

**UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food call for input: Violence and the right to food**

**Response from Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD)**

**Introduction**

CAFOD is the official aid agency for the Catholic Church in England and Wales and part of the global Caritas confederation. CAFOD partners with diverse local NGOs, regardless of religion or culture, to respond to poverty and injustice.

In this response we refer largely to **“ecological violence”: the** disruption of individuals’, communities’, and peoples’ relationship with land, water and other natural resources. We refer to evidence provided by our partners in **Brazil and Colombia** who support communities impacted by the expansion of industrial agriculture and by gold mining.

CAFOD believes that a [just and sustainable food system](https://cafod.org.uk/About-us/Policy-and-research/Food-systems-and-agriculture/Food-system-reform) is rooted in **agroecology**, with the needs and voices of farmers at the centre of the food system. This is vital for protecting the rights of communities around the world whose lives are integrally bound up in their land, forests and rivers, and who depend on and protect the environment and ecosystems.

**Case study 1: Soy monocultures in Pará, Brazil**

***The nature and degree of violence, and the targets of this violence***

CAFOD partner CPT Maraba Xinguara is challenging [soybean expansion in southern Pará, Brazil.](https://blog.cafod.org.uk/2019/10/22/common-home-brazilian-amazon/) Wealthy landowners and large agricultural businesses control most of the land and today 70% of the once abundant forest is dominated by cattle pasture and soy crops, leaving soils badly degraded.

The expansion of such farms is enabled though [violence](https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/brazil-bunge-and-cargill-behind-more-than-30-of-soy-exports-to-eu-and-uk-allegedly-linked-to-indigenous-rights-violations/) levelled against indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant and campesino communities defending their environment - as documented in CAFOD’s 2021 report, [Protecting our Common Home: Land and environmental human rights defenders in Latin America](https://cafod.org.uk/content/download/56617/776987/version/3/file/Protecting%20our%20common%20home%20HDR%20in%20Latin%20America_v5.pdf). In the case of soy farms, land is grabbed from communities through the forging of land contracts and the recruitment of armed groups. Many families in this area live in encampments without basic services and are under threat of eviction. If communities use land productively, they can be granted communal land rights under Brazilian law, but many suffer years of battling administrative barriers, court cases, violence and intimidation to attain their rights.

The destruction of the Cerrado land and the Amazon rainforest is a result of the expansion of soy monocultures. In 2020, [Brazil](https://oec.world/en/profile/country/bra) was the largest exporter of [soybeans](https://oec.world/en/profile/hs92/soybeans) in the world. Evidence connects human rights abuses to soy exports to [UK and European markets](https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/brazil-bunge-and-cargill-behind-more-than-30-of-soy-exports-to-eu-and-uk-allegedly-linked-to-indigenous-rights-violations/). Nonetheless, this year the International Finance Corporation (IFC) approved a [$200 million loan to Louis Dreyfus Company Brazil (LDC)](https://foe.org/news/controversial-ifc-loan/) to support commodity feed crop production in the threatened Cerrado biome of Brazil.

Violence against indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant and campesino communities is enabled by a failure to implement, [loopholes in,](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/feb/10/loophole-allowing-for-deforestation-on-soya-farms-in-brazils-amazon) and the weakening of, land and environmental law. Brazil’s former president had pushed forward a set of policy proposals to weaken environmental legislation, which would enable soy producers and others to more easily deforest and expand production. These policy proposals include the weakening of environmental licensing of mega-projects; weakening of land titling procedures effectively providing an amnesty for illegally grabbed and illegally deforested land; changing time limit rules on indigenous territories thus making it harder for un-demarcated indigenous land to be recognised; and deregulation of pesticides. While the election of a new President in Brazil could signal a change in policy, these communities remain in danger.

***Examples of laws, policies, or campaigns that have successfully prevented or reduced violence in a food system and how authorities and people have created of sanctuary or protection from violence within food systems***

CAFOD’s partner CPT Maraba Xinguara supports communities in the following ways:

* Organisational and legal support to help families access land titles
* Helping communities produce and commercialise food [using sustainable farming techniques](https://blog.cafod.org.uk/2019/10/22/common-home-brazilian-amazon/) that preserve soil, water and natural vegetation, sustaining current and future harvests
* Protecting forest defenders and fighting for justice for those murdered and criminalised

[In Maraba](https://blog.cafod.org.uk/2019/10/22/common-home-brazilian-amazon/), with the legal support of the local church, families received their first formal recognition of land title in 2016, after years of bureaucratic battles, legal setbacks and surviving four evictions. Today, the formal land title recognises their rights and responsibilities to use the land and natural resources sustainably.

**Case study 2: Gold mining in in Cajamarca, Colombia**

***The nature and degree of violence, and the targets of this violence***

In 2017, multinational corporation AngloGold Ashanti announced the discovery of a massive gold deposit in Cajamarca, which they named ‘[La Colosa’ (The Colossus](https://www.euronews.com/green/2021/12/08/colombian-farmers-take-on-david-vs-goliath-fight-against-exploitative-gold-mining)). The gold mine project risks destroying the area’s water sources, unique wetland ecosystem and the livelihoods of more than half of Cajamarca’s 20,000 inhabitants, who live off the land as peasant farmers. This puts their food sovereignty and right to food at risk, and an entire region known as the Despensa Agrícola, the “agricultural larder” of Colombia, risks losing its productivity. The fertile volcanic soils support a wide range of crops, and the area is famous for its production of arracacha, a famous Andean parsnip.

***Examples of laws, policies, or campaigns that have successfully prevented or reduced violence in a food system and how authorities and people have created of sanctuary or protection from violence within food systems***

In March 2017, [the first binding public consultation](https://cafod.org.uk/About-us/Policy-and-research/Private-sector/Human-rights-Latin-America) by citizen initiative (consulta popular) in Colombia was held, and the community voted decisively against the mining project. Its success was hailed as a victory for community democracy. Other communities followed Cajamarca and initiated their own public consultations. A range of diverse stakeholders (including local and national government, campesinos, local communities, journalists, youth and women’s groups, and academics) have worked cohesively to resist the company’s plans to build a huge mine in their communities, through roundtable meetings, outreach at local, regional and national level, and an annual ‘carnival march’.

Subsequently, the Constitutional Court reversed a 2016 decision that had allowed binding public consultations by citizen initiative. In 2018, the court issued three further rulings precluding mining activities from being forced to undergo public consultations. These decisions have allowed the government and companies to attempt to minimise the legality and binding nature of the consultations including the one in Cajamarca.