

AWA WOMEN SPREADING THE WORD

For a 'good living' free from
gender-based violence in Colombia



Awa women spreading the word

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Introduction

We, the Inkal Awa people, are people of the mountains, people of the jungle. A people made up of 31,000 people living in the jungles of the southern Colombian Pacific. Of these, more than 15,000 of us are women, and have always been defending life and the territory. Together with our comrades and our family, we take up a struggle to continue to survive physically and culturally in our territory, Katsa Su, which is thoroughly attacked and damaged by economic interests and the violence of legal and illegal armed groups.

As young Awa women leaders, we belong to the Department of Women and Family of UNIPA (Awa People's Indigenous Unit [*Unidad Indígena del Pueblo Awá*]), an organisation that in 2021 will be celebrating 31 years of struggle and resistance. Ever since then, we have been walking the path initiated by our elders.

Our work as women has focused on protecting women, girls, and men, to guarantee our 'good living' as a people. Many of our fellow Awa women carry out important work leading communities, raising their own products and minor species that enable their families' sustainability. We also belong to the indigenous guard; we work to enhance female leadership by carrying the staff of command, and to strengthen the cultural network, our music, and our language: Awapit. In this effort, we rediscover our identity and recognise our own practices as indigenous. For this reason, it is imperative to continue transmitting the cultural legacy of our people, in the context of increasing violence.

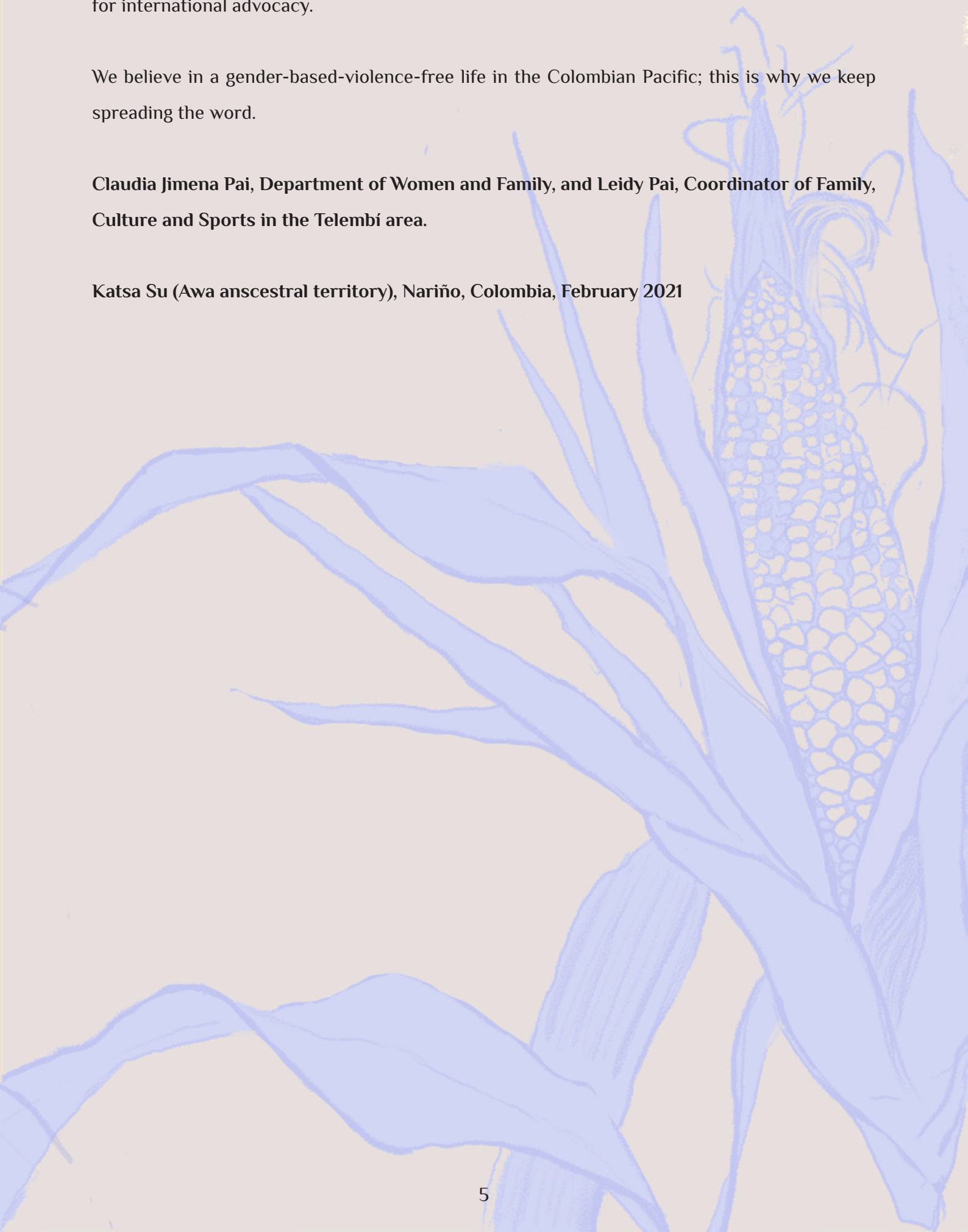
The work you are about to read is part of different strategies and projects developed by the Department of Women and Family to address the prevention of gender-based violence against Awa women and girls, in a context of armed conflict, but also in family and public spaces. It complements previous monitoring work in the territory, diagnoses, and studies that we have carried out to update and detail our situation as women and as an indigenous people. It is a tool that explains who we are, and what our struggle is about. What's more, it broadens the voices, views, and perspectives on our situation in order to encourage responses, for the protection of

indigenous women and girls from the indigenous administration and the State's institutions, and for international advocacy.

We believe in a gender-based-violence-free life in the Colombian Pacific; this is why we keep spreading the word.

Claudia Jimena Pai, Department of Women and Family, and Leidy Pai, Coordinator of Family, Culture and Sports in the Telembí area.

Katsa Su (Awa ancestral territory), Nariño, Colombia, February 2021



What do you have in your hands?

The document you hold in your hands is a part of a collective work based on transnational solidarity with the Awa people from Colombia. It is an awareness-raising and dissemination material in which Awa women and the Awa People's Indigenous Unit (UNIPA | *Unidad Indígena del Pueblo Awá*) tell their story, their worldview, their *wat usan* ('sweet living' or 'good living') and their resistance to the penetration of logics based on accumulation through dispossession, which leaves bare the ancestral lands and generates disharmony and violence. Violence against those residing in Katsa Su and finding themselves in the crossfire of armed actors, drug traffickers, armies, and multinational and extractivism-related interests. This violence is expressed on women's bodies and transgresses against their daily lives and their dream to freely move about Katsa Su through aggressive masculinity.

This proposal is a part of the project *Peacekeepers: a strategy for prevention and protection against gender-based violence on Inkal Awa girls and women in Nariño, Colombia*, funded by the Catalan Agency for Cooperation to the Development (ACCD | *Agència Catalana de Cooperació al Desenvolupament*) and carried out by the Movement for Peace, Disarmament and Freedom (MPDL | *Movimiento por la Paz, el Desarme y la Libertad*) and the Observatory for Indigenous People's Autonomy and Rights in Colombia (OADPI | *Observatorio por la Autonomía y los Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas de Colombia*). Its content was elaborated jointly by the team of UNIPA's Department of Women and Family in Colombia and OADPI in Barcelona. Thus, the information was provided thanks to the knowledge and research work led by the Department of Women and Family and the other sections of UNIPA. This contribution with Awa's own knowledge combines with charts and illustrations made by Laia Motta and interviews with Awa female leaders conducted by OADPI's team.

