



# Chile

## Introduction

The neoliberal economic model imposed in Chile during the military dictatorship between 1973 and 1990, and subsequently by democratically elected governments, has favoured the development of big companies and has had significant impacts on social equity, the exploitation of natural resources and the preservation of life, culture and the traditions of indigenous peoples.

Specifically it has promoted export-oriented extractive industries, including mining, agroindustry and forestry. Studies show that the Chilean model of forest development is the main factor driving the loss of native forests [1] and associated biodiversity. This is having direct and devastating impacts on peasant communities and indigenous peoples, who depend on forests for food, traditional medicines and religious purposes. Hydroelectric and subsidised forest industry activities have been established on community lands without their permission, and the pulp and paper industry has polluted their territories.

This assessment was developed in three locations in southern Chile, selected because of problems faced, and ecological diversity. The communities in this region are particularly impacted by plantation forestry and the installation of large

hydropower projects to provide energy for mining. 'Guided conversations' were conducted and community workshops focused on 'social cartography' or mapping, allowing the communities to collate and reflect upon information about their resources and challenges to their resilience.

The first group of communities is Santa Bárbara-Quilaco-Alto Bio-Bío. Non-indigenous peasant communities co-exist with members of the Mapuche-Pehuenche indigenous people, who are traditionally linked to the Andean deciduous and high Andean Araucaria forests. [2] They have to deal with the expansion of industrial forestry and the construction of hydroelectric projects.

The second community is Tralcao-Mapu. Most of the peasants in this community hail from the Mapuche-Lafquenche indigenous people, who have a history of fighting for the survival of their culture and customs and the protection of their wetlands. This community is associated with the Valdivian temperate rainforest, forest type coigüe-raulí-tepa. [3] Their territory is threatened by the expansion of monoculture tree plantations and pollution from the cellulose industry.

The third community is Chanlelfu, and the people here are also Mapuche-Pehuenche. They are struggling with the impacts of forest plantations that threaten local biodiversity and places of cultural importance.



# Community Conservation Resilience in Chile

The communities report significant social and biological impacts that threaten their resilience and their ability to continue to live in ways that respect and conserve their local ecosystems and biodiversity. All the communities surveyed maintain a struggle against forestry, pulp and hydropower companies, in order to protect their sacred sites, and the wetlands and forest in which they live and from where they get their food and medicine.

are not being considered as a whole in the projects' environmental impact assessments.

The changing socio-economic context is also affecting the viability of communities. Relocation to new areas with little or no support is a major concern, as is the reduction in land available for agricultural production and traditional practices. Government policies also overlook the organic nature of communities,

which are resistant to bee colony collapse syndrome. The places where they grow herbs and medicinal plants ('menocos' in Mapudungun language) are protected by the communities, who take and propagate plant material for domestic use and to control gully erosion. But their propagation and nursery activities are currently hindered in certain areas because of water shortages and pollution from the pulp mills. Wild edible



Chanelfu community workshop participants' group photo. Carolina Lagos/CIC

These include the contamination of air and rivers by the paper industry, and a dramatic decline in biodiversity leading to imbalances in the food chain. For example, crops often fail as a result of the acid rain that results from the mixing of the gases released by the processing plants and rainwater. The communities report extensive water-related issues, from water shortages, through to changes in river flows and flooding. They are also worried that the risks associated with dams during storms, earthquakes and volcanic activity

tending to split them apart. The communities are especially worried about the migration of young people to the cities, and expressed concern about loss of ancestral knowledge and discrimination against people speaking indigenous languages.

The communities are actively engaged in maintaining and conserving local biodiversity. They practice a diverse traditional and small-scale agriculture, without using pesticides or other agrochemicals. Some communities also keep traditional breeds of bees,

mushrooms are also collected in a way that facilitates spore distribution.



# Preliminary Conclusions and Recommendations

The communities' resilience, and their ability to continue managing and conserving their local environment, could be significantly enhanced by policies designed to empower them—by promoting self-determination, strengthening cultures, rescuing native languages, and reviving traditional ways of relating to nature.

Their resilience would also be enhanced by increased respect for the Mapuche worldview and culture. This includes returning the Mapuche people's ancestral lands, allowing the exercise of sovereignty, and ensuring effective participation in decision-making relating to territories. Developing inter-cultural education would help to improve the relationship between Mapuche and non-Mapuche communities, enhancing solidarity and cooperation.

