



IGARAPÉ INSTITUTE
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CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE AMAZON THROUGH THE VOICES OF WOMEN DEFENDERS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT



Peru

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Introduction

“With the ongoing climate change, the heat drives everyone to despair, whether in the city or the countryside. We live in the countryside but feel the change, which bothers us. So, how can we not continue to defend our trees? They are alive, but they do not speak. We are the ones who can speak for them in their defense.”

- Indigenous defender from the northern Peruvian jungle

The forests are at risk, and the communities in these areas face challenges imposed by climate change. This critical insight emerged as the central theme from the interviews conducted with women defenders by the Igarapé Institute for this study. The research delves into the complex and deep-seated connection between indigenous women and their territories in Peru. It explores their experiences, obstacles, and accomplishments in safeguarding their territories and leading the battle against climate change. These women encounter a range of pressures – environmental, economic, and social – across the Amazon region.

The research was motivated by the need to amplify the voice of Peruvian defenders, which is essential to understanding the ongoing climate crisis. These women’s role in defending their territories has often been overlooked or undervalued. The analysis in this report uncovers significant findings and insights:

- The context of profound inequality in Peruvian society, along with the historical marginalization of indigenous populations, especially in the remote regions of the Peruvian Amazon, highlights the urgent need for inclusive policies focused on ensuring territorial rights, land demarcation, and access to basic services. However, more specific public policies for indigenous women and the need for more financial resources for their initiatives in environmental protection stand out as significant obstacles.
- The Amazon is vital to indigenous women’s physical and cultural lives, who are essential in safeguarding this territory. They face threats due to pressures exerted by both legal and illegal economic activities, endangering not just their territories but also their ways of life.
- In Peru, indigenous women protect their territories and spearhead local organizations. The challenges they encounter include threats to their physical safety and gender-based violence, intensified by their commitment to environmental protection.
- The research also identified the limited financial support available for the activism of these women defenders, the workload resulting from the gendered division of labor, and the discrimination they endure. Despite these challenges, indigenous women emphasize their achievements, including enhancing technical skills and political participation.

In this research, we employed a participatory approach centered on focus groups and in-depth interviews with key informants. These fundamental activities for our study were carried out in collaboration with local defenders active in four regions: Ucayali, San Martín, Madre de Dios, and Loreto. In total, four focus groups and 14 in-depth interviews were conducted. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques included social and territorial mapping and classifying challenges and solutions.

The study is organized into four main sections. The first provides context about the situation in the Peruvian Amazon. The second section details the methodology used in the research. In the third, we discuss the primary challenges identified by the interviewees. Finally, the fourth section presents recommendations to strengthen the protection of territories and improve the living conditions of indigenous women in Peru, acknowledging the significance of their role in environmental protection and preserving their cultures and identities.

The Peruvian Amazon and the “Deep Peru”

Peru is a country marked by division and inequality. According to the World Inequality Database (WID),¹ in 2021, the poorest 50% of the Peruvian population contributed only 5.7% of the national income. In 2019, women’s participation in family income was just 34.1%, with a notable concentration of wealth among the richest, predominantly men.

These economic disparities represent just one facet of the social, racial, and gender divisions in the country. Since the colonization era, a socio-racial divide has solidified between the “Greater Lima,” seen as white, urban, and westernized, and the “Deep Peru,” characterized as indigenous, Andean, and labeled “uncivilized.”² In 2005, Julio Cotler observed that for Lima’s oligarchy, “Deep Peru,” the home of forest peoples, is not considered a part of Peru.

An illustrative event occurred in January 2023 when President Dina Boluarte, responding to protests against the government, declared, “Puno is not Peru.”³ This statement reflects discrimination towards Puno’s impoverished Andean region, the protests’ origin. The social issue divide in the country is so pronounced that, until recently, a wall known as the “wall of shame” in Lima separated poorer regions from richer ones.