The document is divided into several sections. The first one focuses on the Department of Women and Family history and of UNIPA itself since its creation 30 years ago. The second section is centred on Awa's land, Katsa Su, as a disputed territory. It aims to point out the main aggressions suffered in the area since the 1990's and collective victimisations. A third section brings out the gender-based violence endured by Awa girls and women in the context of armed conflicts. The next units contrast the impact undergone by the Awa communities, with their resilience as pro-

tectors of the rainforest, as people from the mountains and as active individuals that generate strategies facing *wisha*, the harm coming from the outside. Awa female leaders' speech reveals how, through the sense of community and the connection with nature, Awa women and the Awa people as a whole put up their resistance. The last part of this work provides information on health and Awa's responses in the context of the current pandemic, as well as information about the rights and recognition that the Awa people have obtained in recent years.

Moreover, this collective work aims to be a working tool for advocacy and international solidarity, to invite organisations, institutions, collectives and those engaged with native peoples and their women's struggle —to all those willing to stop the physical and cultural dispossession and extermination of the Awa people— to approach, get to know and collaborate on this matter.

The OADPI team

Barcelona, February 2021

Thirty years ago, Inkal Awa's fight and resistance path began

Formation of the UNIPA | One step further for an organisational process that had already taken root in the territory. Although, the UNIPA was not recognised as a territorial authority by Colombia until eight years later.

1990

Programme Women, Family | A process at an early stage begins to take shape. In the beginning, UNIPA's main demands were related to land, education and health. The Awa women started to position their struggles and rights as a collective matter that sustains the families and the community. Their work is based on the identity of the Awa women, linked to the Awapit language, and to the weaving of traditional baskets and utensils, while defending spaces of political participation and representation.

1991-1993

Coordination Women and Family | Over time, the programme changes its name to gain space and importance within the UNIPA. Justice is promoted for cases of gender-based violence.

2008

First meeting for the good living of Awa women, men, and family. In this period, several meetings, events and *mingas*¹ are held. Step by step, the Department is gaining strength and its work continues to generate safe environments against gender-based violence, but also to make it visible, thanks to the celebration of the Day for non-violence against girls and women, or to the *minga* "Intercultural Law of Origen for the defence of the way of life and for the good cohabitation of Awa women and men".

2012

Department of Women and Family | Participation in organisational, communal, and institutional spaces is promoted. Work is being done to ensure that all women are aware of their rights and that they are well respected. Limitations are detected in the indigenous justice system for cases of gender-based violence.

2016-2018

A community strategy for prevention and protection against gender-based violence is activated. The Department of Women and Family carries out a self-diagnosis of gender-based violence in different communities, showing figures, risks and vulnerabilities, as well as the strength that the indigenous justice and self-protection strategies can have.

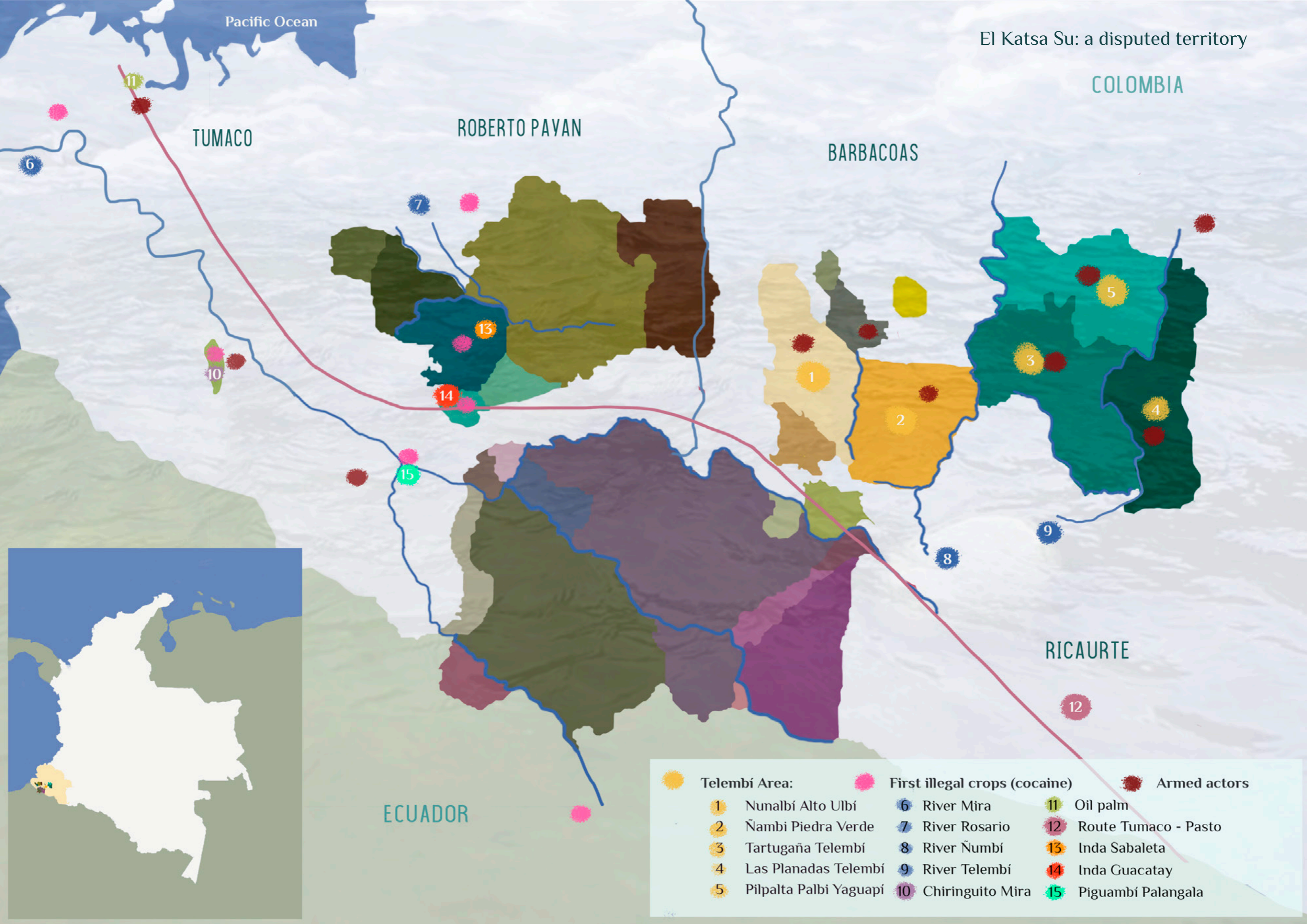
2019

Radio programme *Semillas de vida - Guardianas de Paz*, 'Seeds of life - Peacekeepers' | In the midst of a pandemic and in the framework of the project *Guardianas de Paz*, a radio strategy is developed. It provides tools for prevention and the protection of Awa women and girls against gender-based violence and promotes self-care during the pandemic. It is broadcast on the indigenous community radio station *INKALTAS AWAPIT* ('Awas' voice').

2020

¹ For the Awa people and other indigenous peoples in South America, a minga is a gathering of the community members to carry out collective work for their benefit as a group.

