

DEVELOPING GENDER-SENSITIVE ECONOMIC POLICIES FOR A JUST ENERGY TRANSITION IN COLOMBIA.



The case of Cesar and Magdalena

July, 2024

Just Energy transition in Coal Regions



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IKI JET and its JET-CR Platform aim to support and accelerate just energy transitions away from coal to renewable energies and other sustainable economic activities in Colombia, Chile, South Africa, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Mongolia.

The Just Energy Transition in Coal Regions (JET-CR) Knowledge Hub is an online platform building bridges between experts, policymakers, coal industry, trade unions and civil society organizations. It's a space to bring together different perspectives, share real stories and search for effective tools and solutions.

It aims to particularly amplify the voices of workers and communities dependent on coal showing how knowledge can work in practice. It also turns practice into knowledge by bringing local experience into global conversations and advancing just energy transition expertise.

Providing regular digests of articles, research papers, news stories and events it serves as a "one-stop shop" for collecting up to date information related to just energy transitions away from coal around the world.

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TIERRA DIGNA is a Colombian organization for the protection of the environmental and human rights, with more than 12 years of experience, defending life, territory and ancestral spirituality throughout Colombia, more specifically in the regions of: Cesar, Magdalena, Chocó, Amazonia and Huila in peasant areas, indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. We are the pioneer organization in our field, proof of this is the declaration of the first river subject to rights in Colombia and Latin America, in 2016. Currently, we are carrying out the process of constructing public policy, legal instruments and community based economies, within the framework of the just Transition, in the departments of Caesar and Magdalena in the context of the first closure of open pit coal mines, being the first transition mining-energy pilot in Colombia.

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DEVELOPING GENDER-SENSITIVE ECONOMIC POLICIES FOR A JUST ENERGY TRANSITION IN COLOMBIA. The case of Cesar and Magdalena.

Editors: Willington Ortiz, Sibel Ersoy, Maria Cecilia Bonnet.

Authors: Andrea del Rocio Torres Bobadilla, Kerstin Mohr.

Research Team: Diana Álvarez Rojas, Olga Álvarez Santoyo, Oscar Diaff, Santiago Avella, Elizabeth Galician Herrera.

Authorship contribution statement: Conceptualization: TD, WI; methodology: TD, WI; healing of data: TD; writing – preparation of original draft: TD; review and editing: TD, WI; display: TD; supervision: WI.

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Acronyms

NCRES	Non-Conventional Renewable Energy Sources
JET	Just Energy Transition
PAR	Participatory Action Research
GHG	Greenhouse Gases
NMA	National Mining Agency
NELA	National Environmental Licensing Agency
MEPU	Mining and Energy Planning Unit
MME	Ministry of Mines and Energy
NCESP	National Council for Economic and Social Policy
OCCRMME	Office of the Comptroller General of the Republic Ministry of Mines

1. Executive Summary

This report analyses the role and impact of women in the mining sector in Colombia's coal-producing regions. It highlights the paradoxical situation in which the consolidation of the extremely lucrative mining sector has not led to a significant improvement in the economic and social development indices of the region for the general population, and the high degree of economic marginalisation of women. This document also presents reflections and proposals on how to develop economic policies with a gender perspective in the process of a just energy transition. These proposals are the result of a participatory process in alliance with women's organisations in the municipalities of Ciénaga, Santa Marta, La Loma, La Jagua de Ibirico and Becerril.

The report highlights the urgent need to develop economic policies within the energy transition process based on 6 principles formulated by the women of the mining corridor Cesar-Magdalena.

- **Principle 1:** Building community-based economic alternatives from women's organizations.
- **Principle 2:** Developing projects that are environmentally sustainable and aim to restore ecosystems.
- **Principle 3:** Promoting holistic healing processes for women in mining areas undergoing just energy transition.
- **Principle 4:** Establishing public services managed by communities, utilizing clean technologies, and with significant participation of women.
- **Principle 5:** Building fair trade practices based on women's life stories.
- **Principle 6:** Establish integrated and participatory evaluation and monitoring systems.

The report also outlines **three specific project proposals** developed in collaboration with women from the mining areas. These projects have been developed taking into account the proposed principles of a gender approach to achieve a just energy transition. Finally, **specific recommendations are made to national and international stakeholders regarding policies and concrete actions** to promote economic proposals with a gender perspective in the context of a just energy transition in mining areas.

2. Introduction

2.1. The role of women in the Just Energy Transition

The imperative to move towards a 'just transition' was explicitly recognised in the Paris Agreement. Since then, the notion of a 'just transition' has become one of the central terms to describe what should happen to achieve the ultimate goal of the UN Convention on Climate Change. This is: "the stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system". The first time the term 'just transition' was used in an international agreement, it was specifically aimed at protecting workers' rights. Since then, the notion of 'just' within the term has evolved to include demands for protection and justice from various social groups, such as indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, peasants, women and populations living in energy poverty.

Although the just transition is a universal imperative, given its validity as a requirement for addressing the planetary climate crisis, it is logical to expect that the implications of such a transition will vary from country to country, and even from region to region. The case of Colombia is a good example of this diversity. Here, the just transition is characterised by the country's position as one of the world's leading exporters of thermal coal. However, in contrast to the majority of coal-producing countries (which also use coal to a considerable extent within their own energy matrix), coal mining in Colombia is almost exclusively for export. Thus, the term 'just energy transition' - widely used in national and international debate - does not adequately capture the implications of this fundamental component of the required transformation in Colombia.

