

Unearthing Women's Anti-Mining Activism in the Andes

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Context

This small research project aimed to make visible the everyday experiences of women anti-mining activists in the Andes, foregrounding the women's own narratives in order to understand the dynamics of women's anti-mining activism. Working with LAMMP, the research focused on two places where women have been prominently involved in opposing the activities of large transnational mining companies – in the community of Huancabamba in the Province of Piura, Northern Peru, and several communities in and around Cuenca, in Southern Ecuador (principally the communities of Molleturo and Victoria del Portete). Unlike other prominent examples of community resistance to mining in the Andes, in both of these instances full scale mining exploitation has not yet begun and the communities are continuing to resist the opening of the mines. In Peru, the mining project in question is Rio Blanco, a copper mining project now owned by the Chinese conglomerate Zijin Mining Group Limited, though previously owned by a British Company, Monterrico Metals. In Ecuador, there are several potential mining projects that will affect the area studied, the principal ones being two Canadian mining companies – International Minerals Corporation's Rio Blanco project, a gold and silver mine, and IAMGold's Quimsacocha project, a gold-silver-copper mine.

The rapid expansion of the mining sector and the granting of numerous concessions in both Peru and Ecuador in recent years, has been accompanied by high and increasing levels of often violent social conflict. In both the areas in this case study, there has been a long history of conflict, involving a broad cross-section of the affected communities. However, women's involvement in protest against mining has not been well documented and this research aims to gain a better understanding

of how and why women are involved in anti-mining activism, as well as considering how LAMMP can better support women in continuing this struggle.

The research involved conducting in-depth interviews with 27 female anti-mining activists in Peru and Ecuador during February 2012, working with grassroots activist organisations in Piura and Cuenca that are supported by LAMMP. The organisation in Peru is AMUPPA, the *Asociación de Mujeres Protectoras del Páramo* (the Association of Women Protectors of the Paramo), based in the community of Ñangaly, near Huancabamba. In Ecuador the organisation is FMDP, the *Frente de Mujeres Defensoras de la Pachamama* (the Women Defenders of Pachamama's Front), based in Cuenca. These organisations provided a way of contacting women activists and facilitated the research fieldwork phase.

The women involved in this research were predominantly rural women from communities that will be directly affected by the proposed mining projects, as well as a few women from nearby urban areas. The women were all Spanish speakers and did not identify as indigenous women, instead tending to identify themselves as *campesinas* (peasants). The women interviewed were mostly middle-aged and older women, with the majority being over 40 years old and the oldest being 70. Interviews were conducted in Spanish in a variety of locations, including activists' homes and the offices of the FMDP in Cuenca. All interview excerpts used here have been translated from Spanish by the researcher, and pseudonyms have been used throughout for individuals.

Research Questions

The research was guided by the following key questions:

1. How are women involved in anti-mining activism?
2. How do the women explain their involvement?
3. How does the women's activism impact on their daily lives?
4. What do the women feel they have achieved?
5. What challenges do the women face in continuing their activism?
6. What difference does the work of LAMMP make to the women?

1. How are women involved in anti-mining activism?

The women's accounts of their activism stretched back over several years, with the most experienced women having participated in anti-mining activism for around 10 years. The women recounted being involved in all aspects of activism, including protests in their communities, which often involved violent confrontation with the police and army; collecting signatures to demonstrate the lack of community support for the mine; attending public meetings and enquiries; carrying out educational workshops in local communities and awareness raising activities about the detrimental impacts of mining; speaking on the radio; and attending conferences and events. In some cases, the women recounted experiences of travelling overseas as part of their activism, supported by LAMMP (a point discussed in more detail below). However, despite this extensive involvement and commitment over many years, women have until now remained relatively invisible as key actors in the anti-mining struggle in Latin America. The women interviewed had been involved in broad-based anti-mining activist organisations in their communities, before more recently forming specifically women's organisations due to an increasing recognition of the gendered nature of mining impacts, and also the lack of spaces for women's participation within broader the anti-mining movement.