El Katsa Su: a disputed territory



Telembí Area:		First illegal crops (cocaine)		Armed actors	
1	Nunalbí Alto Ulbí	6	River Mira	11	Oil palm
2	Ñambi Piedra Verde	7	River Rosario	12	Route Tumaco - Pasto
3	Tartugaña Telembí	8	River Ñumbí	13	Inda Sabaleta
4	Las Planadas Telembí	9	River Telembí	14	Inda Guacatay
5	Pilpalta Palbi Yaguapí	10	Chiringuito Mira	15	Piguambí Palangala

“Violence is a spirit that came [from outside], and that alters our thoughts and essence. So, the territory, the people, the authorities —everyone— must be harmonised, to counteract the spirit. When something happens to one of us, we are all affected spiritually, knowing or not what happened”²

The Awa People is recognised as a collective subject of rights and also of reparation³ by different organisms, institutions, and judicial bodies⁴ given that —as indigenous people and as ancestral territory they have been affected by the actions of armed actors and by the activities of transnational corporations, megaprojects, mining activities, hydrocarbon extractivism, large-scale palm oil production and illicit crop⁵ for more than 30 years. These affectations were partly due to the physical and geographical conditions of the area.

In Colombia, the Awa ancestral land, or Katsa Su, is located in the departments of Nariño and Putumayo. This territory is strategic given that it has access to the Pacific Ocean and shares a porous border with Ecuador, these areas surrounding the border are used for the transport of weapons and explosives, and for the commercialisation of narcotics, which makes Katsa Su a valuable territory, source of disputes for the different armed actors. In addition to that, the territory is considered to be of great value for its exploitation, on the one hand, because of its forest resources and, on the other hand, because of its soils. These features have led to the installation of mining infrastructure and the development of megaprojects such as oil palm intense cultivation.

Historically, both strategic and extractivism-related interests have coincided in Katsa Su. For example, part of the Awa community identifies the period between 1981 and 1990 as a period of reconfiguration of the guerrillas and in which illicit crops for cocaine production and oil palm monoculture arrived. They also relate the activities around oil palm to asset laundering from drug trafficking and the consolidation of the paramilitary group “la Escoba”. The Ombudsman’s Office of Colombia actually recognises that, since their arrival, the armed actors have had an impact on the human right situations of the Awa People and that their interest in controlling the cocaine economy has created problems such as the gradual destruction of the lands, the increase in violence and the social and cultural decomposition of the Awa people.

According to the National Information Network Register of Colombia (*Registro de la Red Nacional de Información*), between 1 January 1985 and 1 January 2020, in the department of Nariño, 36,666 indigenous persons from seven native peoples have been declared victims of the armed conflict and, in the department of Putumayo, 32,401. Based on the information collected in Victims Unit of Colombia’s registry, UNIPA estimates that 8,882 Awa were victims between 1987 and 2018 in Nariño. Specifically, the organisation estimates the declared and recognised cases as following: 775 cases of homicide; 286 cases of threatening; 205 cases of forced disappearance; 6,339 cases of forced displacement; 669 cases of mass displacement; 94 cases of

abandonment or dispossession of lands; 276 terrorist acts; 16 crimes against sexual integrity; 27 cases of personal injury; 105 cases of anti-personnel; 22 cases of kidnapping; 8 cases of under-age recruitment and 59 cases of loss of property.

In the context of the current global pandemic, this violence has intensified. Between February and December 2020, UNIPA has denounced through their reports 26 cases of assassination, harassment and threatening against Awa leaders, 4 massacres, 4 attacks, 2 mass displacements of approximately 140 people in total, and the presence of anti-personnel mines in the territory. All those offences weaken the Awa people spiritually, culturally and organisationally. The entity also warns of the failure to act by the Colombian State, despite the fact that the order 004/2009 of the Constitutional Court of Colombia warned that the Awa People are at serious risk of physical and cultural extinction.

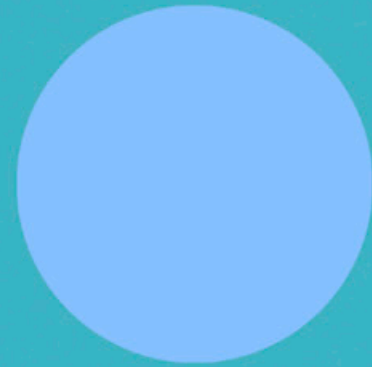
Finally, it is worth stressing that this same territory, where foreign actors have intervened with warlike, economics and extractivism-related interests, is where the Awa people live, communities that have developed multiple strategies to defend good living in Katsa Su and preserve their culture. The defence of these values is precisely one factor that gives rise to the population's victimisation. However, many of the dynamics resulting from plunder, drug trafficking and war have penetrated the community and have altered the harmony in the territory, within the community, but also within the families. One example is the influence of factors —such as violence by armed groups against women, the dynamics of drug trafficking and alcohol consumption— on the incidence of violence that men from the community perpetrate against Awa women.

2 Interview excerpt from the report *Acercamiento a las afectaciones psicosociales e impactos colectivos de hechos victimizantes en el marco del conflicto armado con enfoque de género de los 5 resguardos priorizados por el proyecto CODHES-UNIPA* (UNIPAA, 2019, 6).

3 Literal translation of the term *sujeto colectivo de derechos*, which according to 1991's Constitution of Colombia grants certain indigenous peoples a legal status in which their rights are recognised as a group, not as individuals. | Auto SRVBIT- Case 002- 079, 12 November 2019, Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP).

4 Art 88 CP Colombia, Sentence T-380 of 1993 from the Constitutional Court of Colombia, Auto 004, 2009 Constitutional Court.

5 Report OADPI *¿Paz para quién? Defensa del territorio y minería en Colombia*, article about the Awa People (Morelló, 2017, 136).



Arrival of illicit crops and palm cultivation, and expansion of armed groups

- Arrival of illicit crops and palm cultivation, and expansion of armed groups
- Planting of coca for illicit use
- Monoculture of oil palm, used for laundering drug trafficking assets
- Reinforcement of the paramilitary group "La Escoba" due to the arrival of oil palm production

1981-1988

Aggravation of the armed conflict

1999-2004

- *Plan Colombia*: fumigation of crops for illicit use
- Consolidation of paramilitarism in the block 'Liberators of the South' of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC)
- Strong presence of AUC and denunciation of the indigenous peoples as guerrilleros
- Between 2000 and 2002, 62 homicides. This is the first peak of violence for the Awa people, related to the defence and democratic policies of former Colombian President Uribe and to the consolidation of the 'mobile columns' of the FARC-EP

Period of demobilisation of the Liberators of the South (AUC), creation of the Post-Demobilisation Groups (GAPD), strengthening of other criminal gangs and disputes over territorial control

2005-2010

- Creation of the organisation *New Generation and Black Eagles* by the paramilitaries
- Increased militarisation by the Colombian State
- FARC- EP: 'Plan Rebirth'
 - Guerrilla war
 - Anti-personnel landmines
 - Alliance with the ELN for territorial control
- 2009 | According to the Diocese of Nariño:
 - 13 major displacements in which there were cases of aerial spraying, affecting chiro and yuca crops. More than 14,000 people were affected
 - 2 massacres of the Awa people
- Tortugaña Telembí reservation: "The worst episode of our lives" | 17 people were killed (including children) with special public cruelty against two women and their unborn babies. Municipality of Barbacoas
- Gran Rosario reservation | Paramilitaries and army killed 12 Awa people, community of Calbí. Municipality of Tumaco

Period of repositioning of FARC-EP and subsequent disarmament

2011-2016

With the signing of the peace agreements, the victimisation of the Awa people reduced significantly. 'In 2015, 292 victimising events were recorded, while in 2016, 150 were reported'.

However, soon after, the space left by the FARC-EP was occupied by other illegal armed groups and ELN, which tripled victimisation.

Post-peace agreements period with FARC-EP and fragmentation of violence

2016-2019

Reconfiguration of armed power and fragmentation of violence. No organisation is strong enough to organise drug trafficking, nor is there any armed group that can impose itself over the others.

Growing violence in the territory.

