DECLARING FREE TERRITORIES

Friends of the Earth International

COMPILATION OF IDEAS AND EXPERIENCES

2018

GUARANI FAMILY IN THE PROCESS OF RECOVERING LAND

PICTURE: DOUGLAS DE OLIVEIRA FREITAS

Friends of the Earth International

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INTRODUCTION

At the Forests and Biodiversity Program we have been thinking about the multiple ways to stop and expel projects and policies that financialize nature out of our territories. Our thinking process stemming from our meeting in Uganda[1] led us to the need to gather and reconcile shared strategies implemented so far with communities and Indigenous Peoples: some of them more related with national work and its implications in terms of lobbying with local authorities, many others related to the work in the local territory, in addition to important reflections that emerged in terms of international work. We shared experiences about the challenge to explain issues in a simpler way, without losing sight of the critical points that make us reject these projects and make visible the real solutions that are already being implemented by peoples and communities.

One of the ideas that came up was: why not declare our territories free from REDD? We are familiar with the experiences of various FoEI groups that have done the same, for instance, regarding struggles against mining and GMOs. As time went by and as we have begun to work on other issues such as Finacialization of Nature (FN), some groups have also shown interest in declaring our territories free from financialization projects, given that they respond to the same extractivist model. It is important to highlight that in contrast to mining, whose impacts are immediately visible, REDD and FN in general are rather abstract because their impacts are not readily visible. In addition, they are presented as a solution for Nature conservation that even includes money disbursements to carry out this work. These conditions could make it more difficult to declare REDD-free or FN-free territories. In Costa Rica[2], a group of indigenous persons from the indigenous territory of Talamanca, to the south of the country, declared their territory free from REDD. From the beginning they faced several challenges. The main one was to explain how something that is presented as an instrument that would contribute to forest conservation and would include direct payments could entail negative impacts. During this process we saw that this challenge could be successfully overcome because the free-territory declaration would take place in an indigenous territory where forests embody a spiritual and cultural dimension and it is thus easier for people to understand these impacts. In addition, the territory is of the community and the entire community takes care of it. Another issue addressed was indigenous autonomy: where do REDD proposals come from? Is this something that emerges from the Indigenous Peoples themselves or from international organizations that argue that in order to preserve the forest it is necessary to remove all communities away from them? What do Indigenous People want? This kind of questions gave way to important reflection spaces on REDD which included an analysis to identify those responsible for causing climate change and how this type of mechanisms allow big corporations to continue polluting. Finally, the experience of Indigenous People regarding payments for environmental services (PES) in Costa Rica –with REDD being presented as a new type of PES- helped to see that it could bring new problems such as the distribution of potential funds, community division and restrictions to the use of forests. A similar experience is seen with REDDeldía[3] in the forest region of Chiapas.

So we undertook to gather, read and compile ideas based on the work of several of our groups, so they can be replicated elsewhere and enriched. In this way, we will be able to see what it means to declare a territory free from REDD, FN or any other threat, while we share several experiences. This document is not a set of recipes, because declaring a territory free from a threat varies a lot within one country and from one country to the other. What we want is simply to share ideas so that they can be enriched through the work to declare our territories free from policies and threats so that they continue to be filled with our proposals.

1. Forests and Biodiversity Meeting held in Uganda in 2013
2. Personal communication with Mariana Porras of COECOCEIBA-FoE Costa Rica
3. https://grupocartadebelem.wordpress.com/2013/07/15/chiapas-suspendido-el-programa-redd-plus-dice-semahn/

WHAT DOES DECLARING A TERRITORY FREE FROM A THREAT INVOLVE?

Declaring a territory free from a threat is an exercise of autonomy, a way of putting autonomy into practice. This idea is the one that best summarizes and explains the meaning and implications of such a process.

It is a political practice aimed at realizing human rights, especially collective rights -- those that protect us as communities, as people who are part of something more collective, a community. We are not only referring here to the human right to decide in the territories themselves the activities and policies that could exist in them, but also to the human right to timely information, to the necessary time to analyze and understand the information, including according to traditional ways, wherever they exist. The right to citizens participation understood as a process that promotes, allows and respects that communities and their organizations are a fundamental part of the analysis and understanding of any elements that enable making a final decision about an activity or policy that affects their territories. The right to autonomy and self-determination are key since without a territory there is no autonomy and self-determination, and neither autonomy nor self-determination can be exercised or realized without a territory. In addition, autonomy and self-determination in a territory cannot be exercised if they violate the autonomy and self-determination -and other human rights- of other territories. Thus, declaring a territory free from threats is closely linked to the practice, realization and respect of human rights.