2. How do the women explain their involvement in anti-mining activism?

The women interviewed explain their involvement in terms of their understandings of the potential negative impacts of mining, and the ways in which these impacts are gendered. In particular, the women emphasised three key aspects:

- Impact on water, particularly in relation to agriculture and health
- Impact on traditional ways of life
- Social impact on the community

Impact on water

The impact of mining activities on water quality and quantity was one of the prime motivators for women's involvement in anti-mining activism. Women highlighted the fact that the proposed mining sites were high in the mountains at the sources of streams and rivers on which they, and the whole country, rely. They noted evidence from elsewhere on the contamination of water by mining activities, in particular the potential for cyanide, mercury and base metals to enter the water supply. As in many instances it is the women who are the primary agriculturalists in their households, responsible for growing crops and tending animals, they feel this threat particularly keenly. Similarly,

many women explained their activism in terms of the potential impact of water pollution on the health of their families, drawing on examples from places such as Cajamarca where active extraction is already taking place. They also highlighted the geographical spread of the impact of contaminated water supplies, which would affect more distant urban areas as well as their own communities, as well as emphasising the fact that urban areas rely on rural areas to grow crops and produce milk for the cities. They thus framed their struggle not simply in terms of the personal detriment that the mine might bring, but as a struggle for the common good.

***Interviewer:** And what impact does mining have on women?*

***Pati (Ecuador):** We are not going to be able to drink the water any more, we'll get sick, it will affect our animals, our crops that we sow, the effects are going to be that the water will be polluted and we will not be able to sustain our production.*

***Florita (Ecuador):** ...I am defending nature, and I defend all the community and the future that is to come. We do not want contaminated water, we want pure water, pure air, and that our Mother Earth is pure in order to sustain us. You know that the earth feeds us. So if they come and contaminate the water, what will happen to the water that runs through our Mother Earth? It will dry up, it will become unviable. For Mother Earth the water is the same as the blood in our veins. This is why we are protesting, we do not want this.*

Social Impact on the Community

The women highlighted issues of alcoholism, prostitution and crime as potentially negative consequences of the threatened arrival of mining in their community, again drawing on evidence from other communities where mining is currently underway. Whilst it is important not to suggest these communities were entirely conflict-free and idyllic locations prior to the arrival of mining companies in the vicinity, the women emphasised that disagreements over the proposed mine were already generating significant dis-unity and conflict within the community. Particularly given the lack of resources within these communities, in terms of money, infrastructure and facilities, many community members hoped that the mine would bring prosperity to their communities, creating a polarised situation between pro and anti-mining members of the community. These social divisions were exacerbated by the activities of the mining companies themselves, and the women described how the mining companies sought to 'buy' members of the community and influential community leaders, through gifts and monetary payments.

***Interviewer:** And why do you think that it women are so involved in the fight against mining?*

Berta (Ecuador): *This affects us firstly in terms of the social problems that we are living with, for example in Molleturo the community is divided, and not only the community but also households are divided. Yes, for example, if the father is hoping for work in the mine and the mother is thinking that the water will become contaminated and that there will be nowhere to get fresh water to drink. And she thinks of the children. On the other hand the father thinks about the money that work will bring. So in many cases households are also divided. Or a brother is in favour of the mine and a sister is fighting against the mine. So this has affected us. We see that there are more disadvantages to women. Because also, if the mine does arrive.... we have seen in Peru, for example, there they are living in communities and the women have suffered greatly from the arrival of the mine, because the women have been raped, because the mine has brought prostitution, there have been human rights violations against the women.*

Impact on Traditional Ways of Life

Both the above motivations for women's activism are part of a broader and more fundamental issue which the women highlighted in their discussions - that mining would impact on their entire way of life, a way of life firmly embedded in traditional agricultural and cultural practices. The women emphasised how intimately their way of life is connected to the land, and felt that this way of life was under severe threat by the arrival of the mine. Rural communities in the Andes have historically been characterised by communal practices, reciprocity and strong kinship ties, and the women suggested that even the exploratory phase of the mining was already impacting on these ways of life, particularly in terms of community unity, as outlined above. The women perceived that they had no alternative but to engage in activism against the mine, as they emphasised that they had nowhere else to go and no alternate livelihood strategies if their current way of life became unviable.

