

Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational Experience No. 40



**BEAST AND BEAUTY:
EXTRACTIVISM AND GOOD LIVING**

The tentacle of mining extractivism has been present in the southwestern region of Antioquia; but thanks to the resistance from the defense of the territory, predatory greed has not been able to get away with it to date. Resistance goes hand in hand with a dynamic of regeneration towards good living and post-development.

WEALTH FOR WHOM AND AT WHAT ECOSYSTEMIC PRICE?

Southwestern Antioquia, located 50 kilometers from Medellin in Colombia, is part of the tropical Andean zone and is a world biodiversity hotspot with 22 endemic bird species, 3 protected areas, the Cauca River, the second most important river in the country and source of water for the most fertile lands; 120,000 inhabitants live in the province, among them indigenous people of the Embera Chamí ethnic group. One hundred and fifty years of coffee culture have been impregnated in a territory that evidences little economic poverty and misery.

The idyllic picture of the Southwest has suffered a severe disruption with the settlement of AngloGold Ashanti, a South African mining conglomerate with a reputation for the worst labor and environmental practices; in 2011 it was declared by Greenpeace as one of the worst companies in the world in terms of human rights violations and destruction of nature. In Ghana, the multinational literally contaminated the land and the people as a consequence of the excessive gold extraction. Ever since previous governments declared the opening of mining, more than 80% of the territory of Southwest Antioquia is titled for mining. Anglo-Gold, with presence in several parts of the country, has plans





for 5 projects in the Southwest, seeking to have this coffee zone declared a "mining district". The first of the mining projects programmed by AngloGold is Nuevo Chaquiro, better known as Quebradona, since its epicenter is located in the village with the same name, 12 kilometers from the municipality of Jericó and a few meters from the border with the municipality of Támesis. It also borders the Cuchilla Jardín - Támesis Integrated Management District. This border was not taken into account in the company's environmental impact study and is one of the reasons why the requested mining operation and exploitation license was

shelved by the National Environmental Licensing Authority (ANLA) in second instance. The project foresees a series of mega-interventions: the removal of 130 million tons of earth and stone to extract 5 million tons of copper, gold, silver and molybdenum; as a tangible result of this extractive undertaking, a dam with 160 hectares of base and 120 meters of height will be generated, accumulating 119 million tons of toxics in front of the Cauca River.

Mining projects such as Quebradona and others are declared of national interest by the national government, accompanied by the vast majority of public entities and companies, reflecting an accumulative and financial logic, based on the commodification of nature. The reading of a growing number of people and movements such as *Visión Suroeste* (Southwest Vision) disagrees with this short-term vision of development. It is a different logic from the orthodox schemes of growth and profitability, prioritizing the common good at the territorial level, managing

a concept of harmonious coexistence between economy and ecology, and allowing a good living for the population. This regenerative logic has been adopted by a growing sector of the territory's population in the face of a concept of development based on an unwise extractivism and eminent dangers from the toxics, generated by mining, for the ecosystem and the inhabitants of the territory. Examples such as Brumadinho in Brazil where the collapse of the dike of the mine dam has killed 272 people and eliminated the entire ecosystem of the Paraopeba river due to the spillage of 12 million m³ of toxic sludge, are proof of this.



MORE THAN 10 YEARS OF STEALTH EXPLORATION

The first to protest and express their concerns since 2008 have been the farmers of Palocabildo. Don Gustavo and Don Eber remember: "They began to see people with helmets and tools in the area, as well as helicopter over flights; facts that nobody informed the communities, neither the company nor the local authorities". Gustavo is a farmer, producer and president of the local aqueduct, a vigorous man, full of energy, calm and willing to do anything to defend his land and the vocation of his land, landscape and water; outraged by the lies and abuses, a peaceful and at the same time energetic man. Eber has on his body and face the marks of the pain of the abuses of the authorities, threatened by members of the security forces. He says he has lost friends for defending water and land. Sometimes he feels alone but he does not lack enthusiasm to walk and rejoice for the visit of

all those interested in joining the defense of the territory. Both slandered by the company and by the environmental authorities and yet, standing up, clamoring for a better life without faltering.



In 2011, the company was confronted for the damage to the water intake of the Quebrada La Fea aqueduct in the village of Palocabildo; the company then called a meeting of the Council of the municipality of Jericó, with the purpose of "socializing" the actions and benefits of the Quebradona project. The indignation of the farmers and other people who attended this meeting turned into discomfort, generated by the lack of transparency of the company and its officials had to leave the meeting through the back door of the seat of government. Just in 2018, the company finally decided to publicly declare its intentions since it was confronted by the peasant communities; that is, more through than 10 years they carried out exploration work on the sly and with lies since they always said they were doing studies to improve crops. This lie was used at the beginning of the exploration stage. A few years ago it is known that they are mining explorations and the initial lie was abandoned by the company.

RESISTANCE AND DEFENSE OF THE TERRITORY

AngloGold believed that it would be enough to get the approval of the community with its web page, full of sustainability speeches and the slogan that *copper gives us life, future and progress* - a very dubious slogan when it is an open secret that copper, due to its high toxicity, contaminates water for drinking and agriculture; by the way, it has been scientifically proven that copper has irreversible effects on the water system. With advertorials on local and national radio stations and newspapers, with incentives to councilors and school principals (provision of computers, trips abroad); and even with the creation of its own foundation (ProJericó) and the offer of a subterranean cathedral in honor of Saint Mother Laura Montoya, founder of the congregation of the Lauritas Missionary Sisters. But their strategy had no effect because the mining plans met with persistent and courageous resistance

from the living forces of the community.