The work or process to declare a territory free from a threat is based on a decision taken by a community, peoples or organization to defend their territory from any activity or policy that is considered a violation, obstacle, weakening or erosion of a way of living or development model, that is intended for their territory.

The movement, as any other, is built through alliances between different organizations and communities. It can be based on the proposal of an organization or community, that with ideas shows that an activity or policy causes negative impacts in different spheres of the daily life of communities. Usually, these activities or policies do not emerge from the community itself but are imposed by government authorities, whether through authorizations to carry out an activity granted to private actors such as corporations, or the implementation of a public policy.

In some cases, the declaration of a free territory can go hand in hand with legal mechanisms, but that is not always or necessarily the case in others. Such a declaration involves loads of consistent information dissemination, capacity building, communication, lobby, alliance building... and getting it is only a first step because the declaration as such does not ensure anything, even in those cases where it is protected by a legal mechanism. The next necessary step is working to enforce it and defend it. Thus, organizational processes that allow to obtain this declaration should be permanent.

That is why it is key, beyond declaring the territory free from a threat, to establish among the public opinion and in the movements' own consciousness the political legitimacy of declaring a territory free from a threat. Meanwhile, it is necessary to establish its social, ethical, moral, ancestral legitimacy, as a matter of global environmental awareness, as a human right. Ultimately, to assert that we are right in doing so. This will be key to defend this political practice from the attacks it will permanently undergo in the political dispute for the control of territories.

SAM - Friends of the Earth Malaysia

COMMON ELEMENTS

Declaring a 'territory free from' a threat takes place, according to experience, in three different moments or instances:

> **As preventive measure:** prior to implementation of the (mega) project or public policy. The easiest and toughest moment. Although interests are not strongly rooted on the territory, in general, the conflict takes place once the effects are suffered;

> **During implementation:** when the investment is already underway in one of its stages; this implies many legal and media battles, mobilizations, ...;

> **During consolidation:** once it is completed and under operation. When the plantation, dam or mining project, or the already advanced infrastructure work is driven away and expelled.

In any of these three moments, the strategies to arrive at and obtain the declaration and its consequences have been very different. However, some common elements that we can highlight in the processes to declare a territory free from a threat include:

Preventive strategy: this entails understanding and sharing clear and sufficient information on the impacts of the projects in the territories. This will allow us to generate decision making processes where hasted action or action with lack of information about what we are fighting can be avoided. This preventive strategy is important because while most of the times the projects or policies are already in place and ongoing in our territories, with this strategy we provide the necessary information that allows to see how this project or policy is linked with extractivist processes.

If the threat is known and the idea is to work against it, it is because we are defending something that we want to preserve: a way of life, rights, elements that are part of this territory... This part involves a propositional agenda that is implicit to the declaration and sometimes it is made invisible by those who reject it. With this we mean that the process of work to declare a territory free from a threat is above all a propositional and mainly 'positive-note' work ('for' rather than 'against'), one that aims to preserve and protect the territory and the ways of living of peoples and communities from the effects of a looting model. It implies generating alternatos, new ways of living well locally, of living well together, the appropriation or reappropriation of the territory, sustainable management of the commons (water, biomass, air, landscape, energy and many more).

Information for transformation: knowing the threat to the territory is extremely important because it implies living, analyzing and politically assessing whether or not to launch the process towards a free territory declaration. We know that this is not an easy decision, given the huge amount of work it entails. However, decision making with awareness and information about the actions needed to defend the territory are extremely important.

Organization in networks: we need to consider organizing ourselves in a broad manner, that is, within the territory and also outside of it, always striving for a broad social representation and without losing sight of the fact that in these struggles we require the support of many people and sectors that also struggle from their trenches and positions in favor of life projects, communality and land. This form of organization enables us to show that there is strength, wisdom and conviction underpinning our defense strategy and proposals. Alliance building also helps us better understand other problems and connect to other struggles, and build a common work agenda towards the future.