Lorena (Ecuador): *This is something very sad for us, because we if we give up hope and think that the mine will arrive, that they will take our water, what will become of our life? I always say this, I repeat this to myself. Where will be go, what will happen to us? They will not be able to live, I will die soon... but my grandchildren, and my great-grandchildren... my great-great-grandchildren will stay here because Mother Earth still provides for us.*

Luisa (Peru): *...we give our life to defend our water... because we live from our water and our land, we sow, we harvest and we survive. This is our work, we do not have a profession, we cannot say I live from my profession. No, we live off our land. We work the land, we sow, we produce, and from this we live.*

In explaining the reasons for their involvement, the women also drew strongly on knowledge about other places, where mining exploitation was already taking place, in helping them to understand mining's negative social and environmental impacts. Accounts from other activists and, in particular, reports from women who had visited communities affected by mining, were powerful sources of information that acted to strengthen women's resistance to mining in their own communities.

Luisa (Peru): *We went to a meeting of women [in Guatemala], because in Guatemala they also have a lot of mining, violence, machismo, death, rape... it is also sad, I was very sad when we went there, so many women, how they had suffered, and it really is lamentable. This is why we do not want this to happen in Peru, because in Guatemala they now have permission to mine, and they don't care about anything else, they keep exploiting, keep doing what they want to do.*

Sofia (Ecuador): *I went on a trip to Peru, two trips to Peru to see the mines, and I saw all of this and I have spoken to the people who are suffering the consequences there with illnesses, with droughts, with so many problems. They told me, 'do not accept the mine'. We will keep fighting, at least it is something...*

In highlighting the impacts of mining, there were two overarching narratives within which the women positioned themselves in making sense of their activism:

- The motif of Pachamama/Mother Earth, and an intimate connection to the land
- A commitment to protecting future generations

The motif of Pachamama/Mother Earth & an intimate connection to the land

The women in Ecuador used the motif of Pachamama to situate and legitimise their activism. Pachamama is the indigenous goddess of the Earth, worshipped by indigenous peoples in the Andes and a key element of the indigenous *cosmovisión*. Pachamama is usually translated as Mother Earth, and the women used the emblem of Pachamama to represent what they perceived as their natural connection to the land, as women and mothers. Despite the women's lack of explicit indigenous identity, Pachamama was still a strong symbol for them in explaining and justifying their involvement in activism.

Sandra (Ecuador): *Because we have known how to care for, love and respect nature, that which God has created, and this why as women, like Pachamama, like mothers, women, sisters of Pachamama, we find ourselves in the position of having to defend our environment to the bitter end, our Pachamama, who gives us wellbeing, sustenance, through her we live and cultivate the land, and we should never abandon her. We must cultivate the land and*

maintain our environment, healthy, free, as God has created it, without contamination from mining.

Lorena (Ecuador): *...because as women we are like Mother Earth. Mother Earth gives life to us all. She is crying out for us to help her, for us to defend her.*

In Peru, this perception of an intimate connection with the land was expressed by activists in terms of an holistic understanding of the world and the importance of maintaining a traditional rural way of life and living in harmony with the land:

Luisa (Peru): *...we give our life to defend our water... because we live from our water and our land, we sow, we harvest and we survive. This is our work, we do not have a profession, we cannot say I live from my profession. No, we live off our land. We work the land, we sow, we produce, and from this we live.*

Pati (Peru): *In accordance with what we were seeing, we realised that this was important for us, because in the countryside we live from agriculture, from farming, and if certain mining projects were to be permitted, the water would become contaminated, our animals would get sick, as would we, so this is what motivates us to participate, to make this effort.*

Whilst the discourse is very similar, the lack of the Pachamama motif in Peruvian women's accounts may be reflective of broader patterns around the relative invisibility of indigeneity in highland Peru but may also indicate the much less well articulated collective narrative of the more recently formed women's organisation in Huancabamba, as opposed to the perhaps more self-conscious and deliberate positioning of the longer-standing Ecuadorian group.

