

The Isthmus of Tehuantepec Corridor: Public-Private Partnerships and territorial impacts in Mexico

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**THE ISTHMUS OF TEHUANTEPEC CORRIDOR:
Public-Private Partnerships and territorial impacts in Mexico**



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ABSTRACT

The Inter-Oceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is a megaproject proposed by the government of Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador that focuses on the construction of infrastructure and energy projects among which is the rehabilitation of the Isthmus Railway and the construction, maintenance and operation of the Jáltipan Salina Cruz gas pipeline. The aim is to put into operation an electric train and a 247 km gas pipeline to expand gas production in the region. Both projects are developed under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) scheme and have foreign investment.

In Mexico, PPPs have been implemented considering that they are the necessary formula to solve the State's inability to administer and offer public goods and services. However, this approach has not guaranteed its success and has generated various territorial conflicts.

This project reproduces relations of domination over territories based on the discourse of a development model that meets social needs, although it maintains as a priority economic growth linked to extractive production. This approach not only generates environmental and social impacts but also makes invisible and accentuates the discrimination and marginalization that women in the region face by not being considered as subjects for decision-making.

In this context, women defenders in this region have undertaken a way of resisting by building their own notion of well-being and proposing an agenda in which the rights to health, education, food, water and environmental protection are fundamental issues.

INTRODUCTION

This article presents an analysis of the megaproject for the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Mexico proposed by the government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador. This region joins the territories of Oaxaca and Veracruz and has a historical geopolitical and economic interest because it is the only point, in Mexico, that joins the Pacific and Atlantic oceans in a distance of approximately 200 kilometres. These territories, in addition to being indigenous and peasant territories, form an ecosystem of great relevance due to its biodiversity and hydrology.

The isthmus has not been considered by the prevailing development model as a biological corridor but as a commercial corridor particularly for the energy and hydrocarbon sector. This is not the first time that a government program has directed its attention to the region under this perspective. Since the 1970s, the Tehuantepec Isthmus has been configured to emulate the Panama Canal.

This work takes up again the most recent interest in this territory, that is, the government's bet which has elaborated a development program for the Isthmus of Tehuantepec whose "nodal axis" is the Interoceanic Multimodal Corridor. This program consists of a set of projects including the renovation of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Railway, the Jáltipan Salina Cruz gas pipeline and the creation of free zones, a model of territorial planning that aims to establish specific areas to operate the projects and attract national and foreign investment in the framework of public-private partnerships (PPP). For the government, this program is considered a "new development model". (SHCP, 2019)

In order to address this, community resistance is based on demanding respect for their right to decide on the territory and to define the activities to be carried out there. The main concerns about the project have to do with its impacts on the environment, the local economy, and the use of the project to expand extractive energy projects that have already impacted the soil, water, and wildlife in the region. The role of women has been central in this struggle by highlighting these impacts, strengthening the union of organizational processes and developing proposals for the collective well-being of the region.

The document is structured as follows: it begins by explaining the context of PPPs in Mexico. Then, it analyses what free zones mean and their previous context. In the third section, it reviews the characteristics of two extractive projects in the corridor: the gas pipeline and the railway, their main power actors and the context of community resistance that is currently organized against these projects. Finally, it analyses their impact on the territories from a feminist approach to this territorial conflict.

With this research we seek to contribute to the work of women social leaders in Veracruz and Oaxaca and, in general, of the region's community organizations who are currently engaged in a struggle for their right to territorial autonomy, environmental defence and a notion of well-being that goes beyond the prevailing development model.

DRAFT for discussion

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1. Public-Private Partnerships in Mexico.

In Latin America, Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) had a special boom in the 1990s as a result of a context of economic liberalization and privatization especially aimed at the region with a view to implementing development policies based on economic growth, which, under the neoliberal approach, was hampered by the State's regulatory frameworks or, as the World Bank mentions, by "the limitations of public provision" such as "lack of technical skills, slow procurement processes and budget constraints".^(Michelitsch and Szwedzki, 2017) Faced with this, the option consisted in combining public and private capital, that is to say, to form PPPs, in order to stimulate growth and give efficiency and sustainability to the supply of public goods and services,^(World Bank, 2017) among them, those corresponding to the sectors of infrastructure, energy, agriculture, education, health, and security, among others.

In Mexico, the first PPP model was the Deferred Infrastructure Projects in the Expenditure Register (PIDIREGAS), created after the reform of the Budget, Accounting and Public Expenditure Law in 1995. These partnerships were initially aimed at the infrastructure sector and consisted of granting private companies the execution of works with which investments are carried out on behalf of public entities.^(PIAPPEM, sf) The financial scheme initially designed was to "Build, Lease and Transfer", with which the State assumes the commitment to buy the goods and services built by private companies.^(PIAPPEM, sf) Thus, mainly infrastructure works were carried out in which the participation of the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE) and *Petróleos Mexicanos* (PEMEX) was highlighted. It has been considered that "the necessary investment to maintain the energy sector would not have been feasible without the association with the private sector".¹ Numerous road infrastructure works were also carried out.

Later, in 2002, another scheme called Projects for the Provision of Services began to be used, designed with the purpose of "increasing the amount of public resources allocated to other priority areas of social impact".² In other words, private capital would no longer be used only for the construction of roads and equipment, but also for health, education, water, security, culture and sport. Until then, the regulation of PPPs worked

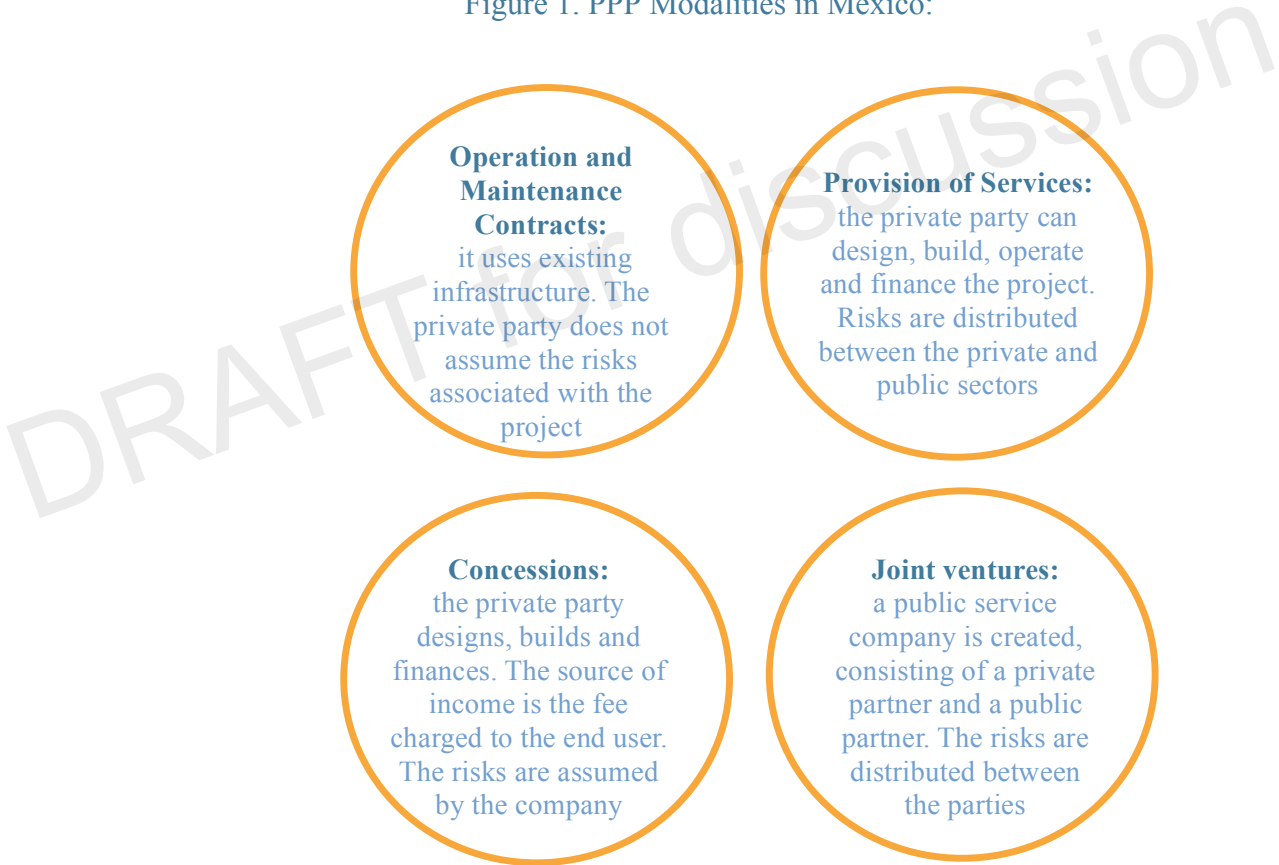
1 (PIAPPEM, sf) p: 23.

