

Manifesto for Territory, Knowledge and Collective Healing

Since our participation in COP30 and since the progress of the DECODE project

OLIVIA AND PALOMA

Our participation in COP 30 in Belém comes at a historic moment when the climate crisis threatens the continuation of life as we know it. It is no coincidence that it was held in the Amazon region, the lungs of the world, a place where the majority of its inhabitants are Indigenous communities from Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela. This time, COP could not turn its back on Indigenous communities because it was held on their territory. This was an opportunity for humanity to turn its gaze to where it almost never looks (the rainforest and Indigenous peoples) and an opportunity for us to reflect on the contributions of the discussions we attended and also to position ourselves as Latin American women and as part of a project that aligns perfectly with the current global situation: the DECODE project. Therefore, we share this manifesto with our reflections and positions regarding the issues addressed at COP:

1. On the climate crisis and traditional knowledge.

While attending both formal presentation spaces and spaces for activism and advocacy, such as the *Cúpula du POVOS*, a question arose that stayed with us throughout the COP: where are the discussions about knowledge, about the environment, and about funding to preserve that knowledge? It seems that the issue of knowledge remains trapped in certain critical niches of academia, without occupying a central place in the broader language of activism, much less in the official halls of the COP, where discourses on alternative energies, green transition, and technological solutions abound, but where the peoples who sustain life with their knowledge are almost never mentioned.

This absence is not accidental. It is a symptom. Because when the climate agenda omits the role of Indigenous, local, and community knowledge, it contributes to deepening the divide between decision-makers and those who care for the land. That is why we affirm that giving visibility and prominence to this knowledge is also a commitment to environmental preservation and epistemic justice, essential for confronting climate crisis.

In this sense, we recognize the importance of initiatives like DECODE, which not only documents and disseminates community knowledge but also brings it to spaces where it has historically been ignored. This is fundamental so that the conversation about ancestral knowledge reaches beyond academia; it enters government corridors, the private sector, the media, and everyday spaces where the idea that Indigenous knowledge is secondary or incidental still persists. We cannot continue to speak only among those of us who have already understood that returning to the knowledge of our peoples is the truly sustainable alternative.

Therefore, as the DECODE project has reminded us throughout this process, we reaffirm that no global debate will be sufficient as long as it continues to separate territory from knowledge, nature from memory, or technology from ancestral wisdom. What we witnessed at COP25 left us certain that the defense of the planet cannot remain disconnected from the peoples who inhabit it or from the knowledge that has allowed these territories to continue to thrive. That is why it is essential to continue working around the question of knowledge, its validation or invalidation, and questioning what we mean when we speak of knowledge.

2. On women, health and territory

If it's impossible to talk about environmental conservation without talking about traditional knowledge, then it's impossible to talk about either of the above without talking about women. Women, and especially Indigenous women, as we learned through the DECODE project and as we recalled at COP25, are the ones who have contributed the most to caring for the land and for life. That's why it's essential to place the defense of women's lives at the center of the debate, women who have also sustained the health of territories long before terms like "green transitions," "adaptation," or "climate resilience" even existed.

At COP25, we heard from Indigenous women that for the health of the planet, we must walk the land. For the Indigenous women of the Ecuadorian Amazon, health is not just the absence of disease; health is the rainforest, clean air, healthy, chemical-free food, children playing in the river, the sound of birds. But according to them, health is not only physical; it is also important to talk about mental health, about being at peace, about living without fear, without threats, without fear of losing your life, your territory, your home. And when extractive companies arrive, when oil companies arrive, they destroy the mental and physical health of the people of the Amazon.

Companies enter territories like a woman's body is violated: without permission, without respect. According to them, the oldest woman to have suffered violence is the earth itself, or as Waldina explained, the woman of her territory, stripped of her

Indigenous identity, has been stripped of her clothing just as the earth has been stripped of the verdure of its garment. At the COP, they mentioned something we already knew: extractivism is a patriarchal practice, born from the belief that one can possess other bodies and other territories.

Women and nature are inextricably linked. Historically, they have been wounded, but they have also healed collectively, and they have healed the wounds of their land. Women's contribution to the health of their territories is immense because, as they say, "without land there is no medicine." Historically, women have been relegated to domestic chores, but in doing so, they have taken on the responsibility of caring for their homes, cleaning them, and keeping them warm. The same is true for the largest home of all: the planet. Men do not contribute equally to the care of the planet, and, in fact, Western men are the ones who most negatively impact it with their capitalist and selfish values of appropriating people, things, and resources.

Indigenous women have healed collectively, they have healed the territories, the rivers, the communities; it is not by chance that a large part of the reforestation processes in the Amazon have been mostly led by women.

During COP25, the strength of community brigades defending the forest emerged. These brigades are born from the communities' deep understanding of fire. Fire is part of the natural cycle; it is part of life. But when it comes from outside, uncontrolled, fueled by destructive practices, it becomes a threat.

Community brigades are an ancestral technology. Those who participate in them know how to recognize when a fire is part of life and when it is a symptom of external destruction. But these brigades are not incorporated into public policy. Neither are community-based diagnostic systems led by women. Nor is the knowledge that could prevent climate tragedies if it were recognized, funded, and strengthened. The communities already have the solutions; what is lacking is the political will to listen to them and support them.