The power of this narrative can also be seen in the ways in which the pro-mining contingent within the women's communities use the term 'Pachamama' as an insult to denigrate the women's activism and campaigning:

Patricia (Ecuador): *They say 'those old women, blah,blah, those Pachamamas won't leave us alone'*

Paula (Ecuador): *They call us 'daughters of Pachamama' as if it were an insult.*

For the pro-mining contingent, the cultural motif of Pachamama also carries implications of tradition and a symbiotic relationship with nature, but is thus evidently seen as a negative, backwards set of ideas, hence is used as an insult by those in favour of mining, something that clearly carries no weight with the women themselves who embrace these meanings as positive connotations.

A commitment to protecting future generations

The women's determination to protect the land and their traditional ways of life for future generations was a recurring theme in the interviews. Women represented the land as symbolic of their connections to their ancestors and as a vital resource to be protected for future generations.

Lorena (Ecuador): *I have to defend this because I have to leave the environment as my parents and grandparents left it to me. So I cannot forget this, this example that they have left me, this beautiful thing.*

Luz (Ecuador): *Our land is not unclaimed, our lands have been bought. Our grandparents bought these lands. We are their grandchildren, we are the great-grandchildren of those old people who used to be here.*

The women suggested that, as mothers, women's concern for the wellbeing of future generations was greater, and presented this as a key factor in explaining their activism. This theme was central for all women interviewed, even those without children, but was particularly poignantly expressed by older women:

Luz (Ecuador): *I say that I have to think of my grandchildren, of my future generations. Because now the natural world is over, nature is being destroyed. And everything will be contaminated. Because taking all of the riches from our soil will leave it contaminated, they are going to leave it exhausted. So, thinking of this, I think – not because I will get anything in return, nothing, never – but I think of those poor creatures, those who are yet to come, where will they go? If now we are already suffering, and we are not yet contaminated by the mine, we are already suffering some consequences. What will it be like in the future? Because we will not get any recompense, we don't gain anything, our suffering is only because we are thinking of our future generations.*

Luisa (Peru): *...and then there's my children, future generations. I will die perhaps tomorrow or the next day, but my children, my grandchildren, they will be here to suffer, this is why I carry on protesting, I carry on in this fight for the good of my children and the next generations.*

3. How does women's activism impact on their daily lives?

Many of the women recognised that their daily lives had changed significantly since they had become involved in anti-mining activism. For many of the women, this was the first time they had been involved in community organising activities, and overall it was a positive experience for them. Some women noted changed gender relations in their household and also reported a greater sense of empowerment and wellbeing from their involvement in activism. However, more negative issues around feeling threatened and intimidated in their communities also emerged as women reflected on how their daily lives had changed, and these are discussed below.

4. What do the women feel they have achieved?

The women felt that their most significant achievement was simply having succeeded in keeping the mining companies out of their communities, although many of them recognised that this may well be only a temporary reprieve.

***Sandra (Ecuador):** They said that they are going to give permission for this Rio Blanco project, that at the end of last year they were going to grant permission, they started to work on the mine, but we have stood firm, presenting petitions, fighting, organising demonstrations, appearing in the newspapers, and because of this the mining companies and the government delayed things and so our organisation has taken a step forwards because at least they have paid attention to us. They have had doubts about signing these contracts because our group has sent a warning to the miners and we will carry on moving forwards, and this is a source of happiness for me because we are making the most of this organisation. We have sent a warning to the mining companies.*

***Marlena (Ecuador):** The achievements have been that we are not leaving them to do whatever they want. They have had to delay things a lot, having to comply with the mining regulations. Now they do not have the freedom to do whatever they like, to take people captive. We have put obstacles in their way, in meetings, we are an impediment to them, we complain, we challenge, we fight.*

***Interviewer:** And what have been the most important achievements in this fight against the mine and in favour of the environment?*

***Cristina (Peru):** Well, in Huancabamba it has been that we have not allowed the mine to operate there, despite many difficulties, we have marched, we have fought, we have even managed to elect a mayor who supports this approach. So we have had a very difficult task, to achieve this we have worked day and night without sleeping, covering the entire countryside, raising awareness among people using our own methods, because we were worried that people's minds would be poisoned, we thought they were going to win, but we have managed to educate people in favour of the environment. This is the biggest*

achievement we have had, and we will not allow the mine to install itself, we will fight. This is another challenge.