As a result of the unplanned closure of two of the country's main coal mines in 2020, the importance of a consistent approach to the transformation of the coal mining sector has become urgent. This situation is therefore an unfortunate case of an unplanned transition that has triggered a social and economic crisis in the communities that were heavily dependent on the activity of these mines.

Among the studies that have focused on issues related to mining and, more recently, on just transition scenarios in Colombia, there are still few analyses that take a differentiated look at the role of and impact on women. Women in coal-dependent regions have lacked a platform to share their experiences of the impact of this activity on their lives (Tierra Digna, 2023). This often invisible reality is a form of structural violence that has generated greater poverty and discrimination for women (Munevar, 2009). In this sense, mining may have promoted - or at least coexisted with - what some authors have called the "hypermasculinisation"¹ of society, where men, perceiving greater recognition for their better-paid work, have internalised the idea of being more valued in social development (Mosher and Sirkin, 1984).

Therefore, this report has two main objectives: (i) to analyse the role of women in the economic activity of coal mining in the areas affected by the above-mentioned mine closures, and (ii) to present reflections and proposals on how to build economic policies with a gender perspective in the process of just transition.

This report is based on the different voices that Tierra Digna has been listening to for more than a year, forming an alliance with women's organisations in the communities of Ciénaga, Santa Marta, La Loma, La Jagua de Ibirico and Becerril. The aim was to understand the life stories of women from all sectors who live in areas directly affected by mining. These women, who play different roles such as workers, company directors, heads of households, youth, politicians, environmental defenders, peasants, indigenous people, Afro-descendants and/or trade union members, **not only offer their own perspectives on what a just energy transition should look like, but also demand that this transition be especially just for women, providing them with greater protection** against the severe violence and discrimination to which they have been subjected for decades.

The report advocates for the joint **construction of proposals and economic alternatives with an ecological focus, based on the rights of nature, the care economy², and gender**. In this way, the report seeks to contribute to current debates on how to promote a just transition in this coal mining area of the country.

¹ Hypermasculinity is a psychological term for the exaggeration of stereotypical masculine behaviour, such as an emphasis on physical strength, aggression and sexuality. This term has been used since the research of Donald L. Mosher and Mark Sirkin in 1984. Mosher and Sirkin define hypermasculinity or the "macho personality" as determined by three components: (1) Attitudes of sexual insensitivity towards women. (2) The belief that violence is perpetrated by men. (3) The experience of danger as exciting. They developed the Inventory of Hypermasculinity (HMI) to measure the three components. Research has found that hypermasculinity is associated with sexual and physical aggression towards women and men perceived as homosexual. In the field of sociology, feminist theories have used this concept to explain the collective behaviour of some societies, where men are exalted and valued more than the women, where masculine behaviour and its values are most valued.

² The care economy emerges as a commitment within feminist economics, a school of thought that emphasises the need to include gender relations as a relevant variable in explaining the functioning of the economy and the different positions of men and women as economic agents and subjects of economic policy. Feminist economics is characterised by placing the sustainability of life at the centre of analysis, by decentering markets. Consequently, the aim of economic functioning from this perspective is not the reproduction of capital but the reproduction of life. Care for others and interdependence are essential elements of this economic model. The care economy is one of the proposals of feminist economics, which seeks to recognise the unpaid work of women in caring for others. (Rodríguez;2015)

2.2. Methodological approach

The reflections and proposals presented in this report have been developed based on the experiences and analysis of Tierra Digna in the context of the first case of “mining-energy transition” faced by Colombia. The first methodological component consisted of eight dialogue spaces (group meetings, workshops, and interviews) where a legal, economic, and political approach was applied. These dialogue spaces specifically invited women from different groups such as indigenous communities, Afro-descendants, peasants, workers in the mining sector, and former mining company directors belonging to unions. The objective was to understand their life stories, experiences, and analysis of the coal extractive economy, as well as their visions of what a just transition process should be.

In addition, the results of a series of meetings held as part of the "Healing Wounds and Touching Souls" programme were considered. This programme included four holistic healing workshops that addressed the situation of gender-based violence against women from a psychosocial perspective.

A third methodological component involved the review and analysis of literature. This component focused on finding relevant information in three dimensions: i) Economic data such as employment levels and access to economic opportunities in mining areas in general, and information on women's participation in the mining economy in particular. The information collected is presented in graphs throughout the report. ii) Data on public policies and legal frameworks relevant to women's participation in the country's energy transition process. iii) National and international secondary bibliography aimed at understanding the state of the art in this debate.

Throughout the research process for this report, the methodological principles of a Participatory Action Research approach (see Box 1) were applied, which is based on co-creating a research process with the people affected by the problem. In our case, the ideas reflected in this report were co-created with women from the five municipalities (Santa Marta, Ciénaga, El Paso, La Loma, La Jagua de Ibirico, and Becerril) located in the departments of Cesar and Magdalena, which belong to the so-called mining corridor currently undergoing the unplanned transition. They wanted to share their stories, dreams, and aspirations to achieve a just transition with a gender perspective.