One of the most powerful metaphors we heard was that of water as a mirror. Water reflects who we are. When water is dirty or polluted, it's because it reflects the humanity that pollutes it. But as some of the women we heard at COP reiterated, the solution to the planet's health lies with women, because if the disease is patriarchal, the cure has a woman's voice. But this voice must be heard; that's why it's essential to include more women, and especially Indigenous women, in decision-making spaces, public policy, and institutional spaces.

3. On the unfair responsibility of indigenous peoples in caring for the environment.

The discourse we constantly encountered at some COP venues was that Indigenous communities were responsible for caring for the planet. But Indigenous communities struggle daily to remain on their land, to preserve their identity, and to keep their knowledge alive. They fight against local problems, against extractive violence, against patriarchal violence, against pollution, and against the loss of sovereignty. How is it possible that, in addition to all this, they have also been burdened with the responsibility of maintaining the global climate balance? Shouldn't the international community alleviate this burden, instead of increasing it?

We cannot shift the responsibility of caring for all of humanity onto Indigenous peoples when it is humanity that owes them a historical debt, that must repair the historical damage done to Indigenous communities, their knowledge, and nature. Why should we relegate the responsibility of caring for the home we all inhabit to Indigenous communities? We cannot wash our hands of this and absolve ourselves of the responsibility to care for the planet as well.

But even if the responsibility lay with the communities, then defending the lives and territories of Indigenous peoples, and Indigenous women, should be a priority on the climate agenda. Giving Indigenous communities this role sounds good in theory, but in practice, their knowledge is disregarded, their territories are invaded and exploited, and resources—which have a spiritual connection to the communities and are at the core of their worldview—are extracted. An example of this was when, while the COP was taking place, the Brazilian government granted a license to extract oil near the mouth of the Amazon River.

That is why we emphatically defend the importance of influencing public policies to guarantee the real and binding participation of Indigenous communities and the effective conservation of their territories. Governments and public policies can—and must—put a stop to the private sector when its interests threaten life, rivers, the rainforest, and the ways of life that have allowed these territories to endure. It is not just about inviting them to decision-making spaces: it is about recognizing their authority, their autonomy, and their right to say “no” when an intervention jeopardizes the continuity of life.

4. Final considerations

Our experience at COP25 left us with several reflections , but also with several certainties. One of these certainties is that the sovereignty of peoples remains the

foundation for any possibility of climate and social justice. There is no just transition without communities capable of deciding on their food, their territory, their knowledge, and their future. We highlight, for example, food sovereignty as a political commitment to sustain life, to protect autonomy, and to ensure that communities do not depend on extractive systems that deepen inequalities; or knowledge sovereignty, which asserts that ancestral, community, and local knowledge can no longer be treated as secondary inputs or as appropriable commodities.

And alongside these sovereign rights, we reaffirm the importance of territories as living entities. Territory is the key to the creation of cultures, knowledge, and relationships; territory is memory, spirituality, language, sustenance, and the future. Without territories, human life could not exist. Defending it requires political will, but also sensitivity, affection, and an ethic of care that we constantly learn from Indigenous communities, and especially from women.

Finally, we experienced firsthand what happens when women come together. One of us shared a room during COP with two African women, one from Ghana and the other from Nigeria, whom she had never met. Yet, every night they cooked together, talked, and shared their different experiences in a safe and caring environment. Something similar happened with the five Latin American women with whom we shared the presentation in the Canadian pavilion: they lent each other their best clothes and held a small, impromptu fashion show so that each one felt she was giving her best on the day of her presentation. When women unite, they heal and care for one another.

However, not all of us were at COP for the same reasons. We heard an Indigenous woman from the Amazon say, “We are not here by choice, we are here out of necessity,” because her territory is at risk, because her voice is not heard, because her knowledge is not legitimized, and the root of this inequality is what motivates us to continue working on the structural problems behind these inequalities: patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism. We declare that we cannot advance on environmental or territorial issues if we do not attack and oppose the different systems of oppression. It is not enough to defend women's rights if we do not work to eradicate patriarchy on all fronts; it is not enough to recognize traditional knowledge if we do not work to dismantle colonialism on all fronts.

This is why the DECODE project is also one of our strongholds of struggle; it is the place where these reflections, and especially this certainty, resonate. It is a place that houses a diversity of knowledge and people who heal, care, and transform. It is a place where it is recognized that knowledge is not only thought, but also action and emotion. The

DECODE project champions the transformation of knowledge while also serving as a living example of social transformation.

We want to support projects like DECODE, public policies, and organizations that focus on defending life, on reproduction, not on the production of life. We want to highlight the values we recalled with the women of the Amazon at COP, but also with all the case studies in the project: solidarity and unity. These are values that capitalism fears and therefore seeks to eradicate from human beings by individualizing us and making us compete against each other. But as they said, “the love between us was so strong that we were able to save ourselves.”

We call for solidarity, for unity, for those forms of relationship that have historically sustained community life and that today remain our best defense against systems that seek to fragment us. We champion communality as an ethical and political principle. Therefore, we reaffirm that all environmental, territorial, and climate struggles must be based on bonds that reproduce life, recognize traditional knowledge, and defend the land. Our call is to recognize that without land there is no medicine, without rainforest there is no future, without health there are no communities, and without women (Indigenous, Afro-descendant, peasant, urban, elder, youth, and girls) there is no life.