Eva (Peru): *At one point in this battle several projects were delayed, the government has delayed in several cases. With the support of all the organisations we have made them listen to our voice and they have suspended projects and in some way the government has seen that there is a sector of the population that they can't ignore, that they have to take into account and consult, that has rights, that they cannot violate, walk over, harm. That we are citizens with the same rights as all citizens. Our economic conditions may be different but that does not justify violence and mistreatment.*

They perceive the formation of formal organisations to coordinate, support and officially represent their activities as a very positive step and an important achievement that gave them greater legitimacy and recognition for their activities:

Nuria (Ecuador): *I think that for us it has been an achievement to bring together this women's organisation, the organisation is known at a national and international level. This has been a task that we have done ourselves and, well, this is an achievement.*

Luz (Ecuador): *Señorita Nuria has organised us to be a legal organisation, so we have got a base, from which to defend, so that people are forced to take us into account. For example, when we go to hand in a document, before when we were just individuals they didn't pay us much attention. Because of this we have gained legal recognition as an organisation. This is why Nuria has got us organised. With her we have become organised.*

In the case of Ecuador, the much longer established *Frente de Mujeres Defensoras de Pachamama* appears significantly stronger than the nascent *Asociación de Mujeres Protectoras del Páramo* in Huancabamba, but nevertheless both sets of women saw these organisations as vital to their continued collective activism, particularly in the face of the challenges discussed below.

Many of the women also discussed their own personal sense of empowerment as an important achievement stemming from their involvement in activism.

Gabriela (Peru): *I have changed quite a lot because before I was scared, I didn't want to go out and participate, I was ashamed, I was scared more than anything. But now with all of this, it makes us brave, gives us the strength to fight, to be able to advise other people, that they should not sell out, that they should fight for our lands.*

Interviewer: *And how has your life changed since participating in this protest?*

Pati (Peru): Things are good for me now. Before, when I didn't have much knowledge, I was scared of speaking, of going out, that something would happen to me, I was scared when they wanted to interview me, of explaining things, because I wasn't used to this, but not any more. Now it is normal, I go out, I explain things if other women have problems. It is easy now for me to help others to the best of my ability.

5. What challenges do the women face in continuing their activism?

The women voiced four key concerns around their continued involvement in activism:

- Violence and fear of violence, threats and verbal abuse
- Isolation and community disunity
- Time and money constraints
- Disillusionment, particularly if the mine begins full-scale operation

Violence and fear of violence, threats and verbal abuse

Many of the women spoke movingly about the violence they had endured as a result of their involvement in anti-mining activism. This was particularly the experience of women who had been involved in protests and mobilisations against the mining companies, which have often been met with police and army violence. Their experiences included being beaten by police, having teargas used against them and, in two cases, being held hostage and physically abused for several days. Several of the women reported being arrested for their participation in protests, facing charges such as terrorism and criminal damage, highlighting the increasing criminalisation of anti-mining protestors by the State:

Luisa (Peru): It worries me a lot because there are many of us defending the environment and they are killing us... they are killing innocent people, because they accuse us of being terrorists, kidnappers. In 2005 I was kidnapped for three days, more than 32 of us were kidnapped, they treated us very badly, I don't want to recall the details...

Teresa (Ecuador): ...they massacred us, they threw bombs at us, we ran, other people were hit, they kicked them, they twisted their arms, it was a barbarity. And no one says anything, because now they come here, as before the Incas came, then the Incas came with their mirrors, these sorts of things, but now they don't come with mirrors, they bring other things.