Finally, during these meetings, a group of proposals for **economic projects led by women from these five municipalities were collected. From these, three proposals were selected and are presented in this report as examples of their initiatives.** These proposals aim to contribute to the construction of economic models with a gender perspective. In addition, the key principles that women from mining areas consider fundamental for the formulation of economic policies within the framework of a just transition have been synthesised into six principles. This represents a valuable contribution by women from the region to the current public debate on a just energy transition in Colombia.

Box 1. Participatory Action Research

For this report we applied Participatory Action Research (PAR), a human geography approach. This methodology is characterised by being conducted by, with and for people affected by a particular issue, in collaboration with academic researchers who contribute relevant knowledge, skills, resources and networks.

PAR seeks to democratise knowledge production and promote empowerment opportunities for those who participate (Kindon et al., 2009). It is characterised by a blurring of the distinction between 'researcher' and 'researched': researchers and community stakeholders work together to co-generate knowledge through ongoing communicative processes and joint implementation of findings (Fals Borda, 2001).

PAR prioritises the experience of those who face a social problem and uses systematic research methods to generate new knowledge. It is a process for generating knowledge for action and knowledge through action to the service of the goals and needs of specific communities (Cornish et al., 2023; Mackenzie et al., 2012).

PAR has interesting synergies with feminist, post-structural, and post-colonial geographies. It represents a counter-hegemonic approach to knowledge production that recognises the existence of a plurality of knowledges in a variety of institutions and places (Kindon et al., 2007).

PAR aims to create a democratic working environment that allows communities to contribute equally to the research, focusing on collaboration, political engagement, and commitment to social justice that is more likely to meet the needs of the community.

PAR strives to ensure that research does not reproduce intersectional hierarchies of class, race, gender, and other axes of difference (George and Syrja-McNally, 2015), but rather empowers marginalised groups to generate knowledge and power through research activities.

In this sense, PAR can be beneficial for bottom-up approaches, helping to ensure community participation at all levels, but it is important to consider that in many cases PAR does not provide effective solutions to problems related to lack of participation due to structural circumstances, responsibilities, and relationships among stakeholders (OECD, 2004).

3. Context for building a gender economy in the just energy transition in Colombia

The role of women in coal mining and the just energy transition is a topic that has not been widely explored in countries like Colombia. Among the studies that analyse the problems that arise in a community with the arrival of mining, it is common to find publications that focus on the impacts on the environment or on the health of the local population. However, **there is a noticeable lack of research that analyzes the differentiated consequences that the establishment of mining industries has on the lives of women** (Tierra Digna, 2023).

3.1. Development of the coal mining sector and the role of women.

Open-pit coal mining operations in Colombia began more than 40 years ago in the late 1970s and early 1980s, with the opening of the first mine called "El Cerrejón" in La Guajira.

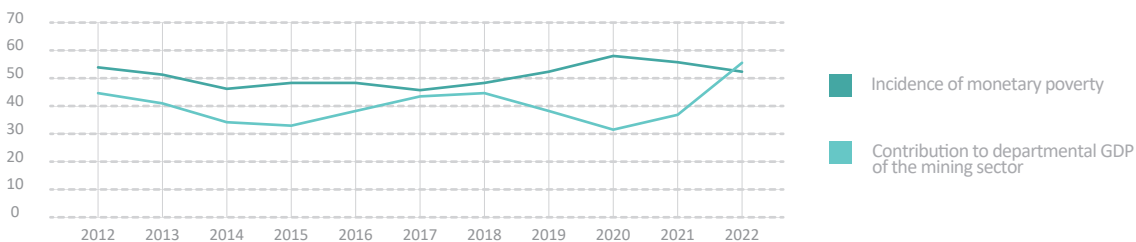
Mining activity in the departments of Cesar and Magdalena began in the 1980s. The mining district of La Jagua was established there: An exploitation area covering more than 12,000 hectares with 8 large-scale open-pit coal mines, operated by various multinational companies such as Drummond, Glencore, and Colombian Natural Resources. This mining district is also connected to railway and port infrastructures that transport coal from La Jagua de Ibirico (Cesar) to the ports of Santa Marta and Ciénaga (Magdalena), with an average annual coal export of more than 45 million tons until 2020.

The Drummond company pioneered coal mining operations in the area. The oldest mine is known as "La Loma," located in the municipality of El Paso. In the mid-1990s, coal ports were established between the mining district of La Jagua de Ibirico and the Bay of Santa Marta. Later (between 2008 and 2013), the coal port was moved from Santa Marta to the municipality of Ciénaga, in response to the environmental impacts the port caused in the city of Santa Marta. During the 1990s, coal mining operations also expanded. Companies belonging to the current Prodeco business group (of the Swiss company Glencore) established operations in La Jagua and Calenturitas mines, located in the municipalities of La Jagua, El Paso, and Becerril. Additionally, the El Hatillo and La Francia mines were opened (in the corregimiento of La Loma), currently managed by the Colombian business group Colombian Natural Resources (CNR). In 2019, this set of mines became the leading exporter of thermal coal in Colombia, with figures reaching 64% of all exported coal, surpassing the El Cerrejón mine in La Guajira (MME, 2021).