2 (PIAPPEM, sf) p: 4

through reforms to the Budget, Accounting and Public Expenditure Law, the General Law of Public Debt and the Federal Law of Budget and Fiscal Responsibility.

In 2012, a unified regulatory framework was formulated for the first time, the Public-Private Partnerships Law, which defines these projects as "those that are carried out under any scheme to establish a contractual relationship between public sector entities and the private sector, for the provision of services to the public sector, wholesalers, intermediaries or the end user, and in which infrastructure provided totally or partially by the private sector is used with the aim of increasing social welfare and investment levels in the country".⁽²⁰¹²⁾

Figure 1. PPP Modalities in Mexico:



Source: Prepared by the author based on information from the Centre for Public Finance Studies (CEFP, 2016)

Between 2010 and 2017, almost all states or sub-national³ entities have constituted their own legislation to regulate PPP contracts; currently only two states, Tlaxcala and Zacatecas, do not have a specific law.^(SHCP, 2017) In general, the most common PPP schemes are concessions and Projects for the Provision of Services (PPS).^(CEFP, 2016) Concessions consist of transferring responsibility for a productive asset from the public sector to a private company for periods of more than ten years,^(CEFP, 2016) and PPS are defined as "sets of technical-economic actions that are developed by a private individual to resolve basic needs and provide the community with the services or functions that are originally the duty of the State to provide, which are indispensable to guarantee the effectiveness of individual and collective rights".^(Government of Jalisco, 2008) Both modalities are similar, although the first is more common in contracts related to exploration and exploitation of natural resources.

With this regulation and approach, it is assumed that the States have a permanent difficulty in guaranteeing public goods and services and are unable to adequately allocate resources, which can only be solved with the intervention of private capital. However, this formula has not necessarily guaranteed the success of the projects; on the contrary, PPPs have led to territorial conflicts and have not always been financially effective. For example, the PPP to build the Chinchero International Airport in Cuzco, Peru, did not consult the communities and approved an addendum to the project plan which established that the State assumed most of the project's risks. This raised its cost and generated a strong conflict that ended in the cancellation of the contract and the public maintenance of a work that did not fulfil its objective.^{(Salazar. Latin American Network for Economic and Social Justice (LATINDADD), 2018)} A similar case occurred in Colombia with the Magdalena River Navigability Project. The project established a clause according to which the company had to be compensated by the State in case it had to carry out a consultation process to obtain the environmental permit, and the company allocated a compensation resource in case of environmental damages without carrying out a proper environmental impact assessment. As a result, it did not cover all the necessary expenses in compensation, shifting the responsibility to the Colombian State which, in addition, did not adequately address the damages caused to the river and its surroundings.^(Cruz. Environment and Society Association, 2018)

3 Mexico is made up of thirty-two states with legal autonomy and their own constitution.

For its part, the Mexican State has recognized that the hidden problems of PPSs lie in the fact that the profitability or the percentage of profit required by the private sector is much higher than that of the public sector and, therefore, public finances are affected. The end of private profit requires profit margins that make projects more costly, which affects the government's ability to maintain the services offered. The contracts for these projects tend to have long terms, more than a decade, and, since they are managed by a private company, they are subject to changes in investment strategies, the internal organization of the company, its board of directors and owners.^(Centre for Public Finance Studies, 2007) PPSs "emerge when a private investor or the government identifies an opportunity, they do not necessarily respond to fully identified urgent needs".⁴

The operation of PPPs depends on the transfer to the private sector of rights over public resources or assets, among which land ownership is the primary interest and the State must ensure that there are no "third party claims to the land to be used for a project".^(Public-Private-Partnership Legal Resource Centre., 2019) The conflict is generated because in Latin America many lands identified for the operation of energy and infrastructure projects are owned by peasants and indigenous people and form an autonomous social, cultural and economic space that does not necessarily coincide with private interest in an "investment opportunity", which has triggered dynamics of dispossession and displacement.

Another conflict that PPPs can produce has to do with the environmental impacts caused by the projects. According to World Bank recommendations "it is important for the government to determine whether the detrimental impact on the environment or on society from a project outweighs its potential benefits and, where a project is necessary, how the environmental and/ or social impact can be kept to a minimum".⁵ However, experience in Mexico indicates that environmental authorizations or permits are granted, even when serious impacts on ecosystems are demonstrated; even projects are authorized to companies although they have caused environmental disasters.⁶ Likewise, environmental legislation

4 (Centre for Public Finance Studies, 2007) p: 12

5 Public-Private-Partnership Legal Resource Centre.

6 On 6 August, 2014, Buena Vista del Cobre S.A de C.V., a subsidiary of Grupo Mexico, one of the most powerful companies in the mining and infrastructure sector in Mexico, spilled 40 million litres of acidified copper sulphate into the Bacanuchi and Sonora rivers, causing the most serious environmental disaster in the country's mining industry. Despite this, in 2016 this company began operations with environmental authorization to build a new mine tailings dam in the same area of the spill and of greater

allows the same companies to determine at their discretion the measures of mitigation and compensation of impacts that in many cases are lax, inexistent or unfeasible if one takes into account that environmental impacts can cause irreversible effects on ecosystems.⁷

For example, in Coahuila and Veracruz, in the north and south of Mexico respectively, the PPP between the municipal authorities and the company Agbar from Barcelona, was justified to "improve water accessibility". However, not only did it privatize this public good, but it also led to its over-exploitation and subsequent lack of supply, since the company altered the data related to water availability in the basin and harassed the community that denounced the fact.^(Project on Organization, Development, Education and Research, PODER., 2019)

Something similar happened with the project to build the Naucalpan-Toluca highway, a concession granted to Group Higa of Mexican origin, designed to cross a natural reserve and territory of the Otomi indigenous community in the State of Mexico. In 2016, the National Human Rights Commission concluded that the project violated the rights of the inhabitants by starting without prior consultation and consent; it also showed that the company violated judicial agreements and intimidated the indigenous communities.^(CNDH, 2016)