Even for those women activists who had not personally had violence used against them, the fear of violence was ever-present in their lives. Women also lived with frequent threats of violence, from

unknown people as well as from community members, and several women described receiving anonymous threatening or abusive phone calls due to their anti-mining stance. Verbal abuse from pro-mining members of their communities was frequently reported by the women interviewed, who described their frequent portrayal within the community as *viejas locas* (mad old women):

Florita (Ecuador): *They call us liars, they say that we are stupid poor people, that we don't know anything, that we are drunks.*

Ana (Ecuador): *The community is divided. Those who are in favour of the mine look at us badly, they insult us, they call us 'the Pachamamas'.*

Pati (Peru): *Those who are in favour of the mine insult and humiliate those are in favour of the environment.*

These experiences of actual violence and a climate in which the fear of violence is palpable, clearly present a severe and ongoing challenge to women's continued participation in anti-mining activism, and highlight the extent to which the women's decision to participate is not one which is taken lightly, exacting a heavy personal toll on the women and their families.

Isolation and Community Dis-Unity

As discussed above, the women perceived that the mining conflict had sown dis-unity within their community, and even within families, who were divided over the issue. As the conflict has continued, fewer people have remained committed to the anti-mining activism. The women attributed this to the concerted efforts of the mining companies to convince local populations of the advantages of the mine, as well as the violence and intimidation that activists faced. Consequently, the women described how in many cases they were one of only a few people within their community who continued to actively struggle against the mining development, and this led to a strong sense of isolation amongst the women. This made it particularly challenging for women to continue actively participating in the struggle.

Luz (Ecuador): *We were a lot of people when we started out, almost more than half the village, and from there we have ended up as just a few, the others have withdrawn. It's not easy now. They are leaving for economic reasons, we are poor and we have few resources. Those who are in favour of the mine say it's not worth fighting because the mine will provide. They use this strategy to get people on side and now those people don't participate.*

Isabela (Ecuador): *Now there aren't any strikes, they don't even do many talks... because of this we have to go to Cuenca when there are meetings. We almost never have meetings here. There are very few of us, the two of us are the most committed.*

Interviewer: *So there are very few women involved in this now?*

Isabela: *Yes, they are distancing themselves*

Interviewer: *Why is that?*

Isabela: *Because they allow themselves to be convinced by those in favour of mining.*

Time and Money Constraints

Many women spoke about the personal cost of continued activism in terms of the multiple pressures they face in their daily lives. With primary responsibility for tending crops and animals, as well as domestic duties and childcare responsibilities, the women found it difficult to devote adequate time to participating in activist activities. Travelling away from their home community to take part in events and demonstrations meant they had to find someone else to look after their animals and children and thus their participation was sometimes sporadic. Similarly, the women noted the financial costs involved in taking part in the struggle. As poor rural women, even the cost of bus fares and buying food away from home are significant extra expenses, and the women described this as limiting their possibilities for participation. They explained the continual struggle to find organisations willing to provide resources to enable them to carry out their activism – whether this be for community workshops, or to attend an event in a nearby city. This struggle for resources is clearly also another time-consuming activity in itself.

Luisa (Peru): *I would sometimes travel, stiff with cold, with only my return fare, because you know that in the countryside we do not have resources, we have nothing but... Here we are, always fighting.*

Cristina (Peru): *For us, to travel here [to Piura], to travel as far as Lima so that our demands will be listened to, the difficulty is that we do not have the money to get ourselves there. Another difficulty is that it is very difficult in the countryside for the women to find the time, the whole day is occupied, but well, the women have managed to get here. Another difficulty is that it is raining a lot in Huancabamba and it's not easy to travel, you need money in order to come here. And the miners say that the NGOs pay for everything, but in this fight there are people who are not paid by anybody, who come on their own account. But to get to Lima [to take part in the March for Water] is not easy, it costs a lot of money.*

Berta (Ecuador): *And now we are in the situation where some of our comrades** have an arrest warrant out on them. Our problem is also that we do not have enough money, because if we had the money we could pay for a good lawyer. But we don't have this. At the moment we are looking for a lawyer who will be good, who will take this on, and who will be able to help our comrades. They had to pay a bond of \$450 dollars to be freed, but they couldn't pay this.*