Disputes over territorial control by armed actors, lockdown, and pandemic

2020

- 26 cases of murder, harassment, and threats against leaders
- 4 massacres
- 4 attacks
- 2 massive displacements of approximately 140 people in total and presence of anti-personnel landmines in the territory



Violence that blend into Awa women's bodies⁶



6 The information from this section comes from the research work of the Department of Women and Family of UNIPA *Informe Realidad de la Mujer Awá* (UNIPA, 2019a) and *Acercamiento a las afectaciones psicosociales e impactos colectivos de hechos victimizantes en el marco del conflicto armado con enfoque de género de los 5 resguardos priorizados* CODHES-UNIPA (UNIPA, 2019b).

7 According to the reconstruction that UNIPA has carried out crossing data with the National Information Network Register of Colombia, Victims Unit of Colombia's, it is estimated that between 1987 and 2018, in relations with displacements (it is not précised if they were individuals or collectives) 3691 women declared that fact, and 3275 for men.

8 The Department of Women and Family y Familia has documented cases of domestic servitude and human trafficking in cases reported by women who explain that, since the 1970s, in local festivities and rituals, the "abduction of girls" was practised by mestizos who would take Awa girls to employ them as domestic servants in their homes in Cali, Pasto or Ipiales, in conditions of semi-slavery (UNIPA, 2019b, 50).

9 See glossary

10 The use of this herbicide, banned in 18 countries, generates multiple impacts when applied by aerial spraying, such as the contamination of food crops, which breaks with food sovereignty, or the contamination of water, which has serious health effects on the human population

Militarisation and war have caused an increase in violence against women, which is expressed through triple discrimination, implying gender, ethnicity, and impoverishment in a context of structural inequality and violence.

Armed actors bear with them a colonial, racist and sexist imaginary that represents the women as weak, defenceless, and attackable, an easy target to fool, to outrage and to sexually assault. These stereotypes are reflected in the contempt for indigenous women's aesthetics, costumery, language and traditional practices. To protect themselves from aggression and not to be detected as indigenous, many women have had to renounce their language and costumery, as well as their role as transmitters of culture. This increases acculturation and puts the survival of the Awa culture at risk.

The introduction of war dynamics in the territory has led to the gradual adoption of the *narco* culture, its representation of power and its prestige in the communities. It has entailed a change in the roles attributed to the male gender and the reproduction of warlike masculinity, based on the myth of money accumulation, and alcohol and drugs consumption. In many cases, violence at home is normalised as a method for resolving conflicts, resulting in a lack of balance that disharmonises the family, the community, and the territory.

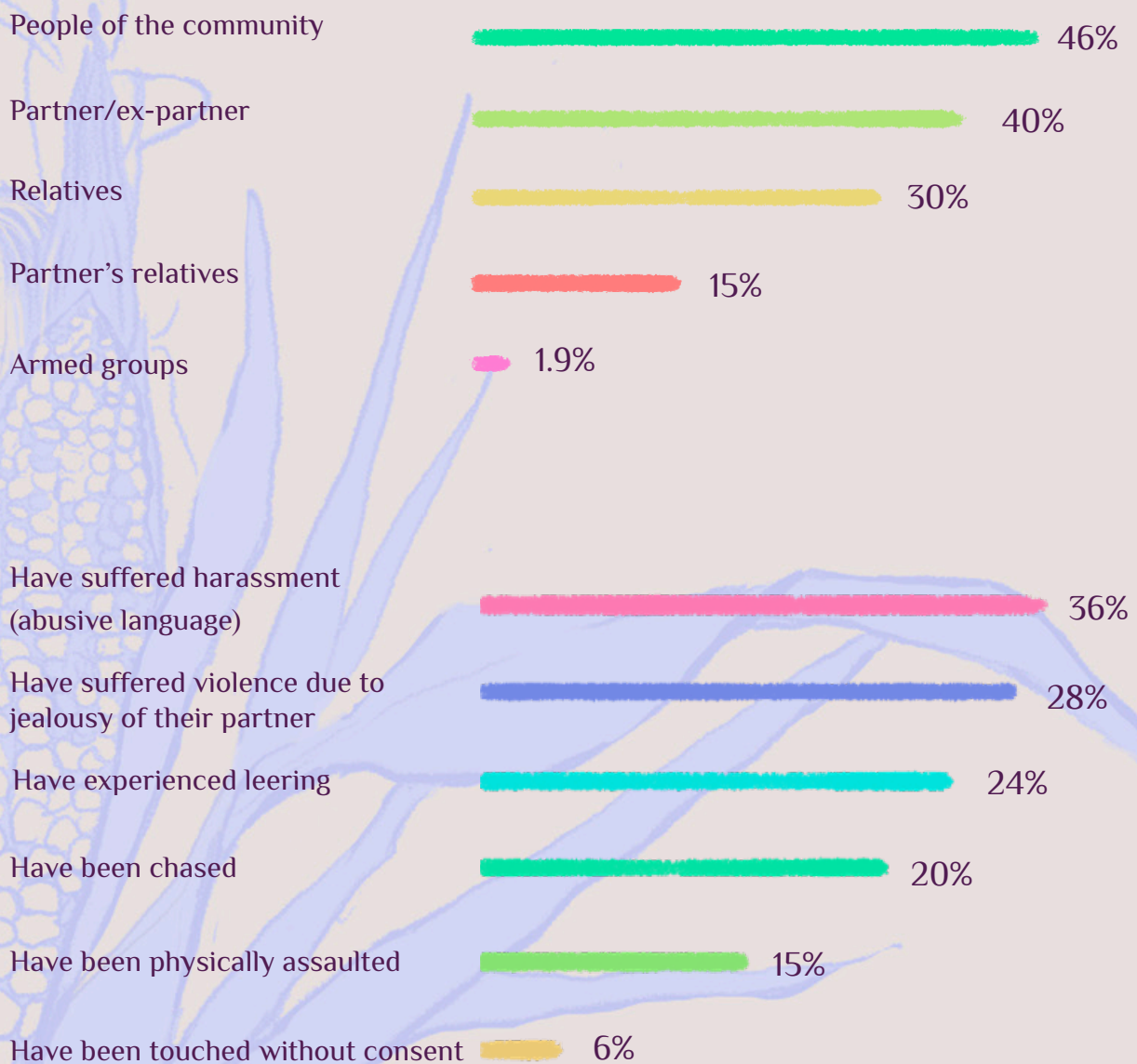
The violence that affects Awa women is manifested in the physical, sexual, psychological, and patrimonial spheres and, in the most extreme cases, takes the form of femicide, outrages, physical and psychological abuse, as well as rape and attempted rape of minors within the family nucleus. A survey of 133 women conducted by the Department of Women and Family of UNIPA (UNIPA, 2019a) revealed that a large part of the violence perpetrated against women comes from men in the community or their partners. Out of the 47 cases treated by the Department, 44.7% involved sexual abuse and 27.6% physical violence.



