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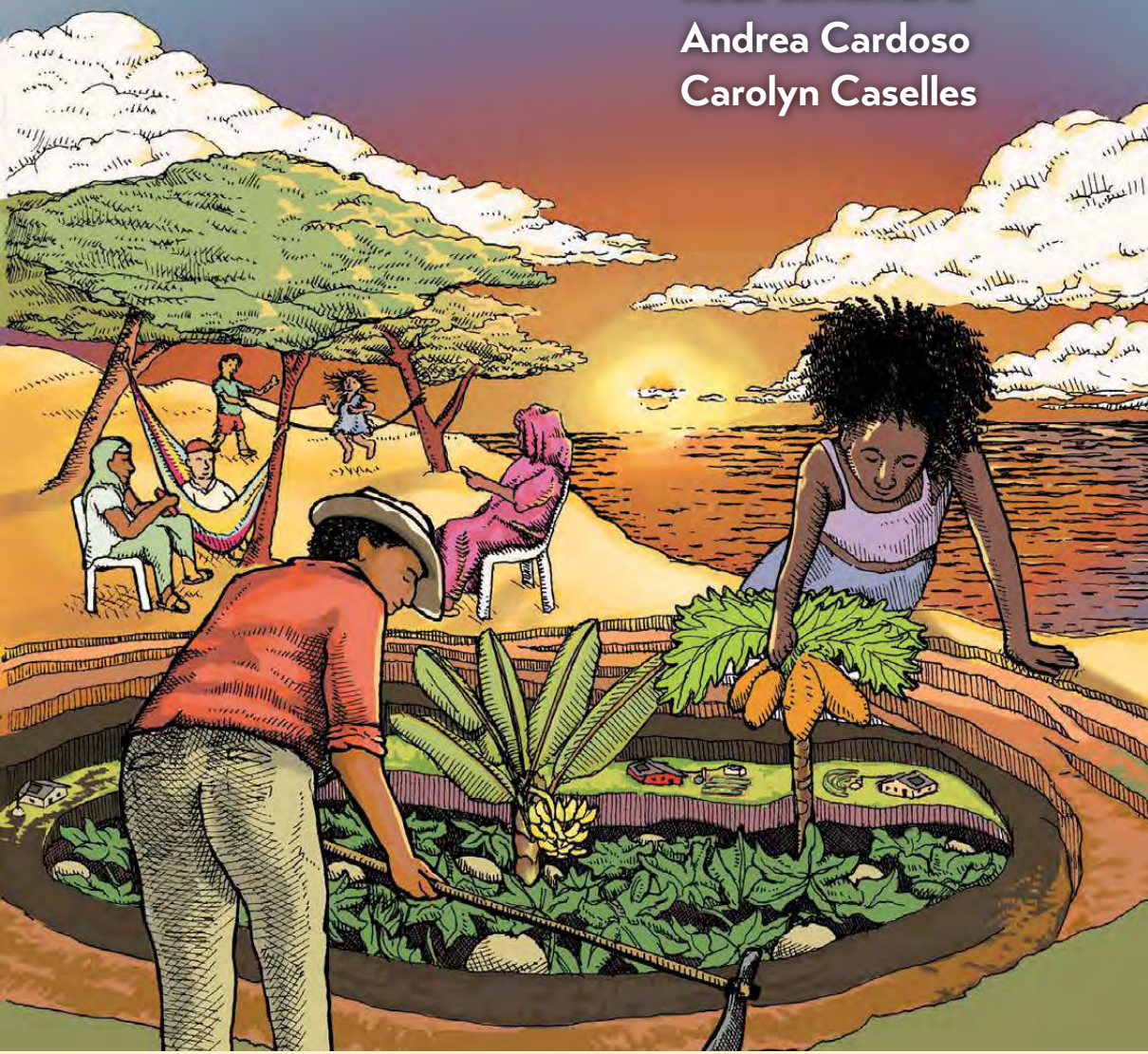
CO-CREATION OF THE ENERGY TRANSITION AGENDA IN THE COLOMBIAN CARIBBEAN

Rosa Santamaría
Andrea Cardoso
Carolyn Caselles



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Contributions for a socially and environmentally just transition.