The coal mining sector became fundamental for the municipalities of Becerril, La Jagua de Ibirico and El Paso, in central Cesar. It eventually became the main economic activity of what is now known as the Cesar and Magdalena mining corridor, which extends from the aforementioned mines in Cesar to their export ports in the Magdalena department. The region has undergone significant territorial transformation. **Prior to the arrival of the mining sector, the region was primarily dedicated to agriculture (cotton, corn, cattle, etc.). Farmers, Afro-descendant, and indigenous communities coexisted in harmony with nature from time immemorial.** Some communities, like the Yukpa, who are located in the Perijá mountain range, have maintained ways of life with a strong spiritual and ancestral focus. In recent years these communities have been led by indigenous women. It was only in the late 1990s that ethnic and farming communities in the region began to become aware of the damages caused by coal mining on their ancestral lands (CGR, 2014).

Thus, the coal mining industry came to offer a significant number of direct and indirect jobs in the region. Paradoxically, the consolidation of this exceptionally lucrative activity has not led to significant improvements in the region's economic and social development indicators. For example, the incidence of monetary poverty in Cesar has remained around 50% over the past 10 years (see Figure 1). These data are aggregated by department and are not specific to the areas directly affected by the coal mines. However, they indicate that the consolidation of the lucrative mining sector has not had the impact on the economic conditions of the population that have been expected, given that the mining sector has contributed more than a third of the department's total gross domestic product over the last 20 years.

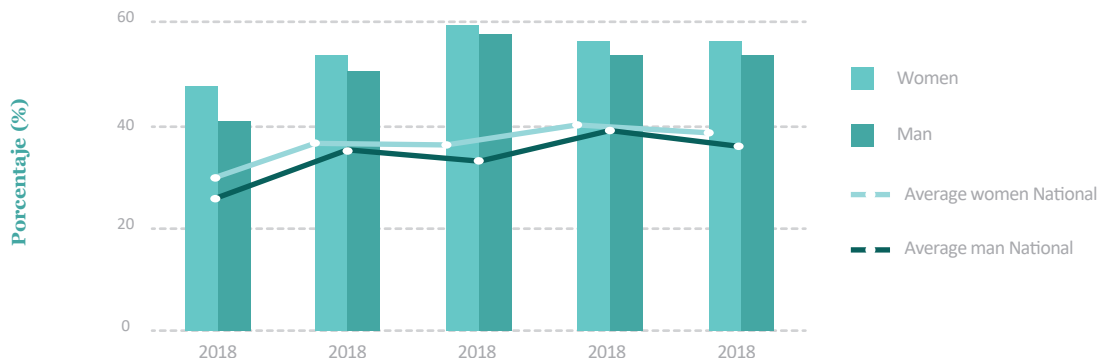
Incidence of monetary poverty and percentage contribution of the mining sector to the GDP in the department Cesar



Source: Own elaboration. Data taken from the annexes of the DANE technical bulletins on 'monetary poverty' and 'departmental national accounts' for 2022.

Now, national statistics show that the incidence of poverty tends to be higher for women than for men. Figure 2 shows the disaggregated data on monetary poverty for men and women in Cesar. It shows that poverty rates remain above the national average and that the economic marginalisation of women is higher. The case of the Magdalena department is similar.

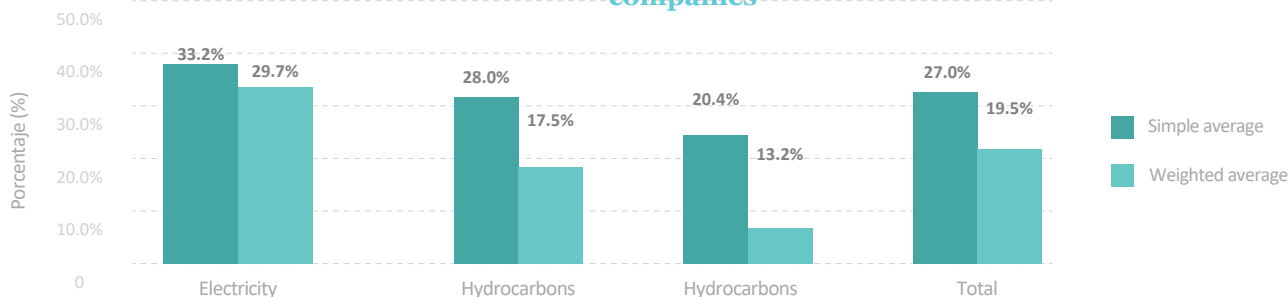
Figure 2. Monetary poverty indices in Cesar and national average discriminated by sex.



Source: Own elaboration. Data taken from the annexes of the DANE technical bulletins on monetary poverty in 2018, 2020 and 2022.

Moreover, **the direct participation of women in this economic sector is marginal.** For example, in 2018, only 23.51% of the total employees in the coal industry in Cesar were women, while the remaining 76.49% were men (SIMCO 2018). This low participation of women is characteristic of the entire mining and energy sector in the country, as illustrated in Figure 3, although the mining sector exhibits the lowest rates.