In the heat of defending the territory, a Citizen Oversight Office for the defense of the ecological and cultural heritage of Jérico and the Jérico Environmental Roundtable were formed; on a regional scale, the Southwest Antioquia Technical Committee and the Western Environmental Belt - COA, among others, were formed. In 2020, the *Alianza Suroeste* (Southwest Alliance) was

born, a platform that articulates the actions against the AngloGold licensing process, bringing together the environmental groups of Jericó and Támesis and other groups (youth, adults, different social and ethnic groups). Currently this alliance brings together 22 of the 23 municipalities of the Southwest. Apparently it has been the defense of the territory that has brought together the society of southwest Antioquia.





BEAST AND BEAUTY

Like the myth of David and Goliath or the Beast and the Beauty, the Southwest of Antioquia and specifically, the communities of the municipalities impacted by the project, face a conflict of unequal interests of abysmal proportions; on one side there is all the economic, technocratic power, with tentacles in regional, national and international instances and the national policy of the mining locomotive in favor of the beast.

On the other hand, there is volunteering, idealism, humanism, all the creative force of sensitivity and connection with the common home and integral ecology; which make use of legal loopholes to assert the constitutional right enshrined on community participation, the regeneration of good living, decentralization and the defense of ecosystemic and environmental goods. But take care, be this is not a dream without answers to the econo-

mic reality: there are answers and economic visions, but in terms and logics that focus their attention on the common good of the territory and on the good living of its inhabitants: the numerous regenerative enterprises give an idea of the viability of this regeneration option.

THE RADIOGRAPHY OF THE PROCESS IN SUMMARY:

the resistance of the territory and the population of Southwest Antioquia to mining has been long lasting, defending the water and the cultural and natural heritage. Up to this point we can speak of a prolonged and sustained action of reactive origin in the face of the persistent threat of mega-mining. But to the reactive performance initiatives of a proactive nature have been associated; a dynamic of regeneration towards good living and post-development.

REGENERATORS ON THE MOVE: VISIÓN SUROESTE

Visión Suroeste, a citizen movement that weaves alliances and actions among the actors/regenerators and initiatives of the region so that the Southwest of Antioquia becomes a model of regenerative development for the region, is inspired by ideas and experiences that are transforming the world towards a new balance with the living and in coherence with it. They have created and manage the Regenerators Network, which is the heart of *Visión Suroeste*, a platform and a fabric



of productive initiatives, family enterprises and cultural, educational, protection and conservation initiatives; creators of new regenerative realities from a holistic vision, where each individual is fundamental for the balance of the system and where listening, dialogues and reflections allow them to evolve their collective intelligence.

They are farmers, young, vibrant people, talking and showing with enthusiasm their ventures in wellness tourism, specialty coffees, hiking, agro-ecological gardens, bird watching, permaculture, beekeeping, art and culture, handicrafts, among others. All these experiences have in common that the priority is not to make or accumulate money, nor to move certain ideologies, instead they are the expression of a clear option for life, territory and humanism in terms of connection with the earth, water, air, planet and the care of the common home.

With Dalida and Victor, a young couple who operate Urantia, an agro

ecological multi-crop and food sales in Jericó, this vibe of regeneration can be felt. These days they are applying to participate in a specialization course in agro ecology, since everything they have achieved up to now is just the beginning for them. Gustavo from Café Luna Llena in Fredonia relates how little by little his brothers have become involved in this regenerative dynamic, expanding the gastronomic offer. Angela Garces and her daughter Alejandra of the Ecological Cabin in Támesis receive their guests in a permacultural environment. It is also worth mentioning Jhon Wilmar Marín and his family of Ecoturismo y Café La Nohelia; they are also part of the group of pioneers who give continuity to a coffee culture, eliminating step by step the use of agrochemicals, migrating to friendlier forms of production and coexistence. There are Luis Carlos and Astro, offering nature tourism; the list of generators on the move is long, more than forty. It is a community of regenerators, with strength and illusion, with faith and optimism, creating their own enterprises in their lives, in the life of the

communities and also of the territory, handling concepts of ancestry and innovation, weaving life projects. Most of the regenerators are young people, with their technical and technological initiatives and ancestral and modern knowledge. Most of them are people who return to the territory by choice after technical and university studies or who come from the city to stay as neo-farmers.



By way of questions, looking at what should have happened a long time ago if the tasks of all of us revolved around the common good and a regenerative vision...

THE UNKNOWNs OR, IN OTHER WORDS, THE WAILING WALL

- What do the media await for to make effective the limits to corporate greed, generating normative certainty and social justice and having a media communication in a timely, objective, impartial and ethical way, contributing to the formation of criteria for the common good among their audiences?
- What is needed for mining companies to transition to productive and friendly practices for the supply of minerals necessary for vital activities, understanding and respecting territories, biodiversity and ecosystem laws?
- Is it too much to ask for a university education that generates and circulates knowledge for historical valuation, care for life and ecosystems that develop capacities to take advantage of opportunities in balance with regenerative models?
- How much more time (when there is no more time!) is necessary for the reorientation of national and global economic policies in accordance with life and productive potentialities based on natural resources, not under extractive forms but based on ecosystem services, conservation and protection of resources, recognizing the vocations and histories of territories and communities?



MESSAGES TO THE FUTURE

- The link between the inhabitants and their territory allows for an economy in harmony with the environment without objectifying and commodifying nature.
- Protest with proposal – the defense of the territory and the resistance against mega-mining, understood as a reaction to the threat, enters into symbiosis with the regenerative initiative to achieve sustenance and economic well-being.
- The regenerators have opened the door and are moving towards post-development in the territory.
- In collaboration between various and different actors and groups from civil society, NGOs and other initiatives, visions of the future and regenerating realities are built.

Almanac of the Future

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