PPPs are schemes that can favour the corporate capture of the State, understood as a phenomenon in which an economic elite makes public policy decisions for private benefit, above the common welfare. When this happens "the realization of fundamental human and environmental rights is undermined through the exercise of undue influence on institutions".^(International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Red-DESC, no date)

PPPs can also result from corporate capture when there is political and legislative interference, i.e. pressure exerted by companies on legislatures in order to "provide better business opportunities or eliminate or weaken regulation of corporate activities". Likewise, when there is a movement of employees from the corporate sector to positions of public regulators and vice versa for the purpose of facilitating regulatory frameworks and business-friendly contracts, i.e. revolving-door dynamics, as well as when companies

dimensions. Available at: <https://www.projectpoder.org/es/2019/07/observaciones-al-informe-preventivo-del-proyecto-nueva-presa-de-jales-para-buenavista-del-cobre-s-a-de-c-v-26so2013md082/>

7 In 2019, Canadian company Almaden Minerals indicated, when applying for environmental authorization to exploit gold and silver in the state of Puebla, that mitigation measures related to the control of leaks or spills and the recovery of fertile soils would be implemented "only if possible". Available at: "Regional Environmental Impact Assessment, with risk analysis. Ixtaca Mining Project, project number 21PU2019M0014». pages:VII-6 and VII-7

manipulate communities, interfere in the judicial system and privatise public security services.⁸

Currently, Mexico is part of the global agreement "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" and formed the National Council of the 2030 Agenda. This agenda has promoted the implementation of PPPs in Latin America as it is considered a strategy to achieve sustainable development and eradicate poverty. In November 2019, the National Council presented the "National Strategy for the Implementation of 2030 Agenda" in which it states that one of the principles that will allow the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are the "multi-stakeholder alliances" referred to the coordination between actors from different levels of government and the private sector, among others. For the government, this coordination is necessary because it affirms that "the public sector cannot, by itself, induce the necessary transformations to achieve the SDGs".^(Presidency of the Republic, 2019) In other words, one of the principles of the National Strategy is the formation of PPPs with the purpose of increasing investment for sustainable development by means of "*pipelines*".⁹ These seek to articulate national and international funds with projects for the provision of services and to prepare an analysis of the Social Infrastructure Contribution Funds, that is, to use private investment for the provision of public goods and services.

1.2. The Isthmus Corridor, "a historical PPP"

The Isthmus Corridor was officially announced by the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit (SHCP) at the beginning of the current government period with the presentation of a Development Program for the Isthmus of Tehuantepec during the Bi-national Infrastructure Conference on 17 June, 2019.¹⁰ According to what was presented that day, the program seeks to promote a new way of seeing development, reduce the stagnation caused by the lack of investment, generate jobs and conserve, restore and increase natural resources and biodiversity. This is considered a "historical public and private investment".^(SHCP, 2019)

8 International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Red-DESC

9 The word is used in English in the Spanish text. This is an analogy used in the field of PPP discussion to refer to the paths through which investments for a project can be channelled.

10 As of the date of publication of this article, the full programme has not been published or there is no document describing it in detail. .

Table 1: Projects that make up the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Development Program
Construction of new container terminal in the port of Coatzacoalcos and Salina Cruz. Modernization of the oil port and construction of an industrial port in Salina Cruz
Rehabilitation of the isthmus railway
Construction of the Palomares-Matias Romero trans-isthmus-trunk extension circuit
Establish 6 Welfare Development Areas in the municipalities of Acayucan, Minantitlán, Matías Romero, Ciudad Ixtepec, Coatzacoalcos and Salina Cruz
Construction, operation and maintenance of the Jáltipan-Salina Cruz gas pipeline
Development of wind power plants for electricity generation in the region of Ixtepec in Oaxaca
Maintenance and rehabilitation of the Minantitlán and Salina Cruz refineries

Source: Prepared by the author with data from SHCP and the National Bank of Public Works and Services, Banobras. ^(SHCP, 2019) ⁽²⁰¹⁹⁾

These projects operate through a multimodal corridor, the **Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec**, constituted by decree as a decentralized public body whose objective is to "implement a logistics platform that integrates the provision of port management services and their interconnection through rail transport"^(SEGOB, 2019b) by means of public and private investment. It has the capacity to carry out the legal acts that it considers necessary to "promote the region's productive capacity and modernize the physical infrastructure". ^(SEGOB, 2019b)

The corridor works as a free zone that guarantees participation and support from state and municipal governments, a regulatory improvement that implies procedural diligence for application for concessions, PPS and legal certainty for investments. Within the free zone, the companies operating there have a 30% decrease in Income Tax, a 16% decrease in Value Added Tax (VAT) and will have a reduction in the price of fuel. ^(SHCP, 2019) In June, President López Obrador announced that "as part of this project, 10 industrial parks of between 500 and 1,000 hectares will be built." ^(López Obrador, 2020)

The Isthmus Corridor is an interesting example of how PPPs work, as it is justified by the government as a project that will generate social welfare and seeks to legitimize itself as a necessary scheme for a region with high poverty rates. It is composed of several projects (see Table 1) defined in the long term using existing public infrastructure, such as the Isthmus railway operated by the state-owned majority holding company, Ferrocarril del Istmo de Tehuantepec S.A de C.V. ^(SCT, no date) and the Jáltipan-Salina Cruz gas pipeline,

administered by the National Natural Gas Control Centre, CENAGAS. (SHCP and BANOBRAS, no date)

Both projects involve rehabilitation, operation, design, construction and maintenance. The Railway has currently been tendered to six private companies, some in consortium, and the gas pipeline is in the process of being awarded under the concession scheme. In both cases, the private companies will be the ones that build, maintain and operate the services.

2. Mega-projects in the multimodal corridor

2.1 From Special Economic Zones to Free Zones

In September 2015, the Special Economic Zones (SEZ) bill was submitted to the Congress of the Union.^(Parliamentary Gazette Number 4372-VIII, 2015) On 1 June, 2016, the Federal Law was approved and on 30 June, the Federal Authority for the Development of Special Economic Zones¹¹ and the Regulations of the same law were created. To carry out the above, a constitutional reform was previously made to Articles 25 and 26^(Chamber of Deputies of the Honourable Congress of the Union, 2017) referring to the role of the State in national development. The concept of competitiveness was incorporated as a guideline to promote the performance of the private sector in the national economic development, which also allowed that through the head of the Federal Executive Branch a national policy of industrial development was established within the framework of the System of Democratic Planning for National Development.^(Parliamentary Gazette Number 4372-VIII, 2015) This bill was presented by then President Enrique Peña Nieto¹² who indicated that "the development and boost of the zones constitute a policy of economic promotion and industrial development".

In Mexico, since 2013 with the energy reform,¹³ it is part of the fundamental rule that the State safeguards the performance of the private sector so that the objectives of

11 The Federal Authority for the Development of the Special Economic Zones was the "decentralized administrative body of the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit, responsible for planning, promotion, regulation and verification of the Zones". Official Gazette of the Federation, "Regulation of the Federal Law of Special Economic Zones", undated.