(* Throughout this report, I have used the term 'comrades' to translate the Spanish 'compañeras')

Disillusionment

The significant challenges outlined above culminate in a larger long term challenge to the women's continued participation in anti-mining activism. This is the danger that the women become downhearted at the challenges they face and the 'David and Goliath' nature of their struggle. As one activist noted, this will be a particular challenge to overcome if and when, despite the women's activism, the mining companies begin full-scale operations in the women's communities:

Nuria (Ecuador): *... I think it's going to be a very difficult stage when mining activity begins in this country. It's going to be hard because... our resistance at the moment is based on the fact that there are no mining projects. There's a strong sense of hope, that this will not happen. But looking at things realistically it will eventually happen. The government is well disposed towards the entry of mining companies, they don't see a problem. The government is supporting the mining projects, so I think it's going to be a blow that will be difficult to overcome, when the time comes to confront it. We have talked about this with our comrades, we say to them that this is like a war, a war that we can't lose. But we can't say that we are going to win. We are not 100% sure of this, so we also need to prepare ourselves for the most difficult part. But when we say this, the women get disheartened, they say that if the mining companies are going to win, what's the point in carrying on, it is pointless.*

Yet, despite these significant challenges that the women face, overall they express a strong sense of commitment and determination to continue their struggle against the arrival of large scale mining operations in their communities.

Florita (Ecuador): *...For my part, I say, it doesn't matter if I die, if they kill me, I will die defending what is ours.*

Sandra (Ecuador): *But I'm not afraid, I say. Those who triumph in the world are those who don't surrender and we are never going to surrender, we are going to triumph. Because if we are scared, we will withdraw one by one, and this cannot happen. We must always defend ourselves. That our comrades have been mistreated, unjustly imprisoned, prosecuted, this gives me more courage and makes me even more determined to fight for this noble cause and to defend the environment for everyone, not only for this group of women, but for all citizens, for the whole world.*

Luisa (Peru): *I have always said, we will carry on going forward, fighting, until the point where God tells us to stop. Because this is a just battle, we know that what we are doing is right, because it is for the common good, for the whole of our country.*

6. What difference does LAMMP's work make for the women?

The work of LAMMP, and particularly the dedication of Glevys Rondón, the founder of LAMMP, were identified by the women activists as sources of great strength and ongoing support, particularly in relation to addressing the challenges outlined above:

Luz (Ecuador): *Thanks to Glevys, she has given us a little bit of financial support, we have been able to travel. She has also helped us to buy food when we have been on journeys. We have been able to go to workshops. We cannot pay with our own money because we don't have any, we are rural people. We are people of few resources. Though on occasions we have used our own money to travel. Happily she has helped us, but hopefully she will be able to do so again. Because it is very hard...*

Nuria (Ecuador): *At the moment we're experiencing prosecutions of all types... for terrorism, things like that. Yes, it's been very difficult but luckily we've been able to count on the support of international organisations, like in the case of LAMMP and Glevys, who have always been ready to help. [...] This has been very important for us, this support that we have had.*

LAMMP's involvement was perceived as crucial in facilitating links with other activists, supporting the development of networks of solidarity across Latin America and beyond:

Sandra (Ecuador): *What motivates us to carry on is the support of other women's organisations, from other countries and, I would say, this nourishes us, it lifts us up, it gives us more strength to carry on fighting against mining.*

Nuria (Ecuador): *For example, in 2009 or 2010, I don't remember the exact year, we did a tour of Europe with Glevys, we were in England. Glevys organised all of the tour, we visited various institutions, organisations, we went directly to Amnesty International, we visited people who support the work of LAMMP. We went to speak in the House of Lords with a Baroness who also supported the work that Glevys does. We were in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where there are lawyers who work on questions of human rights... we did a lot of visiting. We would leave at 8 in the morning and have a full schedule until the night time. [...]*