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INTRODUCTION: APPROACHES TO THE GLOBAL CARBON CHAIN

Since the 1980s, coal has been mined on a large scale in the Colombian Caribbean. 90% of Colombia's coal production is extracted in the departments of La Guajira and Cesar through open-pit mining by multinational companies. Coal deposits in Cesar and La Guajira are located amid valuable ecosystems for the Caribbean region of Colombia, such as the Sierra Nevada mountain range near Santa Marta, the Perijá mountain range, the Zapatosa swampy complex, and the Ranchería river. These ecosystems are fundamental not only for agriculture and the regional economy for the quality of the soil and the abundance of water but also for the livelihood of indigenous, Afro-descendant, and peasant communities. The coal extracted in Cesar and La Guajira is meant for thermal use, and more than 90% of production goes to export-

Photography: Marco Perdomo Ramos

ing purposes. This coal, shipped through the ports of Santa Marta and Puerto Bolívar, then burned to produce energy in importing countries, leaves behind a series of socio-environmental conflicts (Cardoso, 2018). Colombia has the largest open-pit coal mines in Latin America; coal extracted there is exported to Europe, China, Japan, India, Africa, and the United States. The exploitation of coal in Colombia has seriously impacted human rights and the environment for more than five decades, especially in indigenous and peasant communities located near the exploitation areas (Censat Agua Viva & Cordaid, 2016). Open-pit mining is carried out using heavy machinery that operates twenty-four hours a day with explosions, noise, and permanent dispersion of coal dust, which causes, among others, an increase in respiratory, visual, skin, and heart diseases in the population (Rosa Luxemburg Foundation & Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria del Carbón (Sintracarbón) [National Union of Coal Industry Workers], 2018), water pollution, reduction of land productivity and deterioration in the quality of life of people and communities. The mining areas coincide with the poorest in the country. They face serious water availability and land titling problems added to the serious public health crisis derived from the social impacts of coal exploitation. In this regard, a study by Ardila et al. (2010) concludes that the main effects of coal exploitation in these departments are the deterioration of the environment, perceived through the impacts on flora, fauna, and water sources; air pollution, which has generated an increase in respiratory diseases in the communities inside the exploitation zone's area of influence: the social and cultural heterogeneity produced by labor migration; the displacement of peasants from their territory and their traditional agricultural activities; growth of belts of misery; the emergence of union, communal and union-type social movements who question the administrative management of royalties, investment, and companies' social accountability, as

well as the environmental impact of ports and the coal shipment process. Proven coal reserves in Colombia are estimated at 6,419 million tons (Mt) and potential reserves at 16,347 Mt, which could keep Colombia as a producer for the next hundred years at the current exploitation rate. Colombian energy policies have focused on tilting its energy mix towards hydroelectric energy, due to its potential and viability (topographic characteristics and climate regime) and towards direct foreign investment in this sector (Procolombia, 2015). However, although the government projection for 2050 plans to diversify the energy mix with greater participation of renewable energies, it continues to include coal as an energy source (Unidad de Planeación Minero Energética [UPME], 2015). Faced with this scenario, the Research Seedbed in Energy Transition, in collaboration with various organizations, has held local forums in the departments of Cesar, La Guajira, and Magdalena since December 2017, with the participation of different actors, to try and rethink the decarbonization of the Colombian Caribbean. Although the concept of decarbonization at a global level is related to the disuse of fossil fuels in electricity production, in Colombia, this term is being used more often as the socio-environmental conflicts in the coal supply chain extend from extraction to combustion. Therefore, the expression has acquired a different meaning in environmental and climate justice. The social and environmental impacts for local communities are extensive in addition to the effects of climate change in importing countries. Unlike multinational development programs promoting carbon pricing, carbon capture, storage, and compensations are avenues for decarbonizing economies. Communities in Colombia are articulating decarbonization in coal mine closures, including the entire infrastructure of the coal supply chain, to promote a just transition that includes other economic activities for the territory. This book aims to analyze how the meaning of coal has evolved throughout its produc-

tion and commercialization chain and to showcase results from the dialogues in several local forums about the factors that should form a transition agenda from a mining-energy model to a transformation of the territory. As well as to determine the roles of social organizations, government institutions, and all the other different actors. These forums and conversations have been established as spaces for discussion with communities in the Colombian Caribbean to establish a road map for a future energy transition process in which all groups affected by the entirety of extractive mining activities inside this region are taken into account.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN THE GLOBAL COAL CHAIN