12 Mexican president during the government period from 2012 to 2018

13 This reform redefined the role of the State and granted powers to the private sector in order to promote a new model of energy production and generation in which *Petróleos Mexicanos* and the Federal Electricity Commission could partner with private capital for the construction and operation of new refineries and to

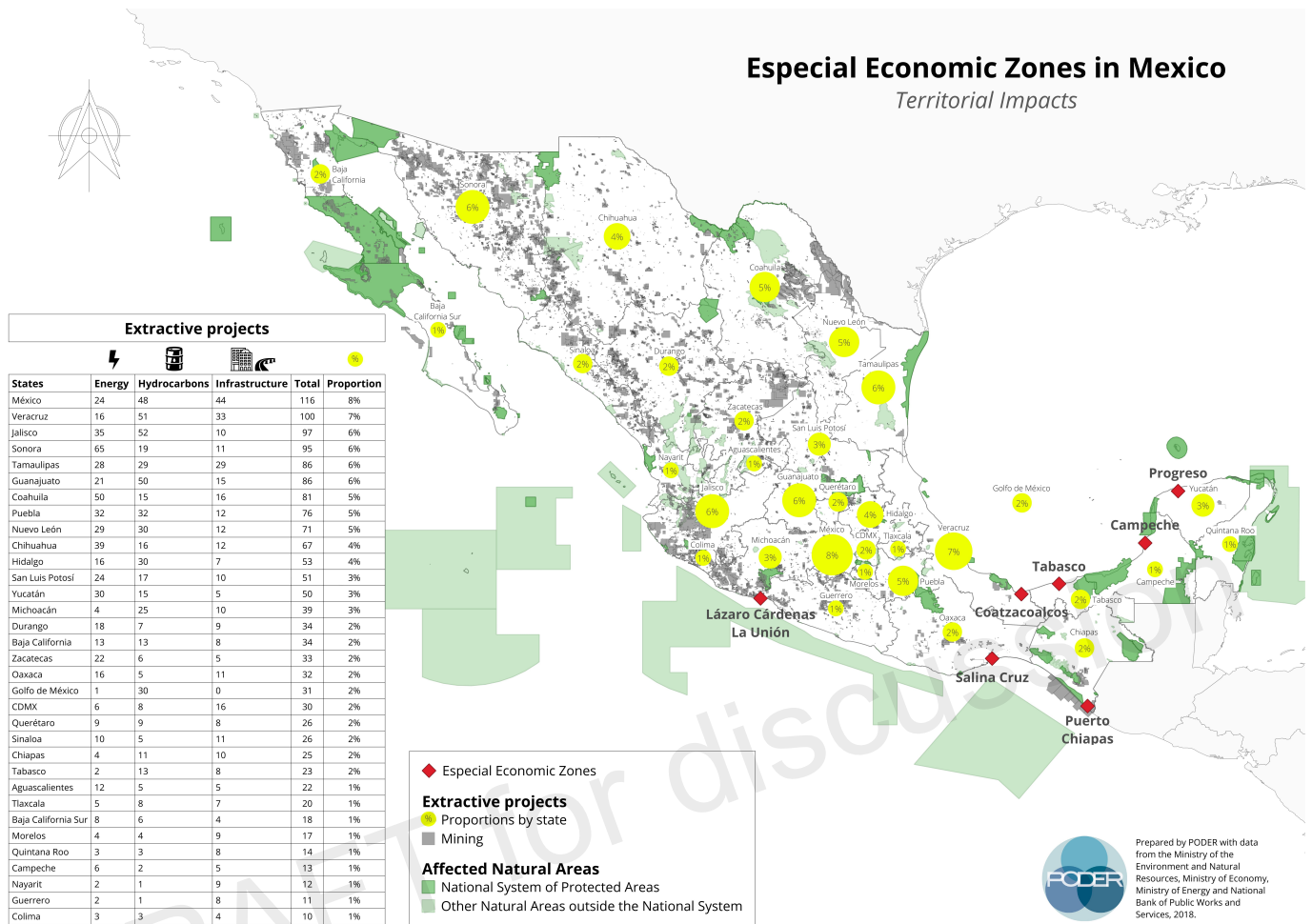
national planning can be designed according to the interest of said sector. The SEZs were part of the package that sustained this government policy and laid the foundations to maintain it in the future. Its operation had been determined through declaratory decrees for seven zones: Coatzacoalcos, Salina Cruz, Puerto Chiapas, Lázaro Cardenas-La Unión, Progreso, Campeche and Tabasco.

As can be seen in the map below, these zones were intended to be located in strategic commercial and productive points in southern Mexico. Around them there are conglomerates of mining concessions and allocations and contracts for hydrocarbons, wind energy and hydroelectric power, as well as important areas of environmental protection and conservation.

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finance, install, maintain and operate infrastructure for the provision of electricity transmission and distribution services. It also provided that the activities of this sector are strategic, of priority interest and public, so they would have priority for the occupation of the surface of the national territory. Available at: <https://www.gob.mx/sener/documentos/explicacion-ampliada-de-la-reforma-energetica>

Map 1: Special Economic Zones project in Mexico



Source: Prepared by PODER with data from the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Energy and National Bank of Public Works and Services, 2018.

In 2019, the current government abolished the decrees declaring economic zones, leaving their operation without legal viability.^(SEGOB, 2019a) However, a year earlier, Rafael Marín Mollinedo^(AFDZEE, 2018d) had been appointed as the head of the Tehuantepec Isthmus Development Programme, and had announced the creation of a free zone throughout the isthmus, a format that has very similar characteristics to those of economic zones but without its own regulatory framework. The format of free zones was decreed in 1981 specifically for the border regions,^(SEGOB, 1981) however, for the free zone of the isthmus, a separate decree will be created that has not been published so far.

Even if these decrees were to be repealed, the projects for at least two special economic zones would remain in place: Salina Cruz, located in the state of Oaxaca, and Coatzacoalcos, in the state of Veracruz. Only that on this occasion they would be part of the mega-project called the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

Both the Free Zones and the Economic Zones are formats that arrange the territory based on a notion of development anchored to economic growth through investment, mainly foreign. Their characteristics should be that the State guarantees entrepreneurs freedom from taxes and tariffs, tax benefits and infrastructure, labour flexibility and legal security for the acquisition and purchase of land. Within the Corridor, these benefits are seen as incentives that should be promoted before the competent authorities.¹⁴

In implementing them, there is a risk that the private sector will replace the role of the State in the territories under the premise that only by this means can employment be generated and poverty and inequality reduced. This way of understanding development favours territorial conflicts produced by the dispute between communities and companies for water and nature. They are a consequence of assuming that private interests are the same as public and collective interests and of designing regulatory frameworks that guarantee privileges to large businesses, which does not ensure social and collective well-being in regions where there is inequality, but does ensure economic benefit for those who operate the zones.

To date, only the documents of the decree creating the Corridor and its statute are public.^(Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, 2020b) Financial and contract information has been published sporadically. For example, it was not until 7 June, 2020 that it was officially published that "for the rehabilitation of the railroad tracks investments exceeding 20 billion pesos in the period 2019 - 2022 will be made".^(Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, 2020a)












Since it does not have basic operation guidelines, the configuration of the free zone in the Isthmus is subject to the decisions that the Corridor, as an organism, takes on the general development of the project. This makes it difficult for communities and citizens to get clear information and exercise control over the operation of the zone, leads to ambiguities in the enforcement of agrarian and fiscal environmental regulations, which is used by companies to ensure the success of their investment.

14 (SEGOB, 2019b)Article 4-V.

2.2. Isthmus of Tehuantepec Railway.

This project consists of the rehabilitation of the 206 km railway line between the state of Veracruz and Oaxaca. So far, six contracts are known for the rehabilitation of 146.3 km of railway line from the entrance of Salina Cruz to the junction of Medias Aguas, contracts to be carried out under the PPS scheme. Between January and February 2020, the SHCP presented the results of the ruling in which these contracts were awarded to six companies with their respective consortiums.^(FIT, 2020) Table 2 below shows the main beneficiaries.

