



DEFENDING environmental defenders

Every week, three people are killed because they stand up for nature. In Africa, South America and Asia people who fight for the protection and fair distribution of natural resources are increasingly facing threats, violence and intimidation. The project 'Defending environmental defenders' helped improve the safety of environmental defenders, so they can continue to fight on the front line for a just world that values and conserves nature.

It is without a doubt that violence against environmental defenders is increasing. A total of 164 environmental defenders were killed in 2018, most of them fighting against mining, logging or agribusiness. The majority of victims come from Central and South America.

The growing world population creates an increasing demand for raw materials, such as minerals, timber and palm oil, which are often extracted in an unsustainable way. In countries that are rich in natural resources, there is an increasing demand for land. Environmental defenders are at risk because they speak out against these destructive impacts. Because they try to protect their land, forest and water against the intruding industry, they literally find themselves in the fire line.

OUR APPROACH

Local & practical

In five countries – Colombia, Peru, DR Congo, Indonesia and the Philippines – we worked on specific interventions which improve the safety of environmental defenders. Together with local partners, we implemented a digital reporting system to better register incidents, helped organize safety trainings and measures, and assisted in providing legal support. An emergency fund was put in place to bring people to safety in case of emergency. The interventions are tailored to the local situations and needs.

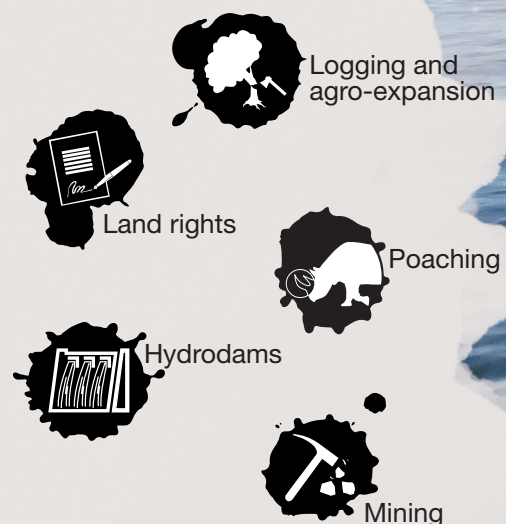
Structural improvement

To structurally improve the protection of environmental defenders, we advocate for the international recognition of the right to defend the environment with authoritative bodies such as the United Nations. Recognition at an international level will contribute to the development of international legal mechanisms to better protect environmental defenders. An important step promises to be the UN Binding Treaty, which should contain obligations to respect environmental defenders and their rights. In a petition to the Dutch parliament, we asked them to actively support this Treaty and to ensure that it protects environmental defenders in an adequate way.

TYPES OF VIOLENCE



MAIN DRIVERS OF CONFLICT



MOST IMPORTANT RESULTS

- There is better registration of incidents, as well as the development of local security networks and technological innovation.
- We were able to set up safe and transparent emergency funds for critical situations.
- Meaningful steps have been taken to ensure institutional recognition of the right to a healthy and biodiverse environment as a human right. However, this is a process that requires our constant attention and pressure.
- Environmental defenders and nature organizations are starting to gain a foothold in spaces where human rights are discussed. In these forums, IUCN NL has positioned itself as an important ally.

LESSONS LEARNED

Context

Knowing the context of the violence against environmental defenders is crucial when taking action against it.

Intelligence

In areas with lots of violence, like Colombia and the Philippines, offenders are very hard to find and catch. Because civil society organizations have to work in the public sphere, we are unable to fully grasp this issue. We need intelligence capacities to truly tackle the problem.

Intersectionality

There are many different types of environmental defenders: men, women, indigenous and not indigenous. Being an indigenous woman, for example, makes it twice as hard to pursue environmental activism. Future actions to protect defenders should be aware of this intersectionality.

Prevention

In the future, the coalition of NGOs will focus more heavily on revealing and analysing the causes of violence.

Networks

Our partners have become even more aware of the importance of working together with civil society organisations in their own region and country. This is crucial when standing up against aggressors.

Recognition

Environmental defenders often recognized situations from their own country in the stories from other defenders. The similarities between them were much bigger than expected. This inspired them to build bridges and find interventions that work in multiple contexts.

Protection

Every time a defender is killed, a large part of the collective movement dies with them. Instead of focusing on individual defenders, many local voices stress the importance of collective protection.

Registration

We worked on better registration of incidents in all of our project countries. This is crucial for legal action, public awareness and lobbying. We do not only need information about murders, but also about how deadly violence can be avoided.

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