasco: Mm-hmm.

[44:29 - 44:47] Speaker 1: So, it's an interest in terms of when you say governance, which is something that needs to be reclaimed to some extent in our own communities because we're very, very much becoming a westernized sort of the government...

[44:49 - 44:49] Marcela Velasco: Mm-hmm.

[44:49 - 45:03] Speaker 1: ...as far as at our tribal council level. And people are, you know, I always say it's like you're trying to fit around these square wheels and doesn't fit.

[45:05 - 45:41] Marcela Velasco: Mm-hmm. Yeah. And and some of the more successful communities, they're just strategic. So it's, you know, take, making use putting to good use some of the rights coming from, from the national government and contesting those policies. There are not and a lot of them are not conducive to, you know, respecting their, these authorities. So it's, you know, the contention and social movement part of it until some other type of government comes into power and really respects these communities that cannot go away. So-

[45:45 - 45:57] Speaker 2: That's great. That [unintelligible] tradition [unintelligible].

[46:01 - 48:11] Marcela Velasco: In the, the, the Indian social movements, the more recent Indian uprising began in 1973, in the Cauca region. This region has a very special history because it was a region where some communities opposed or were able to contain Spanish conquest. So in the 16 or in the 17th century, they, they had these sort of treaties with the Spanish which were eventually, you know, violated. But in the 60s-, 70s, they, they began that social movement. So it's earlier than everything you see in the more indigenous countries like Bolivia and Ecuador, which began in the 1990s. So there's been a long history of a very combative social Indian social movement in the Andes. And so they, the coca Indian movement supported Karmata Rua in that land struggle. That was their strategy, you know, sort of control these, these, get rid of, of, of people like the priests or the landowners who were controlling traditional Indian institutions, I assume, like the tribal governments. So they would say, you know, something like the tribal government is a useful tool, but we need to get rid of the people who are not using it properly. So what they did was that they they penetrated what were called what are called the Indian councils. The Indian councils were pretty much Indian, the Indian government in those lands. And they would parcel out and give land to, to

non-Indian landowners. So the movement, what they did was penetrate this. That was their strategy and get rid of those representatives that were non-Parliament that didn't have the Indian people's interests in. And so they started to kind of propagate this strategy elsewhere.

[48:15 - 48:17] Speaker 3: [unintelligible].

[48:18 - 48:57] Marcela Velasco: Yeah. I'm not very familiar. Yeah. The Venezuelan government is like the oil policy in Venezuela. So what they did, the Venezuelan government was like sort of welfare programs for Indians, and they tried to urbanize them and send them food. This whole idea, you know, civilizing, you know, people who had different lifestyles and what civilized lifestyles are. So they would, you know, they, they, they, they were not as repressive, but they kind of bought them off with these types of handouts. I'm not very familiar with the Indian movement in Venezuela. All I know is very weak.

[48:57 - 48:57] Speaker 3: Yeah. It's not-

[48:57 - 49:06] Marcela Velasco: And the communities were depoliticized by the government. So, yes.

[49:09 - 49:15] Speaker 4: Is there, have you ever looked at the analysis between our [unintelligible] situations? Said an easy landowner.

[49:15 - 49:15] Marcela Velasco: Mm-hmm.

[49:15 - 49:21] Speaker 4: It seems like real one key aspect is assistant to the local government [unintelligible].

[49:24 - 49:24] Marcela Velasco: Mm-hmm.

[49:24 - 49:39] Speaker 4: And as you present the initial case. In any case, it seems like they have, you know, at least the last 10-20 years of government and how the institutions of power, between the 70s and 80s, landowners versus...

[49:40 - 49:40] Marcela Velasco: Mm-hmm.

[49:40 - 49:48] Speaker 4: ...say, the local governace. In the black community on the coast and the communities and how they tie into the effectively [unintelligible].