Source: Prepared by the author with data from the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit, CompraNet 2020.^{(FIT, 2020),1516}

Stretch	Subsidiaries	Parent company	Country of origin	Owner
Medias Aguas-Ubero	Construcciones Urales S.A de C.V. associated with Regiomontana de Construcción y Servicios S.A.P.I. de C.V.			Manuel C Ramos, I
Ubero-Mogoñe	La Peninsular Compañía Constructora S.A de C.V. associated with Caltia Conseciones S.A de C.V., Grupo Emprendedor Caltia S.A.P.I. de C.V. and Ferropartes Industriales del Norte S.A de C.V.			Carlos Ha Chairman of Direc
Mogoñe-La Mata	Ferro Maz S.A de C.V. associated with Constructora Torres y Asociados S.A de C.V., Constructor Janus S.A de C.V. and Chiñas Construcciones S.A de C.V.	Ferro Maz Consortium		Fernando Al Becerra. Data in the Mex registry of
La Mata-Colonia Jordán	Comsa Infraestructura S.A de C.V. associated with Grupo Constructor Diamante S.A de C.V.			Jorge Miarna President. Family own the ce
Technical supervision of the stretch Mogoñe-La Mata	Coordinación técnico administrativa de Obras, S.A de C.V. associated with Colinas de Buen S.A de C.V.			Juan José Ri Presi
Colonia Jordán-Salina Cruz	Construcciones y Maquinaria SEF, S.A de C.V.			So far n informatio reco

There are two Spanish capital companies with contracts in their name. Although the Hermes S.A de C.V Group would be in charge of the Ubero-Mogoñe route, among the beneficiaries of this contract there is also a Spanish company, Caltia, that belongs to the Copasa Group, with headquarters in Galicia, whose president and majority shareholder is José Luis Suárez Gutiérrez.^(COPASA, 2019) This group was in charge of the expansion of the

15 Information on owners and beneficiaries was obtained from the companies' websites and media reports.

16 Information on owners and beneficiaries was obtained from the companies' websites and media reports.

port in Veracruz, a work considered strategic for the movement of oil products in the region⁽²⁰¹⁶⁾. The port was challenged by Veracruz' inhabitants in 2017 for not taking into account the cumulative environmental impact and omitting the existence of a coral reef in the area.^(Mexican Centre for Environmental Law. CEMDA, 2017)

The SACMAG Group would not only be in charge of the supervision of the work in the section Mogoñe-La Mata, but would also participate in the rehabilitation of the stretch from Salina Cruz to Medias Aguas.^(FIT, 2019b) In 2015, the SACMAG Group, a partner of the Dutch company Netherlands Airport Consultants BV., NACO, was one of the companies contracted for the work of the New International Airport in Mexico City.^(Lamberti and Rothstein, 2017) On the other hand, the Azvi Group is also a beneficiary of the Maya Train⁽²⁰²⁰⁾, having been awarded to carry out stretch three of the project.¹⁷

The SEF group is known in the Mexican rail industry for being one of the main sellers of Ferromex^(sf), a company that belongs to Mexico Group, the fourth largest company in the country. Ferro Maz S.A de C.V. is organised as an open-end stock corporation registered in June 2019 to carry out integral projects for the construction and maintenance of railway lines, among other works.¹⁸ It is likely that this company has been incorporated to participate in this project as the name of a larger business group.

On the other hand, it was identified that in 2019 the Auxiliary and Urban Surveillance Corps of the State of Mexico was also awarded a contract to provide security and surveillance services in the sections and buildings of the FIT, in addition to the railway lines of Chiapas Mayab,^(FIT, 2019a) a line that could be used to complement the route of the Maya Train. This surveillance company has been questioned for possible acts of corruption during the past government^(SinEmbargo, 2020) and for violating the human rights of Central American migrants.^(CNDH, 2019a)

Between 1 January, 2019 and 5 March, 2020, the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT)¹⁹ reported having received only three requests for environmental authorization for the operation of three stretches. However, they do not

17 Another mega-project of the current government, located in the southeast region of Mexico, which purpose is the transportation of fuel and passengers over a distance of 1,500 km. The Isthmus Railway will be connected to the railroad line of this train.

18 Information obtained from the Public Registry of Commerce on Commercial Folio No. N-2019047000

19 Response to the request for access to information on folio number: 0001600028720. Keys to the projects for consultation of the Environmental Impact Statements: 200A2019V0020, 200A2020V0001, 9/DC-0464/12/19.

correspond to any of the six works with awarded contracts.²⁰ These could be additional routes, which are currently under the responsibility of Ferrocarril del Istmo de Tehuantepec S.A de C.V. For the other six works, their environmental authorizations have not been published to date, so there is no information on the environmental and therefore social and cultural impacts of the project.

The main objective of the rehabilitation of this railroad track is "to build a 300 km double-track electric train to connect the two ports in three hours, so that shipping companies save time and money".^(CESOP, 2019)

The rehabilitation and maintenance of the track allow to fulfil a fundamental objective of the programme of the Corridor, to guarantee the intermodal loading terminal "PEARSON" located in Oaxaca to carry out the works of loading and unloading of products that will be transferred to the port in Salina Cruz and Coatzacoalcos.^(SCT, no date) At the moment, the main products transported by this track are industrial: cement and iron, non-metallic minerals and wood.²¹ The railway is one of the infrastructure pieces of the extractive agenda for the south of the country in order to consolidate the energy corridor in the region.

2.3. Jáltipan-Salina Cruz Gas Pipeline

Unlike the railway, for the gas pipeline no concession has been announced or published so far. However, the National Agency for Industrial Safety and Environmental Protection of the Hydrocarbon Sector (ASEA) confirmed that there is an request for environmental authorization since 2015 for the development of a project called "P.M.I Cinturón Transoceánico Gas Natural Jáltipan-Salina Cruz" located in the isthmus. Nevertheless, this procedure has been suspended because the promoter company (which shares the name of the project), notified that it desisted from the project and passed to the National Centre for Natural Gas Control (CENAGAS).²²

This gas pipeline is part of the Five-Year Plan for Expansion of the National Integrated Natural Gas Transportation and Storage System 2015-2019. It is considered one of the strategic projects with the aim of "extending the coverage of the gasification system

20 i. Rehabilitation of railroad track Chivela-Lagunas, Oaxaca km Z213+550 KM Z-226+200. II Rehabilitation of railroad track Tolosita and Salina Cruz, Oaxaca km 159+270 – 308+200. III. Rehabilitation of railroad track km 96+146 – 213+250 y 226+200 to 241+280 Oaxaca and Veracruz.