In general ecosystem recovery, forest regeneration and sustainable agriculture are key priorities. To this end it is important to move away from the industrial forestry model and to limit the installation of energy megaprojects. It is also necessary to strengthen institutions that evaluate and monitor environmental impacts. Local energy generation projects should be developed in collaboration with communities, supporting them with financial resources and institutions, and taking advantage of the communities' existing decision-making structures. These projects will benefit from communities' interest in participating in projects that will help to resolve their own problems.

Recommendations coming from the Santa Bárbara-Quilaco-Alto Bio-Bío communities explicitly focused on stopping the construction of more dams on their territory (including the Rucalhue hydro plant), and transferring the administration of existing dams and water services into public hands. They also want to be able to prevent further encroachment into their lands; access their territories, rivers and forests freely; regenerate local ecosystems; be free to practice diverse peasant agriculture and traditional practices; and promote education about sustainability values and practices.

The Tralcao-Mapu Community considered various policy areas or measures that could improve their well-being in harmony with nature. They need to improve important community services (especially relating to road and river transport). They also want to strengthen the local economy, with diverse and autonomous food production that prioritises organic production, and related improvements, including fairer market opportunities and direct contact with consumers, a vocational school for peasant agriculture, and better agricultural infrastructure including greenhouses.

They are calling for rivers to be kept clean, for the conservation and enhancement of local biodiversity, and the protection and expansion of Tralco's native forests, rivers and wetlands. They would like to incorporate systems of non-conventional renewable energy (NCRE) at community level including

solar, wind and bio-digestion technologies. Finally, they expressed their concerns about keeping the land in the local families' hands over the generations, recovering the use of herbs and natural medicines, and promoting traditional Mapuche gastronomy.

The Chanelfu community want their lands to be returned to them, and decision-making decentralised: they want self-determination and self-government, with solutions designed locally, not in Santiago. They are calling for constitutional recognition of the Mapuche people and their language, Mapudungun, and for education and schooling to be based on Mapuche values. They also focused on the importance of agroecology and agricultural schools, and would like to establish their own educational centre. Priorities include planting native trees and protecting riverbeds. Roads also need to be paved and repaired.

Finally, one of the principles of the Mapuche worldview is duality. Under this concept, man and woman are equal and complement each other. However, reports document some violence in relationships, an issue that needs to be addressed. It is important to continue promoting and supporting the leadership already developed by women.





## Testimony

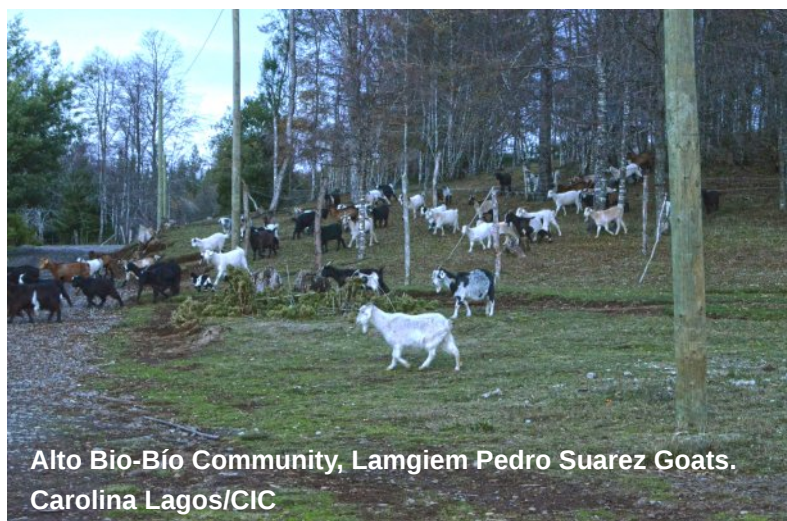
Francisco Manquecheo, 62 years of age, is a member of the Tralcao Community, San José de la Mariquina, in the Los Ríos region. Francisco returned to the land where he grew up in order to work and live in the countryside. However, the arrival of the forestry industry and its monoculture plantations polluted the air and water. Francisco says “Celco came ... the authorities spoke about how it was a great company that would involve thousands of people and employ many from Mariquina. But in the end only about ten people were employed from Mariquina, and of those only one person was from my community.”



Carolina Lagos/CIC



Forests and pine plantations in the hills near Chanelfu community. Carolina Lagos/CIC



Alto Bío-Bío Community, Lamgiem Pedro Suarez Goats. Carolina Lagos/CIC

## References

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