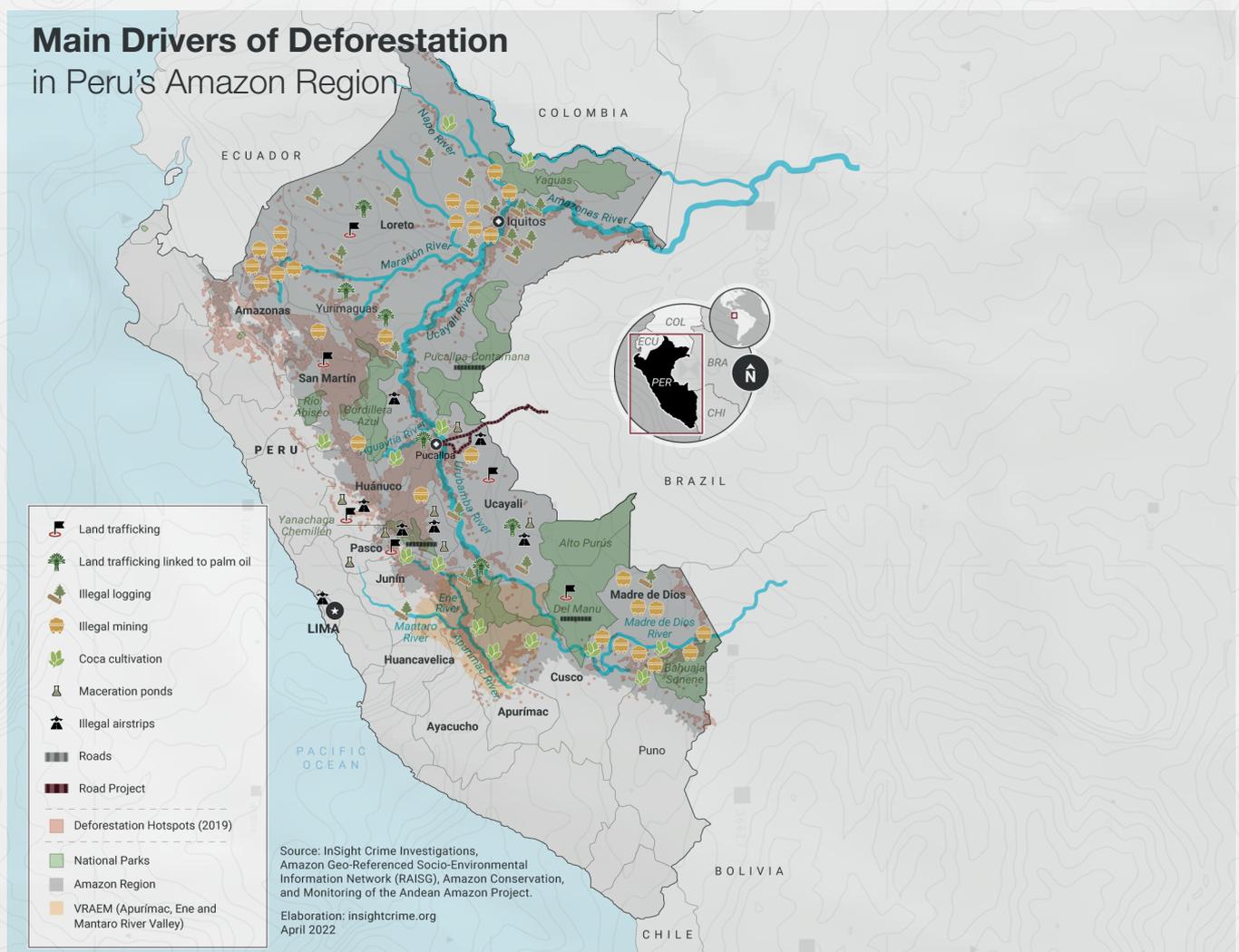
The term “Deep Peru,” used to refer to the Amazon, exemplifies this division. After all, the forest covers almost 60% of the national territory, harbors over 94% of the country’s forests, and is home to more than 50 original peoples and 12% of the Peruvian population.⁴ The combination of an extensive tropical forest and an unacknowledged or unrecognized social conflict has become an endemic and chronic issue. In 2022, Peru’s Public Defender’s Office recorded 247 active environmental conflicts.⁵

Evidence of this is the fact that those who defend these territories and the environment are often criminalized, intimidated, assaulted, or even murdered. According to Global Witness,⁶ between 2012 and 2021, approximately 44 land and environmental defenders were assassinated in Peru, with a quarter of these in the Amazon. The civil organization Tierra de Resistentes,⁷ reports that over 70% of the assassinations of environmental defenders in the region occurred in the Amazon, with 83% of the victims belonging to the Ashaninka indigenous ethnicity.

Why does this situation persist? The report “The Roots of Environmental Crimes in the Peruvian Amazon,”⁸ prepared by InSight Crime and the Igarapé Institute, reveals a series of environmental crimes that have contributed to the intensification of the devastation of the Peruvian Amazon. According to the report, Peru is the largest producer of gold in Latin America, with 28% of its gold coming from illegal sources. The continuous increases in gold prices have stimulated a frantic race for the metal, benefiting many criminal actors.

The report also identifies other complex dynamics associated with environmental crime, such as wildlife and flora trafficking, uncontrolled agricultural advancement, animal smuggling, and corruption. These environmental crimes represent a low-risk source of income for criminal organizations that frequently use the profits to finance other illicit economies, such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, and arms trafficking.⁹