21 (CESOP, 2019) p:11

22 Response to the request for information on folio number: 1621100079220 on 20 April, 2019.

and detonating new markets".^(SENER, 2015) It is 247 kilometres long and has an estimated investment of USD 643,000,000 by 2019. According to the information available as of June of that year, the gas pipeline is partially operating with a diameter of 12 inches and a capacity of 90 million cubic feet per day.^(SHCP and BANOBRAS, no date) Currently, this information has not been modified in its technical file, which means that if it were to remain in operation it would be doing so without an environmental permit. The Mexican environmental authority has not registered authorization resolutions for the project²³ and the Ministry of Energy (SENER) did not inform whether it already has or has entered the Social Impact Evaluation (a requirement for the project to operate).²⁴

For this PPP, the type of contract is a concession for 20 years that will be granted through public bidding with *greenfield* investment,^(SHCP and BANOBRAS, no date) that is, a direct foreign investment in which the investor normally has control of the production, design and installation of the work. However, the work will become of public control and administration on completion of the contract, unless it is renewed.²⁵ According to the Five-Year Plan, the gas pipeline has been planned as a source of natural gas supply for a refinery, a cogeneration plant and a liquefaction plant in Salina Cruz,²⁶ as well as for export to Central America.^(SENER, 2015) The project remains in force within the framework of the new SISTRANGAS Five-Year Expansion Plan 2019-2024.²⁷

As for its role within the mega-project of the isthmus, the National Hydrocarbons Commission (CNH) indicated that this gas pipeline aims to ensure the supply of natural gas for 10 industrial parks along the corridor.²⁸ This means that once the concession is made, its transport capacity would be increased. In addition, it indicated that its characteristics of operation and industrial and commercial projection coincide with those raised in the

23 Project key: 200A2015G0028. The status of the procedure can be consulted on the website of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources:
<https://apps1.semarnat.gob.mx:8443/consultatramite/estado.php>

24 Response to the request for information made to the SENER, on folio number 0001800031720 on 11 June, 2020.

25 (2012) Article 123

26 Cogeneration is the production of electrical and thermal energy from the use of gas. Liquefaction consists of changing the gas into a liquid state.

27 Response to the request for information made to the CRE, on folio number: 1811100089229 on 11 June, 2020.

28 Response to the request for information on folio number: 1800100005520 of 23 March 2020 Available at: <https://www.gob.mx/cenagas/prensa/cenagas-presenta-7-acciones-para-atender-las-demandas-de-gas-natural-en-el-sur-sureste-del-pais>

opinion created for the Special Economic Zone of Salina Cruz.²⁹ Therefore, the industrial parks that will be installed and supplied with gas will develop the activities corresponding to the electrical, metal-mechanical, textile and agro-industrial sectors. Likewise, hydroelectric and geothermal plants will be installed to consolidate a regional energy corridor. (AFDZEE, 2018c)

The Special Economic Zone of Coatzacoalcos, in Veracruz, was projected in its ruling for the operation of activities in the automotive, petrochemical, aluminium and forestry industries. This zone is considered a pole of raw material generation and processing for oil refining and new natural gas deposits. Currently, there are gas and petrochemical projects of PEMEX, a company of Mexican origin, and PETROSUB, of English origin, operating there. (AFDZEE, 2018b) This area is considered as "an opportunity to exploit the isthmus as an energy-industrial corridor, adding value to inputs of Asian origin in order to commercialize them in the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) market".³⁰

Based on the information presented in the opinions for the Special Economic Zones of Oaxaca and Veracruz, the probable routes to commercialize the production transported by the Corridor are the United States, Belgium, Brazil, Argentina, China and Central America.

3. Territorial impacts.

3.1. A mega project without consent

"today we are told that our peoples will benefit from this railway, but the most urgent thing for us is that there should be drinking water, support for agricultural producers, artisans, small traders and equipped hospitals". (News Agency, 2020)

Ten indigenous peoples³¹ live in the region of the isthmus, which together make up 100,962 inhabitants within the six polygons projected for the corridor. The area of influence is made up of 79 municipalities, 33 in Veracruz and 46 in Oaxaca, within which there are also Afro-Mexican and peasant peoples.

29 Response to the request for information on folio number: 1800100005520. The authority referred to consult the Opinion of the Special Economic Zone of Salina Cruz, available at: https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/372131/Dictamen_.pdf

30 (AFDZEE, 2018a) p:105

31 Zapoteco, Mixe, Zoque, Huave, Chontal, Chinanteca, Mazateca, Mixteca, Popoluca, Nahuatl.

Table 3: indigenous population in the isthmus			
Areas in Veracruz	Municipalities	Population	Total
Acayucan	Acayucan	7.642	49.256
Coatzacoalcos	Coatzacoalcos	16.255	
Minantitlán	Minantitlán	12.300	
	Cosoleacaque	13.059	
Ciudad Ixtepec	Ciudad Ixtepec	11.507	51.706
	El Espinal	6.389	
	Asunción Ixtaltepec	10.613	
Matías Romero	Matías Romero	10.360	
	El Barrio de la Soledad	1.581	
Salina Cruz	Salina Cruz	11.256	
		100.962	

Source: Prepared by the author with information from the SHCP^(SHCP, 2019) and data from the catalogue of indigenous communities, 2010.^(National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, 2010)

Currently, this program does not have the consent of the communities. Between March and April 2019, the SHCP together with the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI) published calls for what they called "regional consultative assemblies" on the creation of the Development Programme for the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. However, communities in the region denounced that these are not their legitimate decision-making mechanisms. The meetings were irregular, violating their right to a free, prior, informed, good faith, and culturally adequate procedure.^(CNDH, 2019b) In response, the National Human Rights Commission requested precautionary measures.^(CNDH, 2019b) However, consultations were resumed and the decentralized public body was established. Once again, the indigenous peoples denounced that this was an irregular expedition and filed a constitutional lawsuit challenging this decree.³²

In April 2019, women human rights defenders in Veracruz expressed that the consultations were held without ensuring that their representatives were adequately informed. The authorities in charge only presented the general objectives of the

32 Writ of protection 135/2019 filed with the seventh district court of Oaxaca by representatives of the Mixe people. Information consulted in the integral information system at Human Rights Prohd Centre. http://centroprodh.org.mx/sididh_2_0_alfa/?p=60860

development programme and omitted details on the projects that are part of it, including the railway and the gas pipeline.³³

On 11 June, 2020, the Community Assembly, which includes the five Oaxacan municipalities affected by the mega-project, addressed a letter to the Presidency of the Republic in which they stated that the health emergency caused by the pandemic is being used to carry out activities related to the rehabilitation of the railway without respecting the community authorities. This has generated a danger of contagion; for this reason, they demanded that such activities be suspended.^(News Agency, 2020)

On the other hand, they have denounced that *"the participation of women in the consultative assemblies held by the federal government has not been seen, women have not been included or informed on how the mega-project will affect us"*.^(Women of the Isthmus, those who lovingly care for the land. Against machismo, violence and the challenges that the Inter-Oceanic Corridor brings to women., 2019)

This situation worsens the conflict, not only because it does not have the authorization of the peoples, but also because it does not favour adequate mechanisms for women defenders to make decisions about the territories. In most cases, the community authorities are men who, in addition to being inadequately consulted, are considered the only reference for community decision-making. By 2019 in Oaxaca, of 473,453 certified land owners, only 133,456 are women. And in Veracruz, of 426,643 certified land owners, 106,572 are women.^(RAN, 2019)

The indigenous consultation is a mechanism that may or may not accept a project in the legitimate exercise of the autonomy of the peoples. Therefore, one of the main impacts of the mega-project of the isthmus is how it affects their territorial autonomy, that is, that it is not recognized that there is a social claim and struggle against this vision of development.