[49:50 - 52:49] Marcela Velasco: Mm-hmm. Yeah. So it's in the in the 60s there were land reform policies and a lot of those government officials were pretty progressive. And so that's where some of that support came from. So in presently, people in the Constitutional Court in the Ombudsman's office, some of the human rights organizations in the government. That's where you find you're more likely to find your allies. So that continues to be and it's changed from you know, what it used to be in the 70s. The environmental, the environmental institutions can also be supportive. But then there's, you know, the the executive branch at all levels is not where you find most of your, like, the elected politicians. Sometimes that's not where you, and in Karmata Rua a lot of things that they- in the indigenous community they say they're very aware that they cannot organize a contentious social movement, because right now the right wing is more sort of entrenched. And they would be afraid for their safety, because there's a lot of very powerful landowners who do not like these indigenous communities, like in there. So they constantly kept saying this, we need more land. But at this point, we need to work with the legal process, with, you know, the authorities to expand by land or, you know, try to get funding to buy land because that's what they like. You buy land, you don't you don't reclaim land that used to be yours. So so the community is peaceful at this point. There's no like it used to be in the 80s. There's a lot of violence against the community. That has ended. But they know that if they start to do something contentious, they may. You know, and they don't feel they're ready to recess that. So that's one thing. And with the black communities, the process is a lot more recent. And it has a different history. And the local authorities. A lot of them are also black and from the rivers. And so there is like more like a class difference than a race, like, and I clearly identify that it's more, with the Indians that are mestizos and the Indians. And there's also the class issue. But in the black communities it was, you know, people who left the rivers, who became well off in other government and that they don't care about. And they're trying to get these companies and these, so it's like a class thing within like I'm going to see what they think about this when I ask, but I notice that.

[52:54 - 53:09] Speaker 5: When we look at the Super Bowl [unintelligible]. Many other examples like these or how special are these [unintelligible]. And you said that there were ones that were working well, but you see. Yeah, I've heard about another [unintelligible].

[53:11 - 53:11] Marcela Velasco: Mm-hmm.

[53:13 - 53:13] Speaker 5: This is extremely rare.

[53:14 - 53:34] Marcela Velasco: In Indian, with the Indian communities there's a lot of, of, especially in the Andes. In the, in the Amazon this is very rare. Very rare. So you find a lot of these examples in the Cauca region, in Antioquia, in like the, the-

[53:36 - 53:36] Speaker 6: [unintelligible]

[53:37 - 54:00] Marcela Velasco: In Sierra Nevada [unintelligible], those areas where the communities were either very strong, their social movements or their traditional authorities or they have supported, for allies and government. So you do find examples and they have different issues, and yeah. And in some cases they are even more developed than this. So there's I can think of one community where the Indian, the Indian governor was eventually elected to the town as a mayor. And then so it was a very interesting case where they're dominating local politics. So going beyond the reserve and also, you know, electing their own people in, with Mestizo votes in, in the municipal or, you know, the mayor electing mayors and council people. And having to deal with those rules because they're different than the rules in the reserve. So in black communities, the governance is really, they're facing major, major issues of violence and displacement. So they just gained these rights in 1993. They began to implement them in 1997, and then they were affected by war. So a lot of these communities have been displaced or-

[55:14 - 55:16] Speaker 7: And if I can pull up that. And so the kinds of visits that you doing [unintelligible] community member [unintelligible] is that something that is done very often?

[55:16 - 55:16] Marcela Velasco: Yeah.

[55:16 - 55:16] Speaker 7: Yes.

[55:17 - 56:40] Marcela Velasco: Yeah. There's a big grassroots thing in Colombia. Yeah. And yet they visit the, and there's a lot of meetings and where people network. And this is very important. And what I liked about the, you know, the inter-ethnic school is that they take that a little bit further because they actually organize and structure the field visits, so that people actually get to see how this community has organized. And so you visit, seeing is very important. Talking to the mayor or the Indian governor and, you know, visiting the women's groups and the the schools and the health, all of those things. So, so people learn a lot from this, and then they go and copy ideas. And a lot of graduates from this school have at least, I can think of 3 or 4 have been elected in their communities and, or even in, in, you know, as one of them was elected as a council member in the local government. So they, and they receive talks from mayors who've non-Indian mayors in towns that are close to Indian reserves, that explain to them how the Mestizo government works. So the things they should be aware of. So it's really interesting.

[56:41 - 56:41] Speaker 7: Great.

[56:41 - 56:41] Marcela Velasco: Mm-hmm.

[56:48 - 56:51] Speaker 8: [unintelligible]. In English, it means the traveling eye is the wise.

[56:52 - 56:58] Marcela Velasco: Exactly. Yeah. So any other-, one last question.

[57:02 - 57:02] Speaker 8: [unintelligible] [applause]

[57:03 - 57:04] Marcela Velasco: Okay. Thank you very much for your time.

END TRANSCRIPTION