Media strategies: development of a communications strategy to explain to other organizations and individuals why declaring the territory free from whatever threatens it is needed. This work involves the production of different types of communications material, work with the media, with the general public, addressing specific social actors that we need actively on our side, among others. All of this to make sure that the central message of why we want to declare the territory free from threats permeates on people and reaches people in a massive way. The tools could be: brochures, leaflets, audiovisual materials, radio spots, use of photos among many others.

Political strategy: There are different levels of action: from local to international action. Local work: a grassroots type of work carried out door to door to explain to every person inhabiting the territory, in case they don´t already know, the basis of the work in favor of a declaration, and what they can contribute for it to be successful. These visits also enrich the proposal, more people join the movement, and solidarity is enhanced and work is multiplied; it can also be done through community assemblies and spaces where we can provide information about new incoming projects.

If legal mechanisms are chosen, then the work is different. Sometimes, movements seek that a public authority declares the territory as free through a legal act. This requires conducting lobby work to convince decision makers, sometimes carrying out seminars, participating in discussion panels, activities to explain the importance of and reasons for such a decision. This work also implies work meetings, not only with those who will make the decision, but also with other actors that we think are important. It also involves analyzing materials...and much more. Many times, if not all, mobilization is essential to put pressure on those who will make the decision and to include more organizations and people that will defend the declaration once it has been approved. We often speak of free, prior and informed consent, which also implies that it needs to be adequate to the culture of the community where the project will take place.

CEIBA Friends of the Earth Guatemala

While this is an important right, sometimes it is considered that it only involves undertaking a consultation, but not necessarily requiring compliance with its result. This happens because governments think that they are the ones entitled to make the final decision, when this is not true. At the same time, communities are often not given sufficient time to analyze, at their own pace, together with people they trust, the information they receive, in accordance with their discussion and decision-making traditions. Thus, sometimes, this instrument and right can be used in a negative way.

Mobilization as a strategy to show that the (proposed) declaration does not reflect the vagaries of a small group, but the will of the entire community and territory. Taking the streets is always important, since it can help include more people and to deepen the knowledge about why it is necessary to work more and more.

Once the **declaration is obtained, it is necessary to defend it**. If the declaration is a political action, then all previous activities, and many more, will be maintained. In addition, it is necessary to follow up with public authorities so that they do not grant any permit or pass any policy that weakens the declaration. If the declaration was obtained through a public authority, then we need to remain vigilant so that no other decision brings the declaration down.

ELEMENTS THAT ARISE FROM CONCRETE EXPERIENCES

As we have already mentioned, there is no recipe to declare a territory free from a threat. While we can point out some common elements, as we did above, each struggle process involves new elements from which we can learn and enrich our work. Below we will make reference to some of them, based on concrete processes.

In Mesoamerica, the M4 (Meso American Movement against the Mining&Extractive Model) agreed to use the declaration of territories free from threats[4] as one of its strategies since 2011. This was a political agreement in the framework of the Prevention strategy to have territories declared free from threats before projects arrive. This involves prevention, instead of reaction. With this we see that the declaration is part of a broader strategy and that it can be used both before and after a threat to the territory is established.

Being a movement that exists in several countries, the agreement included that each country would implement it according to its legal, political and cultural conditions. Thus, in Guatemala, it would be carried out through community consultations; in El Salvador, through municipal structures; and in Mexico, based on legal agrarian settlements or through political agreements by peasant and indigenous organizations.

This work has implied organizing assemblies, workshops, meetings and advocacy work so that the agrarian settlements or organizations declare --to the extent they are allowed by existing laws, or in political terms-- Mining-free and Dams-free territories. Depending on the region, there are organizations that also work on freeing territories from other megaprojects, thus working to declare territories free from dams, mines, GMOs, everything that affects human rights, against the corporate appropriation of territories. This strategy has contributed with educational-informative-visual material that identifies the territorial campaign.

4. Personal communication with Gustavo Castro, Otros Mundos - Friends of the Earth Mexico. Everything related to the M4 here is a result of this conversation.

In some territories, declaring the territory free from threats, whether it is the result of a political decision by the movement or a legal decision, does not mean that corporations will stop dividing, buying, corrupting, exploring, among other things. This is why the M4 considers it is important to establish vigilance groups to oversee compliance with the decision.