Figure 1: The main drivers of deforestation in the Peruvian Amazon

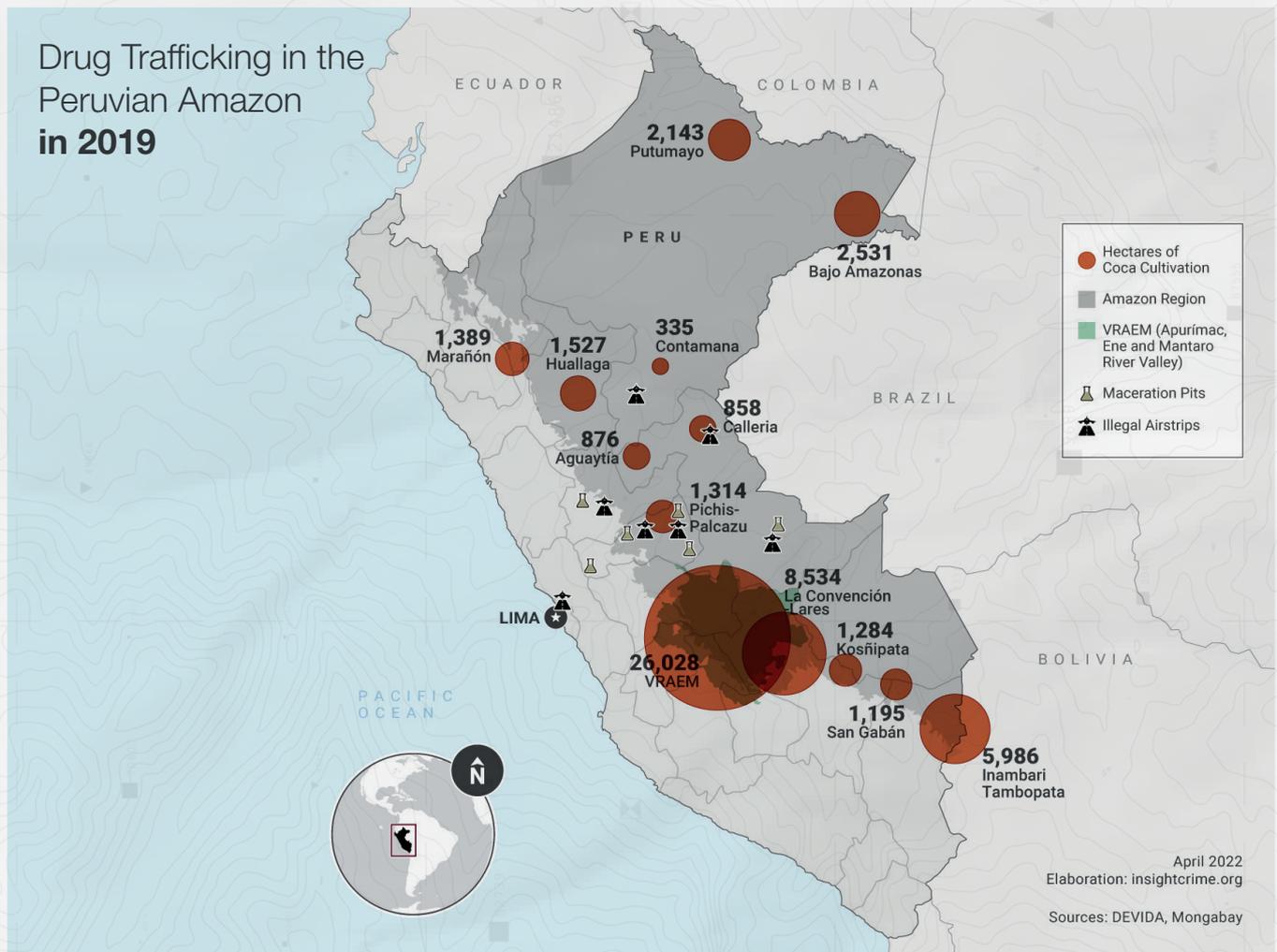


Source: Igarapé Institute and InSight Crime (2022). “The Roots of Environmental Crimes in the Peruvian Amazon”.
<https://igarape.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/The-roots-of-environmental-crime-in-the-Peruvian-Amazon.pdf>.

In this study, to gain a better understanding of the Peruvian Amazon, we divided the Amazon region into three distinct sub-regions: the central jungle, which faces the highest levels of deforestation; Madre de Dios, an area recently subjected to intense pressure; and the northern jungle, home to the most isolated territories.

The central jungle area, encompassing the departments of Ucayali, Huánuco, Pasco, and Junín, has been severely affected by illegal crop cultivation and the presence of organized crime. The districts of Puerto Bermúdez and Constitución, situated at the confluence of Huánuco, Pasco, and Ucayali, present increased dangers for indigenous leaders due to the escalation of drug trafficking. This region is grappling with homicides and targeted violence against those leaders committed to safeguarding their territories. The invasions, often disguised as agricultural or cocoa-producing activities, actually fronts for illicit coca cultivation. The lack of proper land titling for indigenous lands further aggravates these conflicts and threats.¹⁰

Figure 2: Drug Trafficking in the Peruvian Amazon in 2019



Source: Igarapé Institute and InSight Crime (2022). "The Roots of Environmental Crimes in the Peruvian Amazon". <https://igarape.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/The-roots-of-environmental-crime-in-the-Peruvian-Amazon.pdf>.

In mid-2022, the Peruvian Ministry of the Interior reported the murder of Estela Casanto in Chanchamayo, located in the Department of Junin. This case is deeply intertwined with environmental conservation efforts, specifically targeting issues such as mining, illegal deforestation, land encroachment, and drug trafficking.

The conflict is predominantly related to illegal deforestation in the eastern region bordering Brazil (encompassing areas like Serra do Divisor and Alto Juruá/Riozinho da Liberdade). There have been numerous significant incidents of victimization linked to combating this illegal activity. A notable example occurred in 2014, with the murder of four individuals in what is now referred to as the Saweto case. Since this tragic event, the victims' widows have been relentlessly seeking greater protection from the government for their communities.¹¹