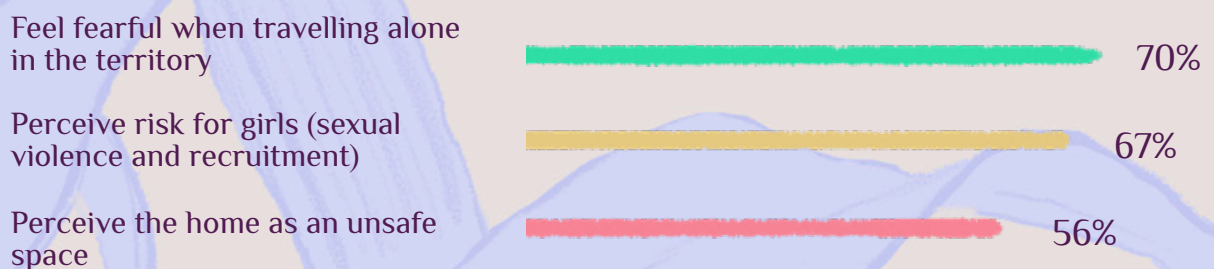
39% have suffered situations of abuse

and biodiversity. Although it has been used since 1984, cultivation has not diminished. National and international social and human rights organisations succeeded in getting the Constitutional Court to rule that the fumigations should be stopped. Yet the debate remains open and Iván Duque, current president of Colombia, has stated that fumigation is a fundamental tool to combat coca cultivation. In 2019, several organisations such as MPDL and OADPI signed this communiqué:
<https://www.mpdl.org/comunicados/america-latina/derechos-humanos/comunicado-para-no-retorno-fumigaciones-aereas-glifosato#sthash.L9RFdAli.DDIWCeX.dpbs>

Who perpetrated the abuse?¹¹

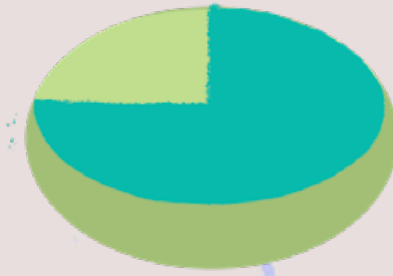


Perception of the risk and unsafe spaces



¹¹ Data extracted from *Realidad de la Mujer Awá* (UNIPA, 2019a).

Gender-based violence is not normalised



76% think that it should not happen

On a personal and family level, one of the most direct consequences of the armed conflict on women's lives is widowhood, increasing their vulnerability and economic dependence. Massacres, murders, homicides, and disappearances, mostly of men, leave many women widowed with children. They thus must develop livelihood strategies based on creating a new household with another man who can sustain the children from the first marriage. While this formula is common, in some cases, sexual violence is perpetrated against daughters in return for supporting the family. Besides, widows are seen as second-class women, devalued, submissive, and in search of protection. Family breakdown is also reflected in the abandonment of the home, caused by early marriages at 13-14 years, followed by the desertion by the husband, who does not provide alimony and consequently subjects the young mothers to dependency. Another practice present in the community is *el gateo* (literally 'crawling'): entering a sleeping woman's bed and forcing her to have sex without her consent.

These data highlight an increase in gender-based violence in the community. However, the settlement of armed groups in Katsa Su, the imposition of their rules and the assassination of indigenous leaders have also had consequences: women's participation in politics is regarded as dangerous, and they no longer participate in community decision-making spaces. In parallel, the risks of forced recruitment and sexual violence against young girls and young women increase through grooming techniques and daily harassment. The Awa organisations themselves consider that there is under-reporting of sexual violence and harassment by armed actors, which can be explained by fear and threats, but also by caution and discretion regarding public exposure.



Protecting the body and the territory: Awa women spreading the word

Glossary

Awapit | It is the language spoken by the Awa people. It acts as the bridge uniting material and spiritual and gives meaning and significance to the Awa people. Through the Awapit language, they communicate, express themselves, transform as a group, and prolong the mountains' diverse existence.

Awa worldview | It consists of the territory and everything that exists in it: the trees, the animals, the rivers, the water, the rain, the thunder, the sun, the wind, the stars, the *chutún* (mountain sickness), the Elder, Astarón¹², the signs and warnings of the jungle.

barbacha (moss) | Protagonist of the story of *Inkal Awa's* origin: it came to life through the union of a black and a white *barbacha*. One shall not destroy any tall tree with *barbacha*, as the rain's mother lives in them.

chagra | Space set up by the indigenous communities for cultivation; its value is not limited to its function of providing food. The activities associated with food constitute a web of practices, knowledge, and behaviours in which specific interactions with beings are repeated: with plants, animals, and minerals, but also other entities such as the spiritual owners of the land.

fallow | A farming technique that consists of allowing the soil to rest so that it can regenerate, recover, and store minerals.

Katsa Su | It's a whole, all the land. It includes forests, rivers, streams, people, everything. It is the particular way the Awa people feel, interpret, give meaning, practice, care and live the environment as a whole. Katsa Su is indivisibly constituted by a spiritual-natural realm that takes its roots in the Law of Origin and indigenous justice and is structured into the four worlds.

land | It is what is palpable, what one can see, touch, sow, where one builds a house, where one sows seeds.

nature | It is life itself. Awa existence and survival revolve around it because it is what provides their food.

¹² The Elder and Astarón are spirits.

paths | They incarnate all the modifications that the Awa have made to the landscape. They go through all of Katsa Su and connect its different parts, reflecting both its geography and history.

stories of origin | It is where the rules and Laws of Origin that guarantee survival and resistance are found, where ancestral knowledge passed on from generation to generation is recreated. The stories of origin reveal the standing agreements to maintain the balance with the territory (Katsa Su) and the spiritual beings that live there through a relation based on respect.

wisha | It means non-Awa, foreigner. It is often identified as an intrusion from the outside and has a negative meaning. It is associated with violence and evil coming from the outside.

wat usan | 'Good living' of the Awa people, the literal translation is 'to live beautiful'.

Elements of recognition and self-recognition of the Awa identity

Staff of command | Made from chonta wood, it is one of the main symbols of territorial and ancestral resistance and authority of the indigenous peoples in Colombia, including the Awa people.

Carrying the *higra* and wearing the traditional Awa costumery | The *higra* is a bag woven with a special fibre obtained from the bark of the tree called 'trumpet tree' or 'snakewood'. The elders wear traditional dresses and skirts.

Carrying the *yaré* | It is a basket woven with lianas (woody vines) that the Awa carry on their heads. Harvest products and small children are transported in this type of baskets.

Using the marimba | Instrument made of chonta wood planks. The marimba is used in all meetings and assemblies of the community and rituals for the healing of the diseases of the jungle.

Claudia Jimena Pai | Young Awa woman, although with a long organisational career within the UNIPA. Since 2016, she has been coordinating the Department of Women and Family in which, together with other colleagues, she works to integrate, considering the Awa worldview, the concept of gender in the struggle.

"For me, it has been a challenge, a very important challenge. In those five years, I have been telling my colleagues that helplessness has had me wept because of some cases of a barbaric nature that have been perpetrated by foreign actors. I also recognise that there have been cases within our community, that the indigenous justice system is in a situation of weakness. It has been disharmonised because of this armed conflict, because of all this mining. We are not going to deny that this has also had our culture uprooted, which has been a challenge for the Department of Women and Family."

"Since my arrival at the department, in the last five years, two colleagues were murdered: a guardian and her partner, also a guardian. These are events that leave a permanent scar in one's life. It motivates us to continue working for the women of our community and the next generations. It motivates us to keep weaving this seedbed of life, to keep our eyes on this network of communication between us and to think about the manner to protect ourselves and to protect one another." to deny that this has also had our culture uprooted, which has been a challenge for the Department of Women and Family."

"I tell my colleagues: change depends on each of us, on how we can continue to pass it on to our sons, daughters, grandchildren, nephews and nieces. No matter how little, we are learning because, every day, one learns something in life. One doesn't know everything in life. Life is dynamic, transversal. For those problems that are affecting us, we, the women, can give solutions establishing strategies. This learning, this seedbed of life has meant a lot because a woman who is skilled, empowered and who also has incomes to sustain her family is a woman who will not suffer abuse again."

"For us, it has been a huge challenge, because gender-based violence is happening always. In those situations, we understand that harmonisation is also about communication, and we have put this into practice in different ways:"

"Through radio messages. On the one hand, with fables that remind us that, according to our Law of Origen and our narratives, there are principles of respect for the women, the family and nature. On the other hand, by informing women where to go in these cases; to the governor, the leader, the community, the Department of Women and Family, to us, members of the Department..."