Figure 3. Women's share of total employment in mining and energy sector companies



Fountain: Elaboration own. Study sectorial 2020
 Note: These values correspond to the total of companies that they filled out the section quantitative of the tool W.E.P. (59)
 No however all the companies they filled out the information requested. For review he universe total in each ask go to the exhibit 59

Source: Taken from Sectoral Study of gender equality for the sector mining and -energy (p. 32) by Lawrence, S., Hernandez, J., & Bottle, S. (2022)

In the case of coal mining, according to Pabón (2020) and Villegas (2019), these figures are explained by gender segregation within mineral extraction activities, where men generally perform heavy physical work and women are hired for tasks such as cleaning or cooking, thus reinforcing the gender stereotypes that prevail in society (Pabón, 2020). This effect of gender stereotypes on women's employment opportunities is confirmed by surveys conducted by Tierra Digna. Of the total number of respondents, **92% stated that there is discrimination against women in the workplace, as most of the job offer from companies in these sector are aimed at men**, limiting women's employment opportunities and thus promoting their informal work

In summary, although the coal mining sector has generated a significant flow of economic resources for the mining departments and municipalities, it also had severe consequences to the socio-economic structure of the regions: (a) it has accelerated the transformation from an agricultural society to one highly dependent on mining activities, (b) it has maintained or increased the economic marginalisation of a large part of the population, and (c) it has exacerbated the economic inequality of women. Moreover, the development of this economic sector took place in the context of the armed conflict in Colombia, which has left serious wounds on family, social, and community structures in mining regions of the Cesar department. A key aspect of this impact has been the increase in segregation and discrimination against women as a result of the hypermasculinisation of the economy and, consequently, of society. This drastic change in social and family values has for years devalued women in economic, social and cultural terms, reducing the importance of their role in the development of these territories (Mohr et al., 2023; Tierra Digna, 2023).

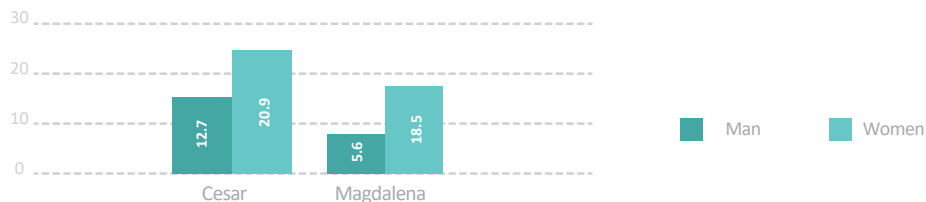
3.2. The current energy transition in Cesar and Magdalena and the women's economy

The Cesar Magdalena mining corridor is currently experiencing a real energy transition process. Unfortunately, it is an unplanned process that was triggered in June 2020 when the Prodeco Group of the multinational Glencore unconventionally and prematurely returned the mining concessions of the La Jagua and Calenturitas mines to the Colombian state. This happened some 10 years before the expiry of these mining concessions. This process of mine closure has caused a major economic crisis in the district of La Jagua de Ibirico. It has also led to political and social conflict due to the lack of proposals for a viable solution. This has also led to a political-legal conflict, as the company Glencore is expected to compensate for the environmental, social and labour liabilities caused by its operations (El Espectador, September 1, 2022).

This unexpected mine closure has made the public aware that a just energy transition in these areas must take into account several dimensions. These are: the ecological restoration of the exploited areas, the recovery of the diverted rivers, the mitigation of the health effects caused by coal dust pollution, the labour and productive conversion of the more than 1,200 direct workers who will be made redundant between 2020 and 2022, as well as the more than 5,000 contractors (indirect workers) who will be left unemployed (El País, February 23, 2023).

A dimension that has received very little attention is the differentiated nature of the consequences of mine closures for women in the region. Although, as mentioned above, women's direct participation in the sector has traditionally been very low, mine closures mean even fewer employment opportunities for women. For example, statistical data from DANE show that unemployment has increased significantly in these areas, which are currently areas in transition (see Figure 4) In 2022, the unemployment rates of women compared to men in the departments of Cesar and Magdalena show a huge inequality gap.

Figure 4. Women and unemployment



Source: Own elaboration.. Data taken from “Boletín técnico Gran Encuesta Integrada de Hogares (GEIH) 2022 - Mercado laboral por departamentos Año 2022” (DANE 2023)

This situation results in a greater impact of poverty on women. For example, as shown in Figure 2, while the poverty rate among men in the region is already alarming (more than half of men are affected by poverty), the situation for women is even worse. This is true for income variables (monetary poverty) as well as access to health, education, and living standards (multidimensional poverty).

At a national level, another common factor to be taken into account is that women's participation in agricultural and food provisioning activities in rural households is crucial, as shown in Figure 5. This is also true for women in the Cesar and Magdalena mining corridor. However, in the context of coal mining regions, there is an additional problem: not only has the availability of land for family farming been reduced (to make way for the mines), but the environmental impacts of the mines (such as reduced water availability and the deposition of coal dust on plant leaves) have significantly reduced women's ability to ensure basic food sovereignty for their families and themselves.

Figure 5. Women in the rural contexts

**Participation and average daily time in rural activities by sex.
Total for rural areas 2020-2021**

	Stake	
	Women	Man
Care for animals for aimed at household consumption such as chickens, pigs, ducks, rabbits, etc., or hunt or fish animals for household consumption	6.5%	7.6%
Plant, water, fertilize, weed, or harvest a home garden or crop intended for	5.3%	2.5%
Collect firewood for household consumption	4.6%	1.7%
Procure water for household consumption	3.2%	1.3%
Preparing conserves, cheeses, or cured meats for consumption by household	0.2%	1.2%
Bring cooking fuels such as coal (mineral or vegetable), waste materials, propane gas, gasoline, petroleum, kerosene, and their derivatives.	2.8%	1.0%
Assist in mineral extraction activities such as coal, salt, etc., for household consumption.	0.02%	0.04%

Notas:
Source: DANE, National Time Use Survey (ENUT).