3.2. From biological corridor to commercial corridor

Oaxaca and Veracruz have the first and third place respectively as the states with the greatest biodiversity in Mexico. Oaxaca is characterized by having more than half of its territory covered by forests and having exclusive species of fauna and flora thanks to its

33 Extraordinary Regional Assembly: "Patriarchal System and Mega-Project of the Isthmus" 27-29 April 2019 in Tatahuicapan, Veracruz

variety of environmental conditions. The Papaloapan and Grijalva rivers, two of the most important in the country, are also located in this territory.^(CONABIO, 2018) Moreover, Veracruz is characterized by diverse altitudinal levels and a great variety of climates that are the source of its biodiverse potential. Its water assets are abundant and, within them, the Coatzacoalcos River stands out for having a great part of the diversity of fish in the state.^(CONABIO, 2013)

Currently, the main threats to these ecosystems have to do with the expansion of the agricultural frontier caused by large extensions of monocultures, oil industry activities that contaminate water sources, deforestation generated by the cutting and looting of wood, and "the opening of roads, oil wells, power lines, and other works that seriously affect biological flows by cutting off connectivity between fragments of vegetation".³⁴ Infrastructure works do not consider medium- and long-term mitigation measures, concentrating, most of the time, on solving the initial and final aspect of the works,³⁵ that is, they focus on the impacts that the company may identify during construction and do not take into account or monitor those that are generated and accumulated due to its operation, which causes deep damage that is difficult to restore.

In addition, mining activities drastically modify landscapes and alter natural biological corridors, causing irreversible impacts on these ecosystems. This situation is similar to the impacts caused by the energy industry in the region, particularly in Oaxaca, where 62% of all wind energy generated in Mexico is produced.^(El Universal, 2020) Wind farms affect the passage of birds and bats, erode soils through the use of spilled oils and solvents, encourage changes in land use for food production, and generate conflicts over land⁽²⁰²⁰⁾

In 2018, the General Directorate of Mines reported 315 mining concessions in force in Oaxaca, most of which are for the exploration and exploitation of gold and silver, and 83 concessions in Veracruz, most of which are for the exploration and exploitation of silver and copper.³⁶ Between 2015 and 2019, SENER indicated that 20 energy projects in

34 (CONABIO, 2013) p:45

35 (CONABIO, 2013) p: 45

36 Response of the Ministry of Economy to the request for access to information on 27 February, 2018. Folio no. 0001000009918

Oaxaca and 35 in Veracruz have presented Social Impact Assessments for the authorization of wind, hydroelectric, photovoltaic and gas pipeline generation.³⁷

DRAFT for discussion

³⁷ Response of the Ministry of Energy to the request for access to information on 28 January, 2020. Folio no. 0001800184419

Figure 2: areas of environmental relevance in the Isthmus

Important Areas for the Conservation of Birds:

Los Tuxtlas (487 species), Sierra Norte (485 species), Uxpanapa (341 species), Chimalapas (432 species), Istmo de Tehuantepec-Mar Muerto (169 species).

Ecoregions:

warm wet rainforests, warm dry forests and temperate mountain ranges. These ecoregions form a large ecosystem that links Veracruz and Oaxaca with other states such as Tabasco, Quintana Roo, Yucatán and Chiapas.

Priority Hydrological Regions:

Papaloapan, Tehuantepec and Oaxaca Coast.

Endemic fauna:

274 species of fauna that only exist in this region and are under the category of high risk and priority for national protection.

Source: Prepared by the author based on information from Conabio, (National Commission for the Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity (CONABIO), no date) Semarnat, (SEMARNAT, no date) FIT MIA³⁸ and gas pipeline MIA. (2015)

The Interoceanic Corridor could further affect the ecosystems of the isthmus by favouring the consolidation of more extractive projects and serving as a hub for their operation and reduction of operating costs. Between January 2018 and January 2020, SEMARNAT reported the entry of eleven Environmental Impact Statements (MIA) to apply for environmental permits for wind, electric and hydroelectric power generation projects in Oaxaca, five of which have already been authorized, and two MIAs for photovoltaic projects in Veracruz, also authorized. For the mining sector, it reported two MIAs for the exploitation of non-metallic minerals in Oaxaca and one in Veracruz, two of which were authorized.³⁹

3.4. Resistance and re-existence

³⁸ Response to the request for access to information to Semarnat on folio number: 0001600028720. Keys to the projects for consultation of the Environmental Impact Statements: 20OA2019V0020, 20OA2020V0001, 9/DC-0464/12/19.

³⁹ Response to the request for access to information to SEMARNAT on folio number: 0001600521119. On 28 January, 2020.

The mega-project of the isthmus is considered by the government as part of a new development model.^(SHCP, 2019) It states that the set of projects in the Corridor will improve the living conditions of the population, create an inclusive economy, preserve and respect the identity of the indigenous communities and will be carried out respecting the environment.^(SHCP, 2019)

However, the mega-project did not start from a discussion between institutions and communities about their living conditions. The isthmus is one of the regions with the highest poverty rates in Mexico. In Oaxaca, 66.4% of its population is in poverty, only 16.3% has access to health services, 27% lacks access to food (that is means insufficient food to lead an active and healthy life), and only half, 58.3%, has access to basic housing services. In Veracruz, 67.9% of the population is in a situation of poverty, 16.7% has access to health services, 27% lacks access to food and only 42.1% has access to basic housing services.^(CONEVAL, 2018) The above points should be a priority discussion to improve the population's living conditions; however, the mega-project has focused on promoting infrastructure and production for extractive sectors and its first actions have been the awarding of contracts to the private sector.

The notion of an inclusive economy is so far anchored to the PPP schemes and the configuration of the Isthmus Free Zone that has as a priority to grant benefits to companies with a regulatory framework that, as mentioned, promises agility in administrative procedures and attractive tax reductions. The "formalities" that will be accelerated are the environmental authorization procedures, indigenous and citizen consultations, and decisions related to land-use planning that require time for elaboration, circulation, information, participation with incidence and organization of spaces for deliberation and dialogue between citizens and institutions. Therefore, they involve periods that, if necessary, require several months, so that guaranteeing their "agility" produces a negative impact of the project on the human, territorial and environmental rights of the communities even before it begins to operate because the interest of the investment is superimposed on the public interest.

The mega-project has not respected the identity of the indigenous communities because it used illegitimate mechanisms to consult them and provided incomplete information when doing so. Furthermore, the rehabilitation of the railway has not generated

spaces for public consultation to inform in detail the short, medium and long-term environmental impacts of the work and the responsibility of the six companies regarding the environmental protection of the entire area.

There is a pattern of opacity with the information related to the mega-project because it is not proactively published and is denied or delivered incomplete when requested. On several occasions, the authorities in charge of the Development Programme for the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the FIT and the gas pipeline stated that they had no responsibility or knowledge about the information and transferred the obligation to deliver it among each other, so people have to request it repeatedly. Likewise, as a result of the pandemic, the deadlines for the delivery of information have been suspended,⁴⁰ but not the operation of the projects and the decision-making on contracts and budget; this deliberately makes it difficult for the population to know about the project and to develop timely territorial defence strategies.

The way in which the mega-project has been designed fosters and maintains relations of domination over territories and population. This results in the generation of disputes between communities and companies over political, economic and cultural interests in the territory, in other words, territorial conflicts.