"In person, through the weaving of migra, because it is during this activity that we are actually chatting. Through words, we share strategies and tools to solve situations and to empower one another."

"Through visits with elderly folk healers, aiming to harmonise and to seek that connectivity with indigenous practices, with plants. For instance, the practices carried out when one gives birth. Care and parenting guidelines."

"Before situations of gender-based violence, in addition to the armed conflict and a severe humanitarian crisis, it is very important to work with some inter-jurisdictional institutions and with our authorities, in the framework of the indigenous justice. For us, the key has been to work in assemblies, meeting with our comrades, revitalising the community looking at how to protect ourselves as a group and as individuals, looking at how to minimise the risks for our women, girls, boys and elders in that way."

"That is why it has been important for the Department of Women and Family to have an action plan, in order to have some guidelines and start working on the political, organisational, cultural, social, economic and environmental parts of the project."



Leidy Pai: Coordinator of Family, Culture and Sports in the Telembí area and coordinator of the Telembí territorial resistance strategy. She also leads the Awa art and culture school Francelina in the Tortugaña Telembí indigenous reservation. She is also the director of an Awa music band in Telembí. She supports the Department of Women and Family.

"Here, in Colombia or in the Awa territory, being a young female leader means losing your freedom. Because if your leadership is one that runs in your family, you grow up with enemies without even knowing it. Indigenous people are seen as an obstacle, because this has been our struggle: to defend our life, to defend our lands and everything that exists within our lands, to defend our way of governing ourselves... At the same time, this implies a great responsibility. There is something that pushes you through. There are a whole people that have educated me, trained me and there is this beautiful land, a land that expects us to preserve it. But it is very sweet. Doing it blooms from my heart. I do it because I love my people, because this is the only path that our elders, our leaders showed us. And there is no other way out because violence only generates more violence."

"We demand justice or harmonisation for our 'good living' because who feel, live and suffer these situations are the women. In the village, there are many other problems and this matter is always left to the last, perhaps because it is not a priority for the community or the governor."

"Having recourse to the ordinary justice system is in the case of very serious cases, especially femicide."

"We have been weaving women's unity. Our relationship has been one of sisterhood, of trust, of struggle, of resistance, of gaining more strength."

"Our territory was colonised, other cultures arrived, so did the mafia and drug trafficking... More than 50 years ago, outlaw groups and the forces of the government arrived at a time when our culture, our worldview had been weakened by the discrimination and rejection that already existed. These practices of violence had an influence and, today, violence settled in our families, and even more did gender-based violence."

"The Department of Women and Family always tries to solve some small problems of abuse and gender-based violence through dialogue, counselling and agreements that can be reached between the different parties. The Department visits the families at the place where the events occurred, talks to the victims and investigates the cases. And, in a second stage, the care process for harmonisation is activated. If the victim wishes so, the Department of Women and Family organises a meeting with a traditional healer for psychological and physical healthcare. The governor is informed of the case so that he can be the person in charge of applying justice in accordance with the facts. Subsequently, it is important to follow up for the well-being of the family, the victim and the community."

"To me, supporting UNIPA's Department of Women and Family means that there is a struggle that we, the women of the Inkal Awa, must undertake. It means acquiring more knowledge, especially about gender-based violence. It means applying this knowledge in the communities. It means that we must have greater responsibility and commitment to our people, in defence of the territory, in defence of women's rights... To be able to talk freely, to have an opinion safely, and to reject certain behaviours that do not seem right to us or that are not fair with regard to the way women are treated."



Omaira Taicús: Indigenous guardian and promoter of the Department of Women and Family in the Telembí area. Like many other Awa women, she spent her adolescence and youth as a domestic worker for mestizos outside her territory. She now works so that young Awa women do not have to follow the same path and for them to be able to be part of a process of encounter with their own culture, their rivers and the jungle through weaving and speaking with their elders.

"Since we have been walking around the territory with the Department of Women and Family, we have been talking about the fact that this is not the right way to live. We have had a lot of conversations and have gained a lot of trust among the Awa women."

"We have been looking for all these problems in the territory, in the community, talking with the women, sitting down, and chatting. We have also gained the trust of the elders, talking while weaving traditional baskets and bags. During this activity, we talk and ask them about their story: why is there this violence?"

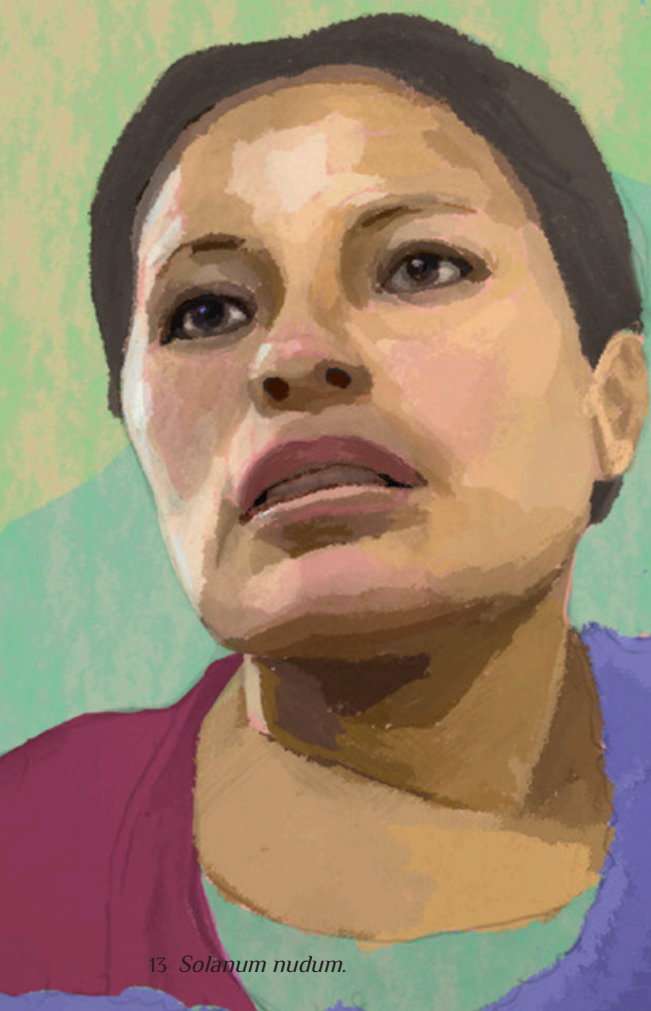
"Personally, I am happy that women do not let themselves be mistreated. Now, they don't have black eyes or bruised faces anymore. They protect themselves. Between them, sisters, cousins, or aunts, they talk about how they should not keep quiet and about how they should inform the council or the governor, or the guardian or the counsellor. They say: 'You can't mistreat us; we are going to punish you and throw you in jail ourselves.'"

"Indigenous justice has been applied following our Law of Origen when there are problems with women, couples... When there is abuse, when he beats her, when the father does not pay for the child [s alimony], when he abandons the home etc. We, as the authority, we punish them according to what the community says in a meeting. If the community says: 'Yes, punish this man,' we put him in jail for 24 hours as a form of punishment. In parallel, we harmonise the woman: we bathe her with nettle, aji pepper, rascadera, lemon and other plants. Thanks to these traditional medicines, we harmonise them so that they get rid of all this discomfort and for them to find balance, for the good living of the family and the children".