Interviewer: *And why is it important to do these sorts of activities?*

Nuria: *Because we can go over there and talk directly about our problems without the need for intermediaries. People can hear what is happening first hand from women who are in that situation. It is a direct source of information. And when we were there they would ask us so many questions that they probably would not understand so well what was going on if they received the information second hand. It also reinforces relationships with people. [...]*

And, of course, it allows us to know more about what these organisations are doing, how they can help us. You know more about their work, and I think this is important. The fact of being able to take our testimonies there directly is one of the most important things. And the people there are moved when you tell them about our situation. [...] So I think this is really good, this sort of tour, the meetings that we had with women from other countries, other communities, even more so, because there our comrades can talk directly about the problems they face, they show us the reality that they are living with. I have had the opportunity to visit the places where they live, and to see how they are affected by mining. So this is another very important way of building our capacity, the exchange of experiences with our comrades.

More broadly, the activists felt that through LAMMP they gained important recognition for their work. This recognition was highly valued by the women who drew a strong sense of solidarity from LAMMP's representation of their struggle in the UK and Europe, acting as a vital counterpoint to the isolation they felt within their own communities and countries:

Cristina (Peru): *At the moment, the only people who are concerned about us are the NGOs, the international organisations. Who is bothered about us here in Peru? Who worries about the people who are abandoned in Huancabamba? No one! Who knows about a little far away village where they are killing people for defending themselves against mining? No one, the journalists don't write about this, no one talks about this. If we mount a demonstration in Huancabamba it doesn't make the news, the newspapers, nothing. No one is listening, because they have all been bought off...*

Marlena (Ecuador): *...You should know that to have support from over there is something important. We have a link with women from other countries and this is a source of pride for us. To be in agreement, to be in contact, it's a great pleasure for us. For me it's a pleasure to be in contact with you, to talk to our comrade Glevys, with the other comrades with whom we are always in conversation.*

Interviewer: *Does this give you a bit more strength?*

Marlena: *Yes, we can say that we are not alone, we are in touch with others.*

Sandra (Ecuador): *With the help of other organisations, from other countries who are also supporting us, we don't feel alone, we are protected, our human rights are supported by these organisations, and I see a good future working with these groups. I feel positive, we are not going to give up, we are going to triumph.*

The women hoped that LAMMP would continue to play an important role in capacity building and advocacy activities over the coming years.

Luisa (Peru): *...But thanks to God we are now in contact with Glevys, with you. Hopefully our organisation will move forward little by little, and we will learn a lot from all of you, with your help, we'll carry on training more women, integrating more women in order that people*

understand that we are fighting a just war [...] Hopefully, with your help, hopefully you won't leave us on our own, we always want your guidance.

Inés (Ecuador): *What we need is someone to guide us. Someone who can provide guidance and who has experience about mining. It is important to be well organised.*

Eva (Peru): *What I would like is for this organisation to become stronger and to have a voice that can be heard, that we stand firm and can be influential [...] Perhaps what I would like most in the future is a more solid organisation.*

Nuria (Ecuador): *The other thing is that I would like the work of the organisation to expand into other places and for this we need more support for the organisation, we have been talking to Glevys about this a bit.; the organisation has grown, it has grown stronger, we are developing work in various areas, and it is evident that we are going to need more support, for specific projects in this different areas where we are working. Sometimes this is a bit difficult at the moment, in the sense that this is still a small organisation.*

Conclusions and Future Interventions

The research has emphasised the important role that LAMMP plays in recognising and supporting the work of a group of vulnerable activists who are dedicated to pursuing issues of social justice and human rights in their communities. LAMMP's support is crucial in sustaining and strengthening this work, and in facilitating links between women anti-mining activists across Latin America, as well as acting as a bridge to wider debates, networks and resources. The research suggests that future interventions should particularly focus on building organisational capacity at a grassroots level and facilitating network-building at a country and regional level, to combat the strong sense of isolation that the women activists recounted. LAMMP's work in coordinating speaking tours also has an important role to play in this regard in terms of building recognition and transnational solidarities, particularly in terms of combatting the vulnerability to violence and intimidation, and the fears of violence that the women described.

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