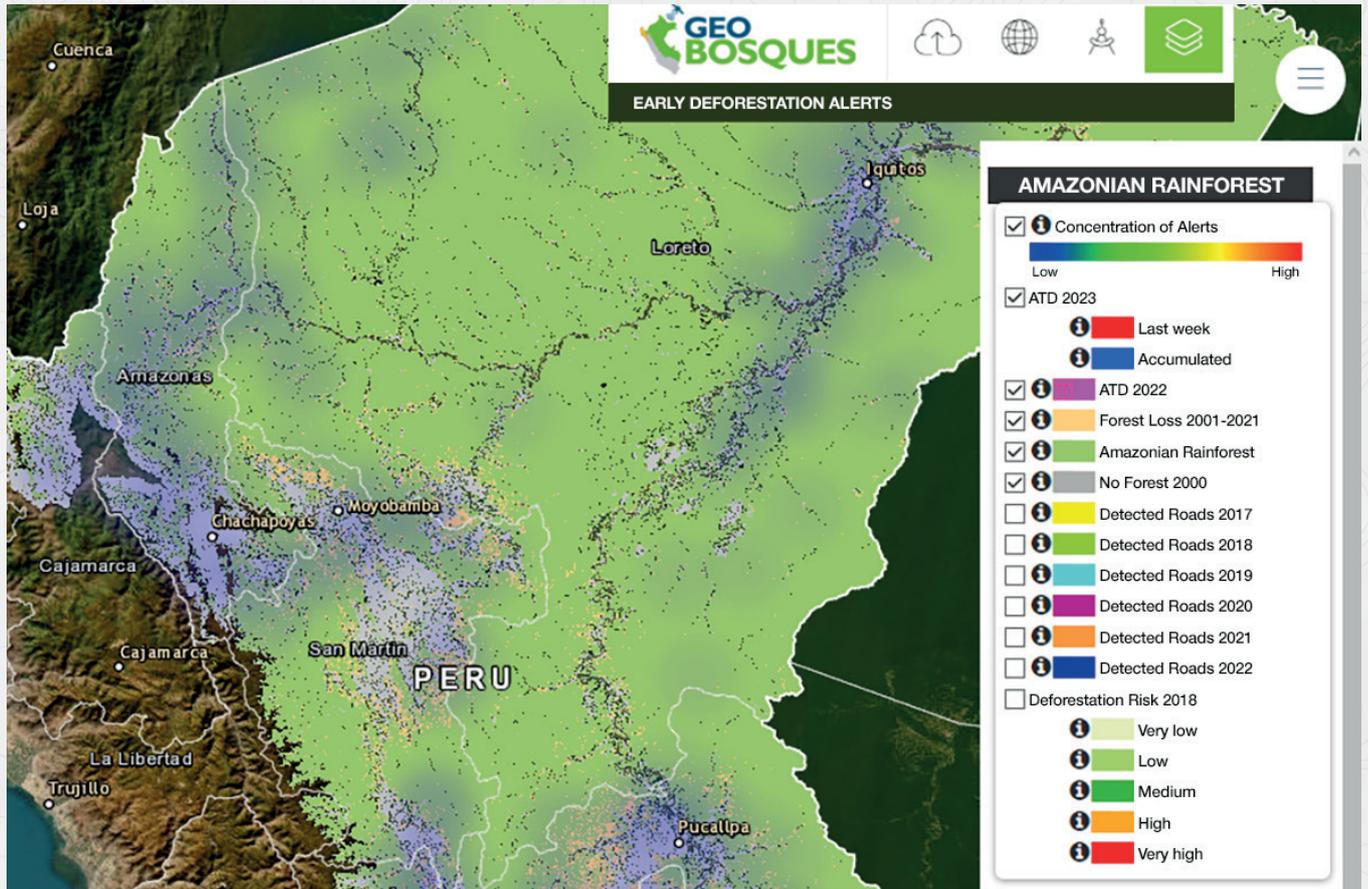
The Madre de Dios region is the focal point of the most recent deforestation surge, linked mainly to mining activities along the Madre de Dios River (known as the Madeira River in Brazil) and in the Paríamanu River area. This region has an extensive array of official sanctioned mining concessions,¹² and a dense indigenous population, particularly near the Bolivian border, adds to the complexity. In places like Tampobata, specifically within the Tres Islas Community, there have been reports of intense conflicts, often arising from the community's struggle against illegal mining.¹³

Additionally, the area has become a hotspot for conflicts related to timber trafficking along the Interoceanic Highway, land invasions for agricultural expansion, and even issues concerning human trafficking.

You will find some of the most secluded and hard-to-reach territories in the **Northern Jungle** region, encompassing the Departments of Loreto, Amazonas, and San Martín. This region also includes Iquitos, the largest city in the Peruvian Amazon, with a population nearing 400,000 in 2022. Despite a lower incidence of recorded conflicts and fewer identified victims, this area is distinguished by its tensions with the Matsés indigenous people in the Requena-Loreto area, close to the Javari Valley border. The Matsés occupy a vast territory of 452,735 hectares, one of the largest land titles ever granted to an indigenous group in Peru, including the Native Matsés Community. Their land is notably large for Peru, where indigenous communities typically hold smaller, more fragmented lands.¹⁴

Geobosques highlighted another significant source of conflict in this region: deforestation for palm oil production, predominantly in North San Martín and Loreto. Further, the deforestation resulting from the construction of the IIRSA Norte Marginal Jungle Highway by Odebrecht, which holds a 25-year concession, has triggered population migration and government-involved land ownership disputes.¹⁵

Figure 3: Early Warning of Deforestation in the Northern Jungle



Source: [Geobosques](https://geobosques.org/), May 2023.

Given this situation, Ucayali, San Martín, Madre de Dios, and Loreto have been pinpointed as key regions of interest. These areas are characterized by high-pressure dynamics impacting the forest and a robust presence of environmental and land defenders. The following section outlines the research methodology used.

Methodology

Considering the regions of interest, the research team from the Igarapé Institute collaborated closely with a defender from San Martín who traveled to Loreto and another from Ucayali who went to Madre de Dios for on-site data collection.