At the same time, different governments, such as the Mexican government, are passing laws that criminalize protests, social mobilizations and resistance.

Based on the M4 experience, we can see that declaring a territory free from threats can be preventive and thus avoid the arrival of the destructive activity. Or at least, it allows having informed people and active organizations and movements in the defense of the territory that will prevent this activity from becoming a reality. This happens because the affected community knows the impacts and threats of this activity. The work to declare territories free from threats will depend on the existing conditions of the movement and the situation it has to face, thus political assessment is essential. The work with communities is the most critical one, and in the long run it is the key to maintain the declaration in place overtime. It is important to highlight that the work to declare territories free from threats is based on a political agreement between organizations and movements involved, and thus, in this way, it is given importance when prioritizing actions and implementing activities while committing to collective actions towards a common goal. In the beginning of the process to declare a territory free from threats and when analyzing the specific problem, we see that this is not only about mining, but dams, GMOs, and any activity installed in the territories of communities that seeks to generate profits for private actors. All those activities are part of a model where communities and territories only exist to satisfy the interests of those who benefit from the model itself. So this type of processes to declare territories free from threats also contributes to generate a critical perspective on the development model, to identify oppression and its causes while building at the same time a model that serves the communities' interests.

In the Mesoamerican region and in addition to the work carried out by the M4, we find the following examples of declarations of territories free from threats. In Honduras, it was possible to declare territories free from mining in at least ten municipalities, through open municipal assemblies. In Guatemala, following consultation processes organized by the communities themselves that resulted in more than a million people voting throughout the country, most of the territory was declared free from mining[5]. In Nueva Trinidad, El Salvador, and through an official process, almost 100 per cent of voters decided against mining activity. This was the third consultation carried out in this country[6]. Eight communities in Tapachula, Chiapas, declared their territories free from mining and dams[7]. On November 11, 2014, in Chicomuselo, Chiapas, several organizations establish an Organizations' Front that declared the territory free from mining and dams as a political declaration that is part of the struggle. This same declaration was made in eight other municipalities in Chiapas, which was thereafter ratified in an assembly with the participation of several communities and a notary that took note[8]. The Escuintla municipality in Chiapas was also declared free from mining[9]. The same happened in Xochitepec and Miacatlán municipalities in Morelos State with regards to mining[10]. On December 8, 2014, 39 communal ejido structures, commons, and social, peasant and indigenous organizations represented by their legal authorities and delegates from agrarian settlements from the municipalities of Tapachula, Motozintla, Huixtla, Huehuetán and San Cristóbal de las Casas joined by different national organizations declared that their lands and territories are free from hydroelectric dams and mining exploitation. At the same time, they called on federal, state and municipal authorities to respect this decision and cancel any permit they have granted to these activities in these territories. They stated that the people have the right to define the best use of the lands and territories to achieve the best living conditions and respect the human rights of indigenous people. They also called on other communities to declare their territories free from threats.

An important case to highlight is the one of the Montaña de Guerrero region in Mexico, where there was an organizational process through the Council of Agrarian Authorities for the defense of the territory and against mining and the biosphere reserve. Their members are agrarian authorities from nine municipalities and others that support them. Every month or every two months we have informational fora in the towns whose authorities have granted concessions to mining companies, which include the peoples where the government wants to establish a Biosphere Reserve. This process has allowed to have information processes in 17 agrarian settlements that resulted in assemblies where the people have rejected mining and the Biosphere Reserve officially (including REDD+ processes and Payments for Environmental Services). Moreover, information exchange work is ongoing that also includes the strengthening of internal regulations of each of the agrarian settlements, thus incorporating other legal mechanisms that contribute to avoid the establishment of companies[11].

The Mexican Network of People Affected by Mining (REMA) estimates that around 2,000 communities have been protected against mining under the slogan of mining-free territories.