3.3. Gender-based violence and the energy transition

It is important to remember that the women who today find themselves unemployed and at high levels of poverty have also been victims of the political violence and armed conflict that has affected the country for more than six decades. The areas in transition in Cesar and Magdalena, also experienced political violence during the decades of the 80s, 90s and early 2000s. Women and peasant communities in these areas were subjected to death threats, disappearances, murders, torture and forced displacement, among other methods of victimization during the armed conflict (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2022).

On the other hand, at the national level, there has been an alarming increase in gender-based violence in recent years. So for example, the National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (INML) recorded 55,582 cases of violence based in gender in the year 2021 in the country, including 106 femicides, 21,434 cases of violence sexual and 34,042 of intimate partner violence. These numbers represent an increase of 19% compared to the previous year, which totaled 44,614. (INML, 2021). While these figures tell us nothing about the possible causes of this alarming trend, it is clear that this situation of injustice cannot be ignored if the goal is truly to advance a 'just' energy transition. For it is difficult to imagine how sustainable economic empowerment of women in energy transition regions can be achieved without addressing the deep emotional and psychosocial wounds that affect them.

For example, during our holistic and psychosocial healing workshops, we encountered several testimonies from women who had been abused. These were heartbreaking, where one can see the clear relationship between armed conflict and gender-based violence in mining areas, affecting women severely and sometimes causing irreversible damage (see box 2).

It is because of these kinds of women's life stories that it is imperative and urgent to elaborate an economic proposal from and for women in the framework of the TEJ that contains as one of the central elements the psychosocial healing of women who have been violated and discriminated. This need arises not only because of the significant impacts that fossil energy exploitation has generated in a context of political violence, but also because of the need to build a transitional economy that is equitable and just. This objective goes beyond the healing of nature, seeking also to restore the social fabrics between men and women that have been deeply affected in communities living in mining areas.

Box 2. Testimony of woman victim of violence

"The afternoon they came home, I urinated out of fear, they made us stand in a line, they knelt down and told us that they were the owners of the land, that we were miserable, that we should prepare food for them because they were hungry, while the food was there, they raped us, they cut the skin on my sister's legs and arms with a knife, and on the other one's face. I was saved from those marks, but I am still afraid of that nightmare and that dream that comes back".

Leader of one of the psychosocial and holistic healing sessions

4. Ideas from women to realize a gender-inclusive economy for a just energy transition

As shown in the previous sections, the unexpected energy transition that the Cesar and Magdalena mining corridor is currently experiencing has exacerbated the socio-economic marginalisation in the region. Marginalisation that already existed during the operation of the mines has now been exacerbated in a scenario where the region's main source of economic income has disappeared. Furthermore, the impact of the current transition on women is compounded by structural gender inequalities. On the one hand, this event has reduced women's direct participation in formal economic activities and, on the other, it has made them more vulnerable to violence. This includes not only violence related to the armed conflict that still affects the country, but also domestic violence.

In response to this situation, the current government has recognized the importance of addressing this real transition case and channeling it towards a first pilot of a just energy transition in the country. **However, no specific legal or public policy framework has yet been developed to provide clear guidance for this just energy transition process.**

As illustrated above, the energy transition in the context of coal mining regions involves challenges on various dimensions: environmental, social, economic, psychosocial, among others. **This study has focused particularly on the challenge of developing economic proposals that can not only replace but also improve the socio-economic structure that was depended on the coal mining sector.** Moreover, considering not only the high levels of marginalisation and violence faced by women in these regions but also the fundamental role played by women in the social and economic construction of society, **the study applies a gender-differentiated approach** to develop proposals to address the economic challenge of the just energy transition.

During meetings, workshops and interviews, women from the Cesar and Magdalena mining corridor demonstrated that their experience, knowledge and creativity are crucial to building the path to a just energy transition. The many constructive contributions made during the participatory work with women from the corridor are summarised in three levels of proposals. (i) First, ideas aimed at formulating general principles that should guide any process of seeking and building alternatives to the socio-economic challenge of the transition. (ii) The second group gathers concrete public policy proposals that promote the construction of gender economies within the process of a just energy transition. (iii) Finally, three proposals for specific initiatives to build gender economies in the Cesar Magdalena mining corridor are consolidated.

4.1. Six principles for building economic proposals with gender approach from the territories

This section presents six basic principles for building gender-sensitive economic alternatives for a just energy transition. For the participating women, these principles are seen as essential to creating productive alternatives that not only address the current economic crisis, but also ensure that the just transition contributes to the promotion of justice, territorial peace, societal healing and environmental protection. These principles are:



Principle 1: Building community-based economic alternatives from women's organizations

Communities, and **women in particular, should lead initiatives through their organisations** based on their vocations and ancestral knowledge. This approach requires the empowerment of women to strengthen governance in their own economic development processes. It also involves working with other economic actors who contribute their skills to support these ventures, for example by marketing these initiatives. Each project will be linked to a model of solidarity and circular economy involving women's organisations throughout the Cesar mining corridor.