This research embraced a participatory methodology, centering on focus groups and in-depth interviews with key informants. The team from the Igarapé Institute, alongside Peruvian defenders, organized four focus groups across Peru: two in Ucayali (in Coronel Portillo in Pucallpa, and Atalaya in Atalaya city), one in Junín (Satipo city), and one in Madre de Dios (Puerto Maldonado city).¹⁶ These focus groups utilized Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques. To enhance the insights, 14 in-depth additional interviews were conducted in Loreto, San Martín, Ucayali, Madre de Dios, and Junín. Notable among the employed PRA techniques were the following:

- **Social and Territorial Mapping**: This approach involves detailed population mapping within a specific area, focusing on its key geographical features. Each defender participating in the study provided their identification and detailed the work they conducted within their respective territories, including insights into their places of birth and current locations.
- **Identifying Principal Challenges**: Participants in the focus groups and interviewees engaged in discussions about the primary challenges they encounter in their territories, emphasizing the impact of these issues on their daily lives. At the end of each session, a prioritization exercise was conducted, allowing each defender to highlight the challenges they perceive as most critical.
- **Solution Classification**: This phase was dedicated to identifying the most effective solutions to overcome local challenges, fostering a sense of local empowerment in pursuing resolutions to common problems. At the end of the focus group sessions, the defenders were asked to rank the solutions they believed had the most significant potential for addressing the challenges previously outlined.

The management of the focus groups and in-depth interviews was conducted by the engaged defenders, supported logistically by the Igarapé Institute. The participants included women from a diverse range of indigenous ethnic groups and leaders from various community groups and local associations. To maintain methodological consistency, the Igarapé Institute briefed the defender-consultants on key topics covered in a research seminar held in September 2022, including aspects such as research ethics, confidentiality, and security protocols.

A standardized questionnaire crafted by the Igarapé Institute's team was used for the interviews. Adhering to the General Data Protection Law principles, all interviews were audio-recorded. These recordings were transcribed and subjected to a thorough qualitative analysis using a qualitative in-house analysis tool built upon predefined categories to pinpoint segments most pertinent to the research objectives. The final analysis was based on data collected from the focus groups and the individual interviews.

The Challenges Through their Eyes

The relationship between indigenous women and their territories in Peru is deeply rooted, particularly noted for their significant role in strengthening and leading self-defense initiatives within the Peruvian indigenous movement. This aspect was notably emphasized by Camille Boutron in 2014. A prominent role documented among these women defenders in Peru is their involvement in organizing Self-Defense Committees (CAD) in rural regions, especially during the confrontations with armed groups like Sendero Luminoso (Communist Party of Peru) and the Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru (MRTA) after the end of the military regime. However, their vital contributions have often been overlooked in the historical accounts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was conducted decades later.¹⁷

Field research in the Peruvian Amazon reveals that women have significantly expanded their roles from domestic spheres to active participation in the public domain, confronting threats to their territories through community and organizational gatherings. The research participants frequently reported threats such as the unauthorized expansion of road infrastructure, land usurpation, and appropriation,¹⁸ and the impact of illegal economic activities.¹⁹ These threats not only jeopardize their territories and ways of living but also expose them to various forms of abuse, violence, and risks to their physical safety.

The defenders are increasingly subjected to criminalization and stigmatization, particularly following the intensification of protests across the country since 2022. Reports to the UN²⁰ have underscored the Peruvian government's use of repressive tactics, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention of protesters and defenders, torture, and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment in police custody. Moreover, there's growing concern over potential retaliatory and stigmatizing actions against these defenders, who are often falsely labeled as terrorists due to their active participation in or public statements about the protests. Human rights and environmental defenders are mainly targeted and harassed.²¹

Furthermore, the inadequate system in Peru for protecting and assisting defenders progresses slowly. The Intersectoral Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Peru, established in 2021,²² faces criticism for lacking clear guidelines on implementing protective measures.²³ Additionally, the Peruvian Congress has not yet ratified the Escazú Agreement, exacerbating the situation.

The conclusion is that women are grappling with precarious conditions regarding access to social and fundamental rights, even those formally guaranteed, and there is a need for more specific public policies addressing their needs. Discussions with Peruvian women defenders have identified three primary thematic areas of focus:

1. Environmental Justice as a Strategy to Overcome Racism and Exclusion:

The focus here is on the profound inequality of Peruvian society and the longstanding marginalization of indigenous populations in remote areas, such as the Amazon territory. It also highlights the crucial need for inclusive policies that safeguard territorial rights, including land demarcation and access to basic services.

1. Risks and Achievements of Women Defenders: This approach sheds light on the challenges women face as they assume the role of defenders. These challenges range from increased workloads and escalating gender-based violence to indirect threats to their territories and families. Conversely, it also celebrates the achievements and initiatives of these women.

1. The Impact of Territorial Attacks on Women: The third theme delves into how various activities by public, private, and illicit actors affect the environment and the territories these women inhabit and the consequent impact on their daily lives.

In the subsequent subsections, we detail these primary themes through the voices of the interviewed women.

Environmental Justice: Demarcation, a Matter of Survival

In Peru, the majority of the women defenders interviewed are indigenous. Their territories are vital, serving as a foundation for their physical existence and cultural continuity. These territories are where they find the resources and cultural elements necessary for their communities' survival and future generations. Therefore, defending their territory is their primary motivation, necessitating the expansion of their legal protection through the recognition and official registration of their native communities. Although there has been progress in this area, challenges remain predominant. Most of the territories are still without official titles, representing the primary motivation for the mobilization of indigenous peoples.