5. See http://upsidedownworld.org/main/honduras-archives-46/5170-territories-free-of-mining-on-the-rise-in-honduras-
6. See http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/30189-salvadoran-communities-declare-territory-free-of-mining
7. See http://www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2014/11/27/declaran-pobladores-de-tapachula-territorios-libres-de-mineria-y-represas-3386.html
8. In http://desinformemonos.org/2013/12/en-chiapas-se-declaran-territorios-libres-de-represas-y-mineras/
9. See http://movimientom4.org/2015/06/municipio-de-escuintla-chiapas-declarado-territorio-libre-de-mineria/
10. See http://otrosmundoschiapas.org/index.php/temas-analisis/32-32-mineria/1909-rema-los-pueblos-en-resistencia-siguen-impulsando-territorios-libres-de-mineria
11. https://es.scribd.com/document/258326198/Guia-de-Las-Resistencias-Comunitarias

When several types of corporate and investment interests affect a territory, communities tend to declare "territories free from megaprojects", including dams, mining, REDD, GMOs, oil pipelines, gas pipelines, fracking, large highways and many more. This allowed, in the case of Mexico, to give visibility to the struggle and success of megaprojects-free territories during a meeting organized by REMA in 2016. This strengthened the hope that it is possible to do something different, something that benefits us.

In all these examples we see that the political agreements reached in each of these communities were a key building block in the work to make the declaration a reality. This work in the end, as mentioned above, is an exercise to validate and respect the right to autonomy. In most cases, official authorities are not involved, it is the result of the collective action of organizations, communities and movements. It is an act where territories are declared free from threats and people work for it as mentioned above. It means taking over the territory itself. And this appropriation validates and gives live to various human rights. In other cases, mechanisms and tools from the legal system such as local authorities are used --which is very useful when they work for communities-- or the public's trust in a notary that provides formality to the political agreements made by communities. All of them demand respect to decisions made.

In Spain, Friends of the Earth has conducted a campaign to declare municipalities free from fracking. The goal of this campaign is to raise awareness among local authorities about the huge impacts on land, water, people and global warming, derived from the use of fracking. With this campaign, we expect to contribute to the rest of popular initiatives that aim to achieve a complete ban against this technique in our territories[12]. The 2nd International Summit - Integration Assembly for Territories free from Fracking took place on May 8 and 9. 2015. The Plenary of Aragon's Legislatures demanded from the government, at the request of Aragon's Board (Chunta Aragonesista - CHA), that this community be declared a "fracking-free territory" to avoid the use of fracking in the extraction of non-conventional gas[13]. The Adelaide River community in Australia was the first to declare itself as a gas field free area, and it plans to work with other communities, around 350, that work to stop the expansion of this industry in their jurisdictions. This action is taken to stop the impacts of fracking and protect other types of local industries, against the government's stubborn support to fracking.

The fight against fracking in the Netherlandas was won, partly by the declaration of free municipalities. Several of them, when issuing these political statements -since the competition to authorize fracking is from the national government- made the national authorities see that the resistance was strong. In this fight, maps were used to show areas where the permit was requested, as well as others where fracking could happen.

Luka Tomac - Friends of the Earth Croatia

Luka Tomac - Friends of the Earth Croatia

12. See http://municipioslibresdefracking.org/
13. See http://www.ecologistasenaccion.org/article24616.html

In this way, the dimension of the problem obtained its fair dimension since the activity could be developed in many places. At the same time, there was work with local authorities on issues ranging from having more stringent regulations and support demonstrations by local groups against fracking. In parallel, the organization of local authorities, developed lobby work at the capital and seeing that these local politicians were in favor of the fight against fracking, made the national authorities declare a moratorium until 2023.[14]

In Australia, there´s a good case against fracking. The Gasfield Free Community movement began in a small town called "The Channon" in the Northern Rivers of New South Wales, Australia. People began hearing about unconventional gasfields and fracking, and about the impact it was having on ordinary people in United States and Queensland, Australia. The gas companies began putting forward proposals for gas drilling in their area. The community realised they would have to act if they were to protect themselves.

They ran a public meeting, talking about the impacts of fracking and notifying people of a loophole in australian law that gives them the right to refuse to negotiate with gas companies (although those companies still reserves the ultimate right to enter land). At the meeting they came to the conclusion that they could not just refuse to negotiate on their own property, because a fracking operation on an adjacent property could still harm their water and air. They would have to refuse to negotiate together. So they asked the crowd a simple questions "Do you want to declare our roads and lands gasfield free?" It was an important moment for the community, because before then people had been worried that their neighbours were not as concerned about the potential impacts, and would sign contracts with gas companies to make money. But nearly everyone in the town hall put up their hand to say "Yes". It gave the community courage to fight, and trust in each other. But as not everyone in the community was in the hall, they decided to make the survey official by going to see every landholder in the area to record their answer officially.