"This is how justice has been done. Here we are with the governor and the Department, guiding all these processes. Managing all this violence against women. We investigate: Why is this situation happening? What is the actual problem? Since we incarnate the Law of Origen, one wonders if we need help from outside, since the ordinary justice system has not been applied and has failed before these cases. For example, imagine, for us, as women, it is complicated to cope with our children. When a woman leaves her husband [because of him abusing her], he doesn't leave her the children, he just leaves them abandoned. So, I don't think it's right that we, as women, should suffer, right? It is also the man's duty to pay for the child's alimony because the child is his too. And we, as women, referred to UNIPA's Department for Women and Family, to the youth welfare office, and that is such a long process! It goes on and on, paperwork, paperwork, and more paperwork... In the end, it gets lost in the mass, and that's it. So, on this matter, I do want the ordinary justice to be applied, when it comes to the alimony and when the husband kills his wife."

"The elders have been commenting that they used to live purely from our own culture. They grew their food, and it was not fumigated. There were many animals to feed themselves. The elders give us advice and we learn to properly value our mother earth. Here, we have traditional medicine, our own fruits to eat and our own dishes. Traditional medicine is good for headaches, bone pain, snake bites and when a woman gives birth. If the elders had not explained it to us, we would be dying, like in the city, where so many people die, right? But we survive. We survive thanks to all this traditional medicine, with our plants: quickstick, vervain, and also zapata. And also during the pandemic, we have been remembering the words of our the elders".

"In the communities, we are talking about everything that we should not forget, and, through this process, we learn how to weave baskets and higrá. So we, as women, have resisted and walked through a great part of the territory, but we want to get to more reservations and more communities. Get to more women, let them know what is gender-based violence and work with them by weaving, to continue healing the community."



For a 'good living': health and harmony in Katsa Su

The territory is a physical and symbolic space in which different beings coexist and share common spaces and sometimes enter into conflict situations.

The Awa people deeply respect the environment and are in harmony with it through different practices.

In the legends and myths about the origins of the Awa people and their territory:

- Events in the mountains or in the jungle are described, and tips for the management of the forest environment are passed on by the elders
- They are not guidelines written in codes and are not strict. They are the stories told by those who have survived because they have experienced them themselves

Awa's technique, "fallow-sow-lumber", facilitate temporary fertilisation of the soil through the process of plant decomposition.

Dreams are not the exclusive domain of the elderly. Women, children and young people also contribute their dream experiences to the well-being of the family.

- Culture is the interpretation and daily experience of the four worlds of Katsa Su. The balance of these four worlds is what allows the millenary Awa culture to remain in perpetuity

For a 'good living': health and harmony in Katsa Su

Ampa Su = *Katsamika* (the world where the divinities live)

Kutña Su = *Irittuspa* (the world the dead live)

Pas Su = *Awaruzpa* the world where we live)

Maza Su = *Ishkum Awa* (the below world, where people eat smoke)

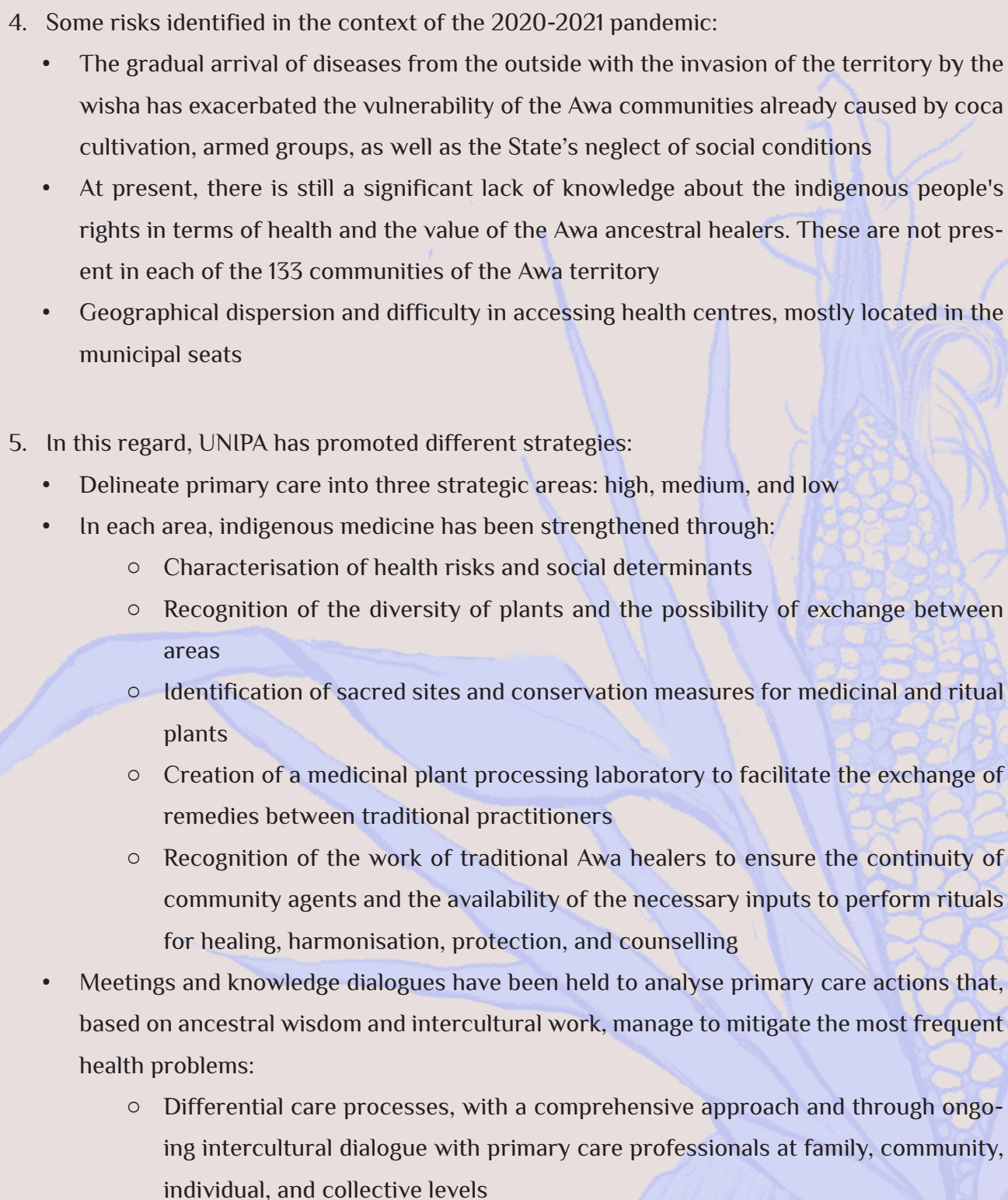


Own knowledge to face the impact of the pandemic¹⁴

1. Traditional medicine is based on ancestral thinking:
 - Health is a state of balance and harmony in the relationships between people and the community, and the territory and nature.
 - Balance is maintained by following the Laws of Origen strictly.
2. Ancestral narratives and laws are guidelines for a pattern of life and health that are passed on through advice shared in everyday life: learning by doing, observing, walking, experimenting
 - Non-compliance causes disease in humans, living beings, ecosystems, and planet
 - The treatment of disease is primarily spiritual, to restore the disturbed balance or harmony
3. In 1999, UNIPA's health programme was created. Since then, the intercultural ethnic approach has accomplished several achievements:
 - Differential institutional approach, despite historical neglect by the State
 - Law 691 of 2001 regulating indigenous participation in the Colombian healthcare system: right to differential care and elaboration of intercultural models, recognition of traditional medicine and indigenous autonomy regarding health.
 - Primary care by traditional Awa healers through UNIPA's Healthcare Provider Institution (IPS), which is composed of traditional healers and indigenous Awa health apprentices, translators, local guides and support staff such as porters.
 - Promotion of UNIPA's own specific health strategies in the Awa communities:
 - "Awá Kuintakin": counselling on self-care for local diseases, environmental and housing protection, parenting patterns and care during puberty, pregnancy, or childbirth, among others
 - "Ñambí Telembí Viven": strengthening of indigenous Awa medicine with ancestral practices from the musical and cultural indigenous perspective, with young Awa people
 - "Women messengers of life": Awapit-speaking women from distant communities are taught skills for partner dialogue, parenting patterns, early infant stimulation, and conflict resolution.