“[...] I started to identify myself as a defender when my community was buried under mining waste. At that moment, I realized I must take action...”

– A defender from the Madre de Dios region

The challenge of securing legal title for native communities is central to the fight for the rights of these people, especially the women defenders. This battle reflects broader issues, such as prejudice and racism against indigenous populations. This discrimination is evident in various forms, including the exclusion of indigenous people from public institutional spaces and the denial of access to citizenship and the constitutional rights afforded to all Peruvian citizens. This marginalization is a result of negative stereotypes about indigenous people, portraying them as primitive and unsuitable for technological settings or written expression.

“[...] In the city, we, the indigenous people, face discrimination. I faced threats and discrimination when I attended a regional government meeting. [...]”

- Defender from the northern jungle

“[...] We are discriminated against for being natives, for our supposed inability to use cameras or record videos. I have felt deeply offended in these circumstances. On one occasion, I confronted a man, saying: ‘Do not think you can marginalize us just because we are indigenous. I have lived in Lima for 30 years and will not tolerate this kind of insult.’”

- Defender from the northern jungle

When considering access to established fundamental and social rights,²⁴ such as self-determination, education, and healthcare, it's noteworthy that a significant number of individuals living in indigenous communities lack identity documents, like Peru's DNI (Documento Nacional de Identidad).²⁵ An essential aspect of the work undertaken by the women interviewed in this research is to raise awareness about these rights. They guide the institutional pathways to access these rights and organize collective efforts to regularize the necessary documentation.

The research team highlighted the need for a consultative process between the indigenous communities and the Peruvian state, particularly concerning environmental impacts on their territories. They pointed out that the representatives in these consultations rarely represent the community's interests. This is perceived as a tactic for co-option, leading to internal conflicts and disputes and weakening the political position of these communities.

They cite Article 6 of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention n° 169,²⁶ ratified by Peru, which mandates consultations with indigenous communities for infrastructure projects and research in designated or environmentally protected areas. The Organic Hydrocarbons Law is also referenced as an example of the lack of consultation with indigenous peoples. Another case mentioned is the establishment of environmental conservation areas, like the Regional Conservation Area of Cordillera Escalera, which often occurs at the expense of recognizing and titling indigenous territories.

“I think it’s wrong that they did this without prior consultation. We are a people, a living culture, and they are killing us. We all know each other, and they are just bureaucrats; they don’t know the land, they don’t know the Aboriginal people. They don’t want to acknowledge us as owners [of the territory] because they are making money from it. Yet, it’s us who have the land, we are the ones conserving it, not them. There is a native community; we already exist; we just weren’t formalized before.”

- Defender from the northern jungle

The Role of the Defender: Gender Violence and Overburden

The campaign for territorial demarcation is an ongoing and historically significant issue. However, women’s active participation and acknowledgment in this battle are often overlooked. The women interviewed in Peru highlighted a critical challenge: the traditional division of domestic labor, which disproportionately burdens women with caregiving and household responsibilities and limited income opportunities. A key question they often face is, “How can we leave our homes to defend our territories when we lack a support network?” This challenge leads to other issues, such as the excessive burden of community and domestic responsibilities, as well as a range of physical and mental health issues related to this workload:

“It’s complicated to leave the territory, being a woman, being a mother; the children grow up, and you must take them with you. The father cares for them when you’re traveling, but it’s not the same.”

- Defender from the Madre de Dios region

The expansion of women’s roles beyond domestic confines is often met with negative perceptions from their partners and community leaders. These women activists report that their engagement is seen as a threat to family stability and traditional responsibilities like child-rearing and home management. Consequently, many of these women endure restrictions, abandonment, and even domestic violence as punishment for straying from conventional roles. It is also concerning that many interviewees confessed to feeling ashamed of reporting domestic violence due to the absence of supportive institutional frameworks, lack of public protection policies, and their positions of influence as barriers. Men, in particular, perceive the political dimensions of community negatively, often regarding women leaders as unsuitable for romantic or family relationships. This troubling perspective is reflected in the following account:

“[...] Officials look at you and say, as a woman, you can’t maintain a relationship because you are a woman who gets involved in these things.’ Or they try to damage our self-esteem with silly questions or generalizations about native women, which sometimes provokes laughter, sometimes anger.”

- Defender from the northern jungle

Within this context, the cycle of domestic violence endures. These women describe facing aggressors labeled as “enemies of the community,” often affiliated with external groups, who target them in political retribution for their activism or that of their fellow defenders. Regrettably, many of these aggressors are members of their communities. The women explain that these “rapists” often receive protection from within the community. Taking a stand against them requires immense courage and exposes the women to heightened risks and danger.

“[...] This is my concern as a woman because there are groups of men who do not accept rejection. I always say that they can threaten me, as they have already done; they can even threaten to take my life, but I will continue fighting.”

- Defender from the northern jungle

The absence of adequate financial support for environmental protection initiatives forces these women to find alternative means of income, especially since many of them are the main providers for their families. This situation contrasts with other countries in the region that have more substantial funding for such initiatives. In Peru, most leaders often have to juggle their environmental activism with another professional occupation. Data from the Igarapé Institute reveals that a significant 83% of Peruvian female environmental defenders receive no compensation for their advocacy work.²⁷ This financial constraint in supporting activism and safeguarding their community territories imposes an additional layer of hardship on these women:

“It happens that we cannot take up leadership roles because we can’t leave home and the children behind.”