Community members then went door to door along their streets - letting people know about the threats of the unconventional gas industry and asking them that simple question - "Do you want to declare your roads and lands gasfield free? Yes, no or Unsure?" The results were astounding, with over 95% of the community answering that they wanted their roads and lands to remain gasfield free.
In order to affirm and celebrate the result, they orgnaised a special event on the town sporting oval to declare the area 'Gasfield Free." At the declaration events, the communities announced themselves "Gasfield Free - Protected by Community". The events were held as a celebration of community: of what they had achieved in the survey but also of everything they loved about their community and their lands. They handed the survey results to local dignitaries, be they mayors of townships or state politicians.

The declaration was not just a survey or a petition, it was a declaration that the community would do whatever it took to stop the industry getting a foothold in the area. Even if that meant participating in non-violent direct action and risking arrest. They pledged to be non-violent but non-negotiable.

Friends of the Earth Australia

14. Communication with Peter Kodde, Milieudefensie – Friends of the Earth Netherlands, november 17, 2017

This "Gasfield Free Community" declaration process began to go viral. Towns all around held their own town meetings, surveys and declaration events. Each declaration process was different, reflecting the individual character of each community. They then formed an alliance to work together to protect the region. They knew that as soon as the industry started in one area, they all became more vulnerable. They began looking beyond their own backyards and the motto became, protect your town, protect the region. Ultimately, over 400 communities in Australia declared themselves coal and gasfield free. For some, the declaration was enough to stop gas companies entering the area. For others, they had to band together in blockades to stop the companies gaining access. Together, they created a movement that also campaigned for the regions to be legislated gasfield free by the government. Some areas gained victories of legislated bans, for other the community declarations protected them from invasion by fracking gas companies on the ground.[15] A video of this struggle can be seen at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7C4ousqB4E

As shown here, many communities in different countries are struggling against the extractivist model, of which mining is a good example of how looting and destruction take place. An alliance between all communities that declare their territories free from threats contributes to the exchange of experiences and to strengthen a common liberating identity.

The struggle against GMOs is a good example of how the declaration of territories free from threats has been used. "A GMOs-free territory is the best example of community self-determination in favor of the most fundamental rights of farmers and in defense of peasants' seeds. Because peasant seeds have been improved and grown by our ancestors for thousands of years. Territories free from patented plants and under intellectual property systems such as GM plants are one of the best ways to protect farmers, almost on the verge of extinction due to the imposition of the agroindustrial model. The exchange of seeds among farmers is one of the practices that would be destroyed by GM plants and their systems of patents on life."[16]

In Costa Rica, the struggle against GMOs managed to declare 78 out of 81 cantons in the country free from GMOs, through agreements with local governments. At the same time, Communal Native Seeds Protection Centers were created as a way of strengthening the declaration[17]. On March 21, 2005, the Municipality of Paraíso de Cártago in Costa Rica was declared free from GMOs. It was the first municipality in the country to do so. They were followed by Santa Cruz, San Isidro de Heredia, Nicoya, Abangares. The declarations are the result of the joint work between community organizations, technical information provided by other organizations with more expert knowledge, and the Municipal Councils on which the efforts were targeted in order to obtain these declarations from state institutions. This work at the same time vindicates the role of local governments, or puts it up for discussion. The entire process is seen as an opportunity to discuss the issue which communities and organizations seek to be freed from, for awareness raising and to defend a way of living. It is not only about the declaration, but the work that comes afterwards to maintain this declaration and make it a reality in the territory, that is, it is not only about the municipal agreement obtained. GMOs-free territories go hand in hand with struggles for native seeds and also agroecological practices, the exchange of seeds and their protection outside intellectual property mechanisms. It is also a struggle for keeping agriculture and food under community control, with production forms based on the diversity of small-scale crops that are also the form of production with which the world is fed and is kept healthy at the same time.