Principle 2: Developing projects that are environmentally sustainable and aim to restore ecosystems

Women in areas undergoing Just Energy Transition (JET) processes propose to develop, through their associations, collectives or women's groups, projects focused on the protection, restoration and conservation of ecosystems using clean technologies. In particular, since these areas have been degraded by coal mining, women want to prioritise projects aimed at restoring ecosystems, with a particular focus on soil, water and air. The economic vision from a women's perspective aims to heal nature, protect it, and restore the ancestral and spiritual connection that humans had with nature, managing it with wisdom and harmony through mutual care and interdependence.



Principle 3: Promoting holistic healing processes for women in mining areas undergoing just energy transition

Economic alternatives should be based on healing the gender-based violence that affects mining areas. It is therefore essential that, as part of the process of developing economic alternatives under the JET policy, **measures such as the establishment of women's shelters and access to psychosocial support services are promoted, with the aim of healing emotional wounds and combating violence** that could hinder women's economic empowerment.



Principle 4: Establishing public services managed by communities, utilizing clean technologies, and with significant participation of women.

In areas undergoing JET processes, it is essential to build public service models, based on community management and administration led by women. This includes the implementation of community systems for basic services such as water, energy, and internet access. To this end, it is important to recognise and learn from existing experiences in the country, such as community aqueducts, community internet networks, and decentralised energy systems based on renewable sources (solar panels, biomass, etc.). The participation of women in the management of these services must be significant in order to ensure inclusive and equitable management



Principle 5: Building fair trade networks led by women

There is a need to establish a system that promotes unity and internal synergies between women's economic initiatives and different commercial actors in order to develop **fair trade networks with a community-based approach, led by women. These networks should integrate their initiatives in areas where just transition** is being implemented. In each process of product creation and marketing, the aim is to promote the reconstruction of culture, ancestral spirituality and the link with nature, based on the life histories of women in the area. .



Principle 6: Establishing integrated and participatory evaluation and monitoring systems

It is necessary to implement comprehensive monitoring systems for policies, projects, or other initiatives aimed at promoting economic ventures. This system should be based on two main pillars: 1) ensuring transparency in resource management and product creation, and 2) ensuring that there are no intermediaries between the producers and the final consumers. **This approach will promote truly fair and transparent trade, with women leading this process.**

4.2. Public policy proposals to strengthen gender economies in JET processes:

Table 1 summarises seven concrete policy proposals that should be adopted to promote and strengthen gender economies within the energy transition process currently taking place in the Cesar and Magdalena mining corridor.

Table 1. Policies for strengthen gender economies in the mining regions

Targeted Issue	Aim of the policy
Psychosocial Support	Development of a community-based gender policy in the five municipalities of the mining corridor, promoting the creation of women's centres specialising in support, training, legal and family counselling, psychosocial and holistic care for women facing gender-based violence.
Psychosocial Support	Promote the elaboration and/or improvement of reporting and support protocols for women who have been subjected to violence in the mining corridor during the JET process, by developing specialised teams with an ethnically differentiated approach to handle reports, conduct investigations and provide counselling to abused women.
Economy	Establish, within the framework of the Just Transition process, a special economic policy for job creation, entrepreneurship and special access to the labour market for women. This policy should take into account their role as single mothers and include an ethnically differentiated approach.
Economy	Promote a corporate culture of non-violence and non-discrimination against women in the mining and energy sector, creating protocols for reporting and eradicating any form of violence within mining and energy companies.
Economy	Expanding job opportunities for women and adapting positions so that women can be hired by the business sector, promoting educational training agreements that allow women access to all types of positions within mining companies. Women have indicated that positions are designed for men, with work shifts and types of functions that do not allow for a true balance, especially considering their role as mothers, which is often more challenging when they are single mothers.
Economy	Include care economy principles within JET policies that goes beyond the recognition of women as caregivers to include an ethnic focus that values and incorporates the knowledge and ancestral practices of indigenous and Afro-descendant women.
Associativity	Creation of a system for strengthening women's organisations in each of the mining municipalities undergoing JET processes, with the aim of promoting the multiplication of women's associative economies.

4.3. Concrete Project Proposals to Build Gender-based Economic alternative in the Cesar and Magdalena Mining Corridor:

As a final result of working with women in the mining regions, **three examples of women's proposed just transition economic** ventures are presented here.

Box 3. Project Proposal 1



House of the women

Development of a multi-purpose learning, commercialisation and logistics centre to empower women as key economic actors of all communities in the mining corridor.

This space will be offer services in different thematic areas such as

Education: Training in project development, management and entrepreneurship, as well as support during the different phases of these projects.

Administration, marketing and digital economy: Training in new economic models, visibility of events in the area through social media and improvements in digital marketing for all projects in the area.

Ancestral knowledge: Development of ancestral techniques in weaving, manufacturing and creating pieces with the cultural identity of each region.

Legal Support: Support women in reporting and complaint process.

Protection: Provide a safe space where women can maintain their integrity and be protected from potential threats to their human rights.

“Establishing the house of the women as a centre of development, care and protection will catalyse the powerful participation of women in the economic decisions of their communities”

Box 4. Project Proposal 2



Development of an economy centered on mango crops.