- Defender from the San Martin region

Despite their adversities and vulnerabilities, these women take pride in their achievements. The interviewees emphasized their growing technical skills and political influence in recent years, often surpassing the men in their communities:

“On that occasion, we went to the border with an official from the Directorate of Agriculture and confronted third parties. We wore our indigenous clothes and were prepared to fight, regardless of the outcome, because, as they say, ‘we either fight or perish.’ We knew we were risking our lives, but did it to defend the territory. I initiated the georeferencing process, and now we are concluding what I started. We want to reclaim the territory that belongs to our community, as we have faced many challenges over time.”

- Defender from the Madre de Dios region

“I requested an extension of my territory, but when I discovered that the adjacent areas were vacant or lacked documentation, some people invaded them. This was a problem because I have maintained this territory for years, and according to ancestral law, it belongs to me. However, the Ministry of Agriculture did not recognize this and considered it vacant land. It was from that moment that I began my struggle, facing numerous accusations. Finally, I have managed to secure the extension I was seeking.”

- Defender from the Madre de Dios region

The Pressure Exerted by Legal and Illegal Economies on Territory

Violence, in its various forms, is a central element in comprehending environmental defenders' hurdles in the Peruvian Amazon. In interviews, all these women consistently pointed to insecurity as an obstacle to safeguarding their territories. To them, threats directed at their territories threaten their existence, culture, and ancestral heritage. Additionally, they emphasize significant regional disparities, particularly concerning the actors exploiting the territory and exerting pressure on their communities.

Numerous actions taken by both private and public entities have repercussions on the territory and the safety of these women, further compounded by the presence of organized crime operating within the illegal economy. The line between legality and illegality is often blurred and varies depending on the aggressor.

For instance, during a monitoring mission in Ucayali, defenders reported an unauthorized incursion by a logging company into their community, damaging the forests and local fauna. They filed a complaint with the Special Prosecutor's Office for Environmental Affairs in Atalaya, with the organization's support.

Similarly, women from the Harakbut indigenous community of Barranco Chico in Madre de Dios reported that a logging company invaded their territory to exploit the forest resources of neighboring communities. This illicit intrusion destroyed significant forest resources, wildlife, waterways, and streams. They also reported the incident to the relevant authorities, and the legal process is ongoing.

“We found a tractor and two motorcycles on our territory. We walked from two in the afternoon until nine at night to reach the bank where we found their camps. We decided to talk; we walked with torches, and there were about 60 people there. They spoke in their language, and we couldn't understand them. They asked us: ‘Who are you? Where do you come from? Where are you going?’”

- Defender from the Madre de Dios region

On the other hand, the women of San Martín, especially those in leadership positions among indigenous peoples, highlighted that drug traffickers threaten their activities, particularly in areas with coca plantations. This presence creates a pervasive atmosphere of insecurity due to the constant threats from the drug traffickers:

“I am willing to fight, but I have received threats against my life. If I have to lose my life, let it be for the children so that drug trafficking can be eradicated. I am terrified.”

- Quechua defender from the San Martín region

In addition to undermining productive activities and threatening income sources, women defenders fear the recruitment of children and youth by drug traffickers, as well as the disruption of their family structures. This concern is particularly acute in territories near coca plantations in San Martín, Junín, and Ucayali Departments. All the interviewed women reported having received death threats, but they view their struggle as a way to protect their children from involvement with these criminal groups.

“I continue to fight against the involvement of girls in drug trafficking. But some groups of men do not care, and we are fighting against them.”

- Defender from the San Martín region

These threats extend to members of their families and the community. However, despite their fear, the women emphasize the need for social engagement and the courage to continue defending their territories, highlighting the strong bond that unites them:

“I feel that they could attack us at any moment and make us disappear. I don’t know if they will do it directly to me; they might target my family, as it’s a mafia, but we have to keep defending ourselves. When you are born for this, threats don’t change anything. If I have to lose my life, so be it.”

- Quechua defender from the San Martín region.

“If someone kills one of us, they won’t kill all of us. One dies, another rises. They won’t be able to kill us all.”

- Quechua defender from the San Martín region

In Ucayali and Madre de Dios, focus groups have revealed an alarming increase in forced displacement. Defenders are compelled to leave their homes due to escalating threats of violence and the targeted assassination of community leaders. In these regions, the primary concern is related to the activities of both legal and illegal loggers, their territorial dominance, and their hostile actions against local indigenous communities. Aside from losing their collective territorial rights, defenders and their families are uprooted from their homes due to imminent threats.

As evident, the challenges faced by Peruvian women defenders are intricately intertwined with their indigenous identity, their connection to their ancestral lands, and the mounting pressures emanating from both legal and illicit economic activities. Gender analysis reveals that societal expectations regarding their roles in society directly contribute to the risks and vulnerabilities they are exposed to. Building upon these insights and their invaluable contributions, we present a set of recommendations and pathways to address these pressing issues.