The two previous paragraphs clearly illustrate that the struggle to free territories is especially a propositional, transformative struggle. When fighting against GMOs, we defend a production form that is opposed to agribusiness, that strengthens traditional knowledge. It does not only oppose GMOs but also intellectual property over forms of life and also the use and consumption of agrotoxics that is part of the package. With the example of Costa Rica, we discussed the role of local governments: do they exist to follow orders and policies given by the national government or can they become an official space that defends the rights of local communities since they are closer to them? Is a local government able to assert its autonomy by defending the political positions of the local communities it supposedly represents?

In Colombia, as part of a campaign to defend biodiversity and food sovereignty, the declaration of GMOs-free territories was identified as a way to prevent them from entering the territory in any form, with the goal of protecting native seeds and strengthening food sovereignty and health. They conceived this declaration as a series of processes that added up in the end. Thus, some could use legal methods, others could not, some could resort to local authorities and some could not, this could take place in the lands of individuals or beyond. All of this added up to the consolidation of a development proposal, a vision of how development in the region should be. This work implied capacity building, training and many other types of work. In March 2012, the Semillas de Identidad campaign in Colombia launched a handbook to guide the processes of declarations where they identified these important steps: identifying the problem, capacity building, debates with communities, identification of alternatives, dissemination, identification of actors and allies, design of projects and programs to recover seeds, drafting internal regulations and rules of procedure,

15. Communication with Chloe Aldenhoven, Friends of the Earth Australia, november 27, 2017.
16. See: http://www.ecoportal.net/Eco-Noticias/En_la_defensa_de_nuestras_semillas_territorios_!_Libres_de_transgenicos_ya_!
17. See http://kioscosambientales.ucr.ac.cr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=671:territorios-libres-de-transgenicos-en-costa-rica-y-establecimiento-

follow up and control and institutional management.
The example above repeats and increases the number of tasks that need to be carried out to declare a territory free from threats.

With the forthcoming example we wish to point out that the processes to declare territories free from threats have been adopted not only by communities, organizations and movements, but also by state institutions. Thus, at the beginning of 2006, in the European Union over 170 European regions and 4500 local governments or institutions declared themselves as GMOs-Free Areas, located in at least 25 European countries, and their numbers are constantly increasing. In addition, Europe has a network of 64 GMOs-free regions[18]. To be member of the network it is necessary to be a regional or local authority, if the former does not exist. It must have decision making bodies that are able to take political decisions that are recognized by Member States. The intention to become a member should be expressed through a decision of the body and follow all necessary procedures, and the network should be informed of such decision. With this example we illustrate that there are as well state bodies that follow formal procedures that have created networks to struggle for the declaration of territories free from threats.

With the examples of territories free from mining, fracking and GMOs we see that there is a common actor against which the work is carried out: corporations. We identified that La Via Campesina[19] considers it important to work for the declaration of territories free from transnational corporations, which are the ones that promote the monoculture model, affecting peoples' rights.

The strategy to declare territories free from threats was also taken up by the Peoples Treaty[20], a process to hold corporations accountable for human rights violations perpetrated by them, and to which Friends of the Earth International has contributed:

> Defending territories and community rights against extractivism and green economy.
>
> (...) Environmental justice struggles to free territories and defend them from land grabbing by corporations articulate the resistance of affected communities by blocking large scale projects, dirty energy, plantations or exploitation of mineral resources, uniting them towards national and global mobilizations for public policies and international agreements. Based on international legislation such as the International Labor Organization's Convention 169, Indigenous Peoples, local communities and local authorities defend peoples sovereignty over their territories and the right to determine their own development paths".

The struggles to free our territories are political processes that demand a lot of work. It is not easy to obtain such a declaration from national authorities. It is neither easy for movements to make such a declaration. In both cases, it is also difficult to maintain them overtime. And despite the difficulties faced in this work, there are many communities that together with their social movements and organizations have been declaring their territories free from threats for many years. These shows that this work is possible and that it is being carried out. Through these type of processes it is possible to build new paradigms and new worlds.

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18. See http://gmofree-euroregions.regione.marche.it/Home.aspx
19. http://cloc-viacampesina.net/es/component/content/article/34-demo-category/288-rocio-alorda-mmmclocomunicacion
20. International Peoples Treaty on the Control of Transnational Corporations, page 41

DECLARING
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COMPILATION OF IDEAS AND EXPERIENCES

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