¹⁴ We follow the recommendations of traditional healers and Colombian indigenous elders to avoid the arrival of the coronavirus: not to name it. Or not to refer to the scientific name of the virus, as ONIC (National Indigenous Organisation of Colombia) points out in its Territorial Monitoring Bulletin (SMT) 004 of 2020 on pandemic monitoring:

<https://www.onic.org.co/boletines-osv/3735-boletin-004-sistema-de-monitoreo-territorial-smt-onic-informacion-para-proteger-la-vida-y-los-territorios>

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4. Some risks identified in the context of the 2020-2021 pandemic:
- The gradual arrival of diseases from the outside with the invasion of the territory by the wisha has exacerbated the vulnerability of the Awa communities already caused by coca cultivation, armed groups, as well as the State's neglect of social conditions
 - At present, there is still a significant lack of knowledge about the indigenous people's rights in terms of health and the value of the Awa ancestral healers. These are not present in each of the 133 communities of the Awa territory
 - Geographical dispersion and difficulty in accessing health centres, mostly located in the municipal seats
5. In this regard, UNIPA has promoted different strategies:
- Delineate primary care into three strategic areas: high, medium, and low
 - In each area, indigenous medicine has been strengthened through:
 - Characterisation of health risks and social determinants
 - Recognition of the diversity of plants and the possibility of exchange between areas
 - Identification of sacred sites and conservation measures for medicinal and ritual plants
 - Creation of a medicinal plant processing laboratory to facilitate the exchange of remedies between traditional practitioners
 - Recognition of the work of traditional Awa healers to ensure the continuity of community agents and the availability of the necessary inputs to perform rituals for healing, harmonisation, protection, and counselling
 - Meetings and knowledge dialogues have been held to analyse primary care actions that, based on ancestral wisdom and intercultural work, manage to mitigate the most frequent health problems:
 - Differential care processes, with a comprehensive approach and through ongoing intercultural dialogue with primary care professionals at family, community, individual, and collective levels

Awa's rights | Did you know...?

The ethnic chapter of the Final Peace Agreement (2016) recognises that Indigenous Peoples in Colombia have suffered historical conditions of injustice due to colonialism and have been severely affected by the internal armed conflict. In this sense, the Peace Agreement establishes that the utmost in guarantees must be established for Indigenous Peoples to fully exercise their human and collective rights within the terms of their own interests and worldviews.

- The Awa People is one of the indigenous peoples in Colombia at greatest risk of physical and cultural extinction, and it has been granted urgent protection on several occasions by the Constitutional Court of Colombia (Constitutional Court. Sentence T-025 of 2004, Auto 004 of 2009, Auto 174 of 2011, Autos 266 and 620 of 2017)
- The Awa People has been recognised as a collective subject of rights and reparation, on the understanding that ‘the indigenous community is a collective subject and not a simple sum of individual subjects’ (art. 88 CP Colombia; Sentence T-380 of 1993 of the Constitutional Court)
- More recently, Katsa Su, ancestral territory of the Awa people, and the 32 Awa indigenous cabildos associated in the Awa People’s Indigenous Unit (UNIPA) have been accredited as collective subjects of rights by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) (Auto 079 of 12 November 2019 of the SRVBIT in the framework of case 02 of 2018)
- It is the first time that the JEP has recognised the interrelatedness, interdependence, and inseparability of a native people’s territory
- Like the rest of the indigenous peoples in Colombia, and years before the signing of the Peace Agreement, the Awa people had already been recognised —individually and collectively— as victims of the armed conflict in Colombia, through Law 1148 of 2011, known as the ‘victims’ law’

Based on the prior consultation of this law, Decree-Law 4633 of 2011 — known as the ‘Victims’ Law for Indigenous Peoples and Communities’— was issued, establishing the specific legal and institutional framework for the protection, comprehensive reparation and restitution of the territorial rights of indigenous peoples in Colombia.

- Indigenous reservations in Colombia are territories of indigenous, collective, special and unalienable property. Moreover, these lands are imprescriptible and not subject to seizure (art. 63 and 329 of the Colombian Constitution) and have recognised autonomy for the management of their interests (art. 286 and 287 of the Colombian Constitution)
- Indigenous autonomy in Colombia is linked to indigenous peoples' culture and is, therefore, the realisation of the fundamental principle of ethnic and cultural diversity. Indigenous autonomy is expressed through the recognition of administrative, fiscal, financial, political, and legal autonomy (art. 287 of the Colombian Constitution)
- The law and the indigenous justice exercised by the Awa people is the natural spiritual, and historical mandate that establishes cultural norms and values, which controls the social order focused on the practice of the people's life
- In Colombia, Law 1257 of 2008 and Regulatory Decree 4799 of 2011 protect all women from any type of violence: physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and patrimonial. In the case of domestic violence in indigenous communities, the special indigenous jurisdiction established in Article 246 of the Constitution of Colombia is applied.

Going along the Awa's struggle: proposals for international solidarity

The Awa people's struggle requires international solidarity; the legal and illegal armed actors operating in their territories must feel that they are being observed; the Colombian State and its institutions must take responsibility and stop being accomplices by their action or inaction. We share with you some ideas for standing with UNIPA in its struggle.

- **Follow UNIPA's social accounts**, spread and replicate its voice. Through their communiqués, they publicly denounce the violence that threatens them as people.
 - Twitter: [@UNIPAcunica](#) | [@awaunipa](#)
 - Facebook: [@unidadindigenadelpuebloawa.unipa](#)
 - Youtube:
 - Audiovisuales Awá UNIPA:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCv7cl8TLMAv-0dNFmqLHbg>
 - Consejería de Mujer y Familia UNIPA:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_YooeehXME_QwIWsqexPg
 - Follow the campaigns and initiatives in solidarity with the Awa people
 - Invite your organisation and/or institutions in your town, city or country to write letters showing concern for the situation of UNIPA
 - You can also make publications on social networks and tag international human rights institutions or the Colombian State so that they can see that more and more of us understand that the survival of the Awa people and the defence of the territory is vital.
- For example:
- [@FiscaliaCol](#)
 - [@IvanDuque](#)
 - [@MinInterior](#)
 - [@DefensoriaCol](#)

- Contribute with the support collectives to think of new strategies to spread the Awa people's and UNIPA's efforts for autonomy:

Observatorio Adpi, OADPI

- Twitter: [@ObservatoriADPI](https://twitter.com/ObservatoriADPI)
- Instagram: [OADPI](https://www.instagram.com/OADPI)
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ObservatorioADPI/>

Movimiento por la Paz, el Desarme y La Libertad - MPDL:

- Twitter: [@MovimientoxIPaz](https://twitter.com/MovimientoxIPaz)
- Web: <https://www.mpdl.org/>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/movimientoporlapaz.mpdl>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/movimientoxlapaz.mpdl/>
- Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/MovimientoPorLaPaz/videos>

For more testimonies from Awa women, check out the following conference (Spanish and Catalan):

“Mujeres Indígenas Inkal Awá y estrategias comunitarias para una vida libre de violencias de género”, XVI Fòrum contra les violències de gènere, Barcelona, 12 November 2020:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lOolqt90FEw>

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