Possible paths

Understanding the challenges faced by Amazonian women, not only in Peru but throughout the entire region, necessitates a deep understanding of their distinctive cultural traits and the profound impact of environmental degradation on their means of subsistence and cultural heritage. It also entails examining how gender stereotypes and various identities influence the daily experiences of these women and can ultimately determine the risks they encounter. The following recommendations were derived from focus groups conducted in Peru and are intended to tackle these multifaceted challenges.

The paramount theme emphasized by the participants was the enhancement of existing **protective mechanisms** through a participatory, inclusive, and diverse approach. Here are some additional salient points they emphasized:

- **Implementation of protection mechanisms for indigenous peoples**, with a focus on indigenous women who endure violence and risks extending beyond gender issues, including threats to their way of life, livelihoods, and racial discrimination within Peruvian society.
- **Collaboration with indigenous organizations**: Strengthening protection mechanisms requires an inclusive perspective that considers not only the specificity of indigenous culture and how they perceive risks and vulnerabilities but also how they can leverage their knowledge and resources. According to the research participants, this action would involve cooperation with organizations with infrastructure, such as boats, which could be loaned to the police for community patrol activities.
- **Facilitating the recognition of their role as human rights** and environmental defenders before the State: While an official registry at the Ministry of Justice acknowledges this role, access could be clearer. Women assert that having this registration could assist, for instance, in gaining access to international resources and investments for nature protection.
- **Establishment and reinforcement of self-protection mechanisms**: The idea is for defenders to become more resilient in the face of the threats they encounter. Despite the need to enhance protection mechanisms with an intersectional gender perspective, defenders emphasized that several self-protection measures are poorly understood and could improve their security and well-being. Partnerships with organizations and agencies that can provide training should be intensified.

Actions mentioned in the interviews aimed at women defenders' recognition, visibility, and empowerment. In this regard, their recommendations are:

- **Promotion of Gender Equality and Participation of Indigenous Women** in Decision-Making Spaces: This can be achieved by amending community statutes and indigenous organizations to incorporate gender parity or rotation in the elections of community and indigenous organization boards. Exchanging experiences with established women leaders can inspire new leadership and guide future actions.
- **Involvement of Men in Gender Issues:** Progress in addressing gender issues is limited without active participation from men. Therefore, their inclusion in discussions on these matters is crucial.
- **Support for the Work of Women Defenders:** This includes strengthening gender-related capacities with an intercultural approach considering indigenous peoples' perception of gender. Ongoing coordination with allies and seeking new partners focused on indigenous issues are essential. Additionally, there was an emphasis on the need for a specific budget to implement activities for indigenous women.
- **Training and Coordination with Indigenous Organizations** and Partner Institutions: Collaborative efforts for training activities in various areas can effectively meet these needs.

Endnotes

1. [WID.world](#) is an open and accessible database that provides information on the historical evolution of global income and wealth distribution.
2. Julio Cotler (2005). "Clases, Estado y nación en el Perú." Lima: IEP, Série Perú Problema, 17.
3. According to [El Comercio](#), the largest newspaper in Peru, the government backtracked and apologized for the statement, asserting that it was not an act of discrimination against the region. <https://elcomercio.pe/politica/actualidad/dina-boluarte-puno-no-es-el-peru-presidencia-pide-disculpas-por-frase-y-niega-que-sea-discriminacion-o-soberbia-noticia/>, January 24, 2023..
4. Ministry of Environment of Peru. "Perú, país de bosques." <https://www.minam.gob.pe/programa-bosques/peru-pais-de-bosques/>
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24. In 2005, the Peruvian anthropologist Julio Cotler argued that the exclusion of citizenship rights among the lower strata of society was used as a strategy to limit their political participation. He identified this as a historical problem rooted in the subjugation of peasants and indigenous peoples – a practice, he argued, that led to the perpetuation of a clientelist structure within Peruvian society. Complementing this perspective, the sociologist Danilo Martucelli, in 2021, noted that the ongoing political instability in Peru has weakened the bond between the state and its citizens. This instability has resulted in widespread informality, complicating the process of institutionalizing rights. See Martucelli, D. (2021), “La sociedad desformal: el Perú y sus encrucijadas”, Plataforma Democrática Project, and Cotler, J. (2005), “Clases, Estado y nación en el Perú”. Lima: IEP, Série Perú Problema, 17.
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26. According to [Article 6° of the International Labour Convention n° 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples](#), governments are required to consult the concerned peoples through appropriate procedures, particularly through their representative institutions, whenever legislative or administrative measures are under consideration that may directly affect indigenous peoples.
27. Igarapé Intitute. “We are Vitória’s-Régias”. For more information, see: <https://igarape.org.br/en/issues/climate-security/defenders-of-the-amazon/we-are-vitorias-regias/>

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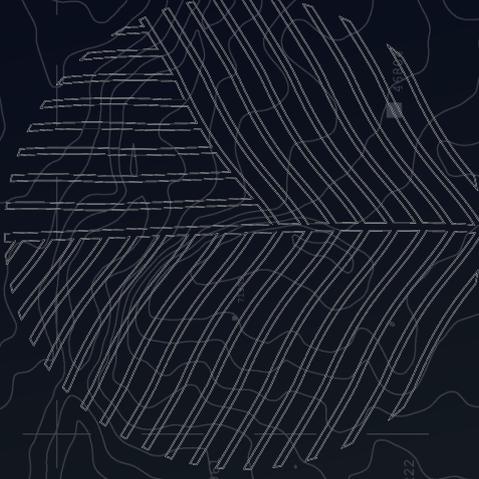
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