Development of a comprehensive agro-economic system, including the establishment of collection centres, a processing plant and a mango marketing unit. This system will also include the production of derivatives such as snacks, wine, vinegar, oil, flour and dried fruit, among others. The project comprises the use of innovative packaging and containers using reused materials from coastal areas.

The project has a strong gender focus, with women playing a central role in the workforce. Located in the rural areas of Ciénaga, Magdalena, the project is in a region historically affected by the activities of three large port companies and constant train traffic.

With a high potential for rural development, the project participants produce 2,500 tonnes of products per year through six marketing companies. The transformation and marketing of these products not only promotes a positive image of the communities affected by the coal sector, but also represents a significant economic opportunity. The project is currently in the implementation phase and is progressing thanks to the efforts of the participants and the lessons learned. However, it faces challenges such as production conflicts, logistical difficulties in marketing, the need for greater digital visibility and organisational structuring, among other critical aspects.

“We have a product with high international demand but which is thousands of tons being wasted because of the lack of processing alternative. We will develop a commercial network where this product is not only exported but also transformed into various products.”

Box 5. Proposal of project 3



Cocoa Processing Plant into Table Chocolate (Asochocojagua)

To develop a community-based production system of cocoa and cocoa derivative products. The aim is to establish a system that comprises the whole value chain including the cocoa cultivation in the Serranía de Perijá, a region with varieties that produce different flavours and quality profiles.

Women are the organisational, productive and developmental backbone of this project, creating different commercial lines that go beyond table chocolate to include processed and derivative products such as desserts and chocolate bars.

This project is currently being implemented and aims to become an economic, commercial and cultural asset. The aim is to create more jobs and give quality products the visibility they deserve, backed up by their incredible taste.

“We have a product characterized by its high quality, free from preservatives, colorants, or artificial flavourings; entirely produced by women.”

5. Conclusions and recommendations for international and national actors

Firstly, it is clear that **energy transition policies in Colombia** need to target regions affected by the prolonged political violence that has plagued the country. It must also take into account the deep economic and social inequalities that have not been offset by the lucrative exploitation of minerals and the production of fossil fuels.

Secondly, it is imperative to recognise **the different situation of women in mining areas. These places are characterised by hypermasculinisation and high levels of structural violence.** This underlines the need for public policies for a just energy transition to include strategies to address these forms of violence and their consequences.

Third, for the **energy transition process in mining areas to be truly just, it is crucial to adopt a gender perspective.** This means constructing an economic policy that not only recognises the different impacts that mining has had on women, but also recognises and strengthens the fundamental role of women in society and their ideas and abilities to propose and lead economic alternatives.

Fourthly, the construction of economic policies within the framework of the energy transition process **should be based on 6 principles to ensure the implementation of a gender perspective:**

- **Principle 1:** Building community-based economic alternatives from women's organizations.
- **Principle 2:** Developing projects that are environmentally sustainable and aim to restore ecosystems.
- **Principle 3:** Promoting holistic healing processes for women in mining areas undergoing just energy transition de TEJ.
- **Principle 4:** Establishing public services managed by communities, utilizing clean technologies, and with significant participation of women.
- **Principle 5:** Building fair trade networks led by women.
- **Principle 6:** Establishing integrated and participatory evaluation and monitoring systems.

Based on the presented results, the following **recommendations and concrete proposals** are derived for national and international actors with the aim of strengthening the role of women

Table 2. Recommendations for developing economic policies by and for women in Just Energy Transition processes

Type of policy	Recommendation	
Economic and Public Policy	Formulate a special economic policy for women in the mining corridor.	State
	Develop a territorial project bank to promote a process of collective creation of ideas for the just transition from women.	State
	Promote the diversification of resources to support TEJ processes with a special emphasis on guaranteeing women's access to financial resources.	State and International Cooperation
	Creation of a law on just transition in mining areas specialising in economic transition, with a differential focus on gender issues.	Parlament
	Create spaces for dissemination and discussion on renewable energies and proposals for economic diversification with a gender perspective.	Civil society, International cooperation and Academy
Psychosocial	Promote psychosocial care services for women in mining areas as an integral part of their economic empowerment, for example through the establishment of women's houses.	State
	Strengthen the system of reporting and care for women in each mining area to address gender-based violence.	Parlament

Source: Own elaboration

Ultimately, we believe that the only path to achieve equity, territorial peace, the healing and protection of nature, the preservation of ancestral cultures, and economic prosperity in mining and -energy transition territories such as Cesar and Magdalena is through **the construction of a just transition policy with gender approach**. Given that the formulation of this policy is just beginning in Colombia, it is the right time to address these challenges.

Women in Colombia's regions in transition are seeking support, recognition, and, above all, the opportunity to heal their lives, honour their ancestors, protect their territories, strengthen their families, and contribute to the well-being of their communities in the just transition processes. Therefore, it is imperative to provide them with the necessary backing.

In the current context, where there is significant interest from both the public and private sectors to make large investments in renewable energy in the region as part of the strategy to replace the coal-based economy, it is crucial that these investments do not become new social conflicts, exacerbate existing conflicts, or lead to further degradation of the region's ecosystems. Instead, we as a society, must learn from past experiences. The alternatives that emerge from the **transition should not be imposed but rather negotiated and conceived from the bottom up. If women were excluded in the past, they must be now the fundamental basis of the transformation.**

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