These conflicts are exacerbated for women and women defenders in the region because the conditions of poverty are added to a context of violence and inequality within which most women "have not participated either in school or in the labour market throughout their lives",^(INEGI, 2019) and more than half have faced violence related to employment discrimination, aggression caused by their partners and sexual intimidation by strangers.^(INEGI, 2019) The year 2019 closed leaving Veracruz as the state with the highest number of femicides at the national level, 125 cases,^(La Jornada, 2019) and in January 2020 Oaxaca was among the 10 states with the most femicides, 22 cases⁽²⁰²⁰⁾

The mega-project justified in the narrative of a new development model and in the PPP scheme does not include in any way the context of particular conflict for women, so that it is invisible to this government move. And even if it were to recognize figures such as

40 Agreements for the suspension of terms and deadlines, National Transparency Platform. Available at: https://www.plataformadetransparencia.org.mx/web/guest/vinculos_acuerdos_estados

those mentioned above, since it is configured from a power relationship that imposes the notion of welfare based on the success of private investment and economic growth directed at the extractive sector, it does not allow for critical participation by communities and even less so by women. In other words, the mega-project is essentially formulated so that this does not happen because its structural components have not been discussed and are designed from the top down. This is a characteristic found in other government projects, an inclusive approach that seeks "to integrate the non-integrated into a dominant development vision, without having consulted whether this is what people aspire to, in particular, and whether they intend to be integrated into economic circuits".⁴¹

In the face of this, it is essential to refer to community organizational processes. Currently, the experience of the struggle against mining and energy extraction in the isthmus converges with the aim of protecting what for women defenders in the region is *the corridor of water and life*. The following is the contribution to this article made by the women who make up the Sierra de Santa Marta Articulation Process,⁴² a network of organisations that has drawn up an agenda for resistance in this territory and a way of rethinking the common welfare and therefore its existence.

Indigenous and Afro-descendant women who defend the territory in the Isthmus

The struggle of indigenous and Afro-Mestizo women of the Oaxacan and Veracruz Isthmus as social actors in resistance has been very important in the last decade. They have played a fundamental role in the struggle for territorial defence and have stood out for their dedication and commitment, being leaders in promoting strategies of resistance and defence of territory against the incursion of wind, mining or hydrocarbon extraction companies, as well as promoting women's voice and representation in the various movements. Women's struggle is a struggle for life, for autonomy and sovereignty over their territory, which not only represents a means of material support, but also has a symbolic value for their history and culture, because they have developed a sense of life, belonging and roots in their territory.

Women who have been leading these resistance struggles at the regional level and in their alliances at the national and international levels in both Veracruz and Oaxaca. Some

41 (Ceceña *et al.*, 2020) p: 18

42 It is made up of the Network of Women of the Earth United for a Future and a Better World AC, Civil resistance against high electricity rates, the Network of community radio stations of the Sierra de Santa Marta, the Bety Cariño human rights centre AC, Tssooka-teyoo of the Sierra AC and Defence of the Territory and strengthening of the Popoluca people, Jaraneros "Son Altepe".

of them are councillors in the Indigenous Council of Government of the National Indigenous Congress, where women and men from all over the country organise and fight to protect mother earth, their communities and indigenous territories, defending their autonomy, exercising the right to maintain and strengthen their own cultures, ways of life and institutions, and their right to participate effectively in the decisions that affect them.

With the inter-oceanic corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the threats that had been overcome are still present and are added to the industrial parks that they intend to install along the railway track. Indigenous women are very clear that these companies are going to dispossess the communities of their territories and that the few jobs they can generate do not compensate for the dispossession of the mountain water that the companies are going to require to operate, the contamination of the water, air and land, the health effects that this pollution are going to generate and the increase in insecurity.

The women know that with the industrial parks, violence, insecurity and crime in general will increase, as has been seen wherever these companies arrive and where money circulates not for the people but for the businessmen, politicians, and leaders of organized crime. In recent years, mega-projects have increased patriarchal violence, fostered by organized crime and spread throughout society as a new culture that affects not only family but all areas of social life. These companies bring with them division of communities, affect decision-making processes in assemblies that represent the basis for the defence of rights, cultures and territories. This division of communities can reach the level of massacre as in the Ikoots community of San Mateo del Mar, Oaxaca or the burning of city hall vehicles by the Nahua people of Tatahuicapan in southern Veracruz in June 2020.

The women are determined not to give a drop of water for these death projects and will continue their efforts towards building their autonomy, with the health processes of surveillance, radio, planting healthy food, community generation of electricity and strengthening community assemblies. They have proposed alternatives to the crisis in values of today's consumerist and individualist society, based on principles that recognize and respect diversity in all forms of life, all forms of plant and animal life, of ecosystems, as well as all forms of human community, all cultures that have resisted colonialism and exploitation, based on the recognition that human beings belong to Mother Earth, but that Mother Earth does not belong to them: it is a sacred common good for all.

Women's proposals have made it possible to criticize the patriarchal, capitalist, racist and colonial vision of the institutions of the State, of big capital, and the feminicidal macho violence of society, which conceive nature, territory and women's bodies as "a resource or property" that can be appropriated, with a material and economic value, as opposed to the spiritual vision of indigenous peoples, and in particular of women, which is conceived as their home, their source of food and sustenance, as a sacred space, where is their root, where they have built their history and where their ancestors live. In spite of the gender inequality that persists in the communities of indigenous and Afro-Mestizo women,

which has relegated their participation and does not value their contributions, women have not taken a stand as victims; they are rebellious women who resist, do not give up, and recognize the socio-environmental crisis and the threats to their territory that are coming. They propose and develop negotiation strategies and promote territorial resistance, inspired by "*women who fight*" from other latitudes, who mark changes to question uses and customs that normalize their exclusion and subordination in their communities.

It is important to recognize the struggles of indigenous, afro-mestizo and peasant women over local control of productive processes and reproduction of life processes, access to land tenure and participation in decisions in their communities, as a political commitment to territory, recognizing their rights and the rights of nature, as well as their demands to transform gender relations between women and men, and also to transform the "civilizing" process, for a new system of life that recognizes that everything is interconnected to nature and spirituality.

Based on the above, it can be said that this proposal to achieve collective wellbeing is based on the need to guarantee health, education, food, access to water and environmental protection as rights. This takes place within a framework that points towards the sustainability of life, where markets are not the centre of life. Therefore the aim is to break away from dynamics where some particular actors monopolize resources and processes that regenerate life are put at risk. (Pérez Orozco, 2019) This vision is not compatible with the PPP scheme as a formula to solve problems that are caused by the same political and economic model that proposes them and that end up producing a vicious circle that maintains the same territorial conflicts, but with components that can vary between contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

PPPs have become a mechanism that has facilitated the corporate capture of the State because it gives companies the responsibility of guaranteeing a public role, which can interfere in political and administrative decision-making. It has been used as a theoretical justification to solve structural problems of the development model based on economic growth and to configure itself through public policies as the way to maintain extractivism in exchange for economic benefits for the population in general. However, in Mexico it has

not guaranteed its success because it raises the cost of the projects and they have served particular investment interests rather than specific needs.

In this case, the PPP scheme and the regulatory framework (currently adequated for the functioning of the Inter-Oceanic Corridor) propitiates that the companies replace State functions specifically in the decision making on the organization of the territory, security and the economic and productive model for the region. In consequence, decisions of public interest are taken based on the private benefit of those who operate the projects.

The Inter-Oceanic Corridor is a project structured according to the geopolitical attraction of this Mexican region, which is seen as a commercial node for energy. Its characteristics keep it as a hegemonic development model, which gives continuity, although with modifications, to the neoliberal project of the Special Economic Zones for the southern region of the country. As it is seen as a trade corridor, the ecological relevance of the region has been dismissed. Its main impacts are associated with the generation of territorial conflicts. Currently the project does not have the consent of the population and there has been little transparency with its technical and operational information that prevents it from being known in detail.

The Isthmus of Tehuantepec is a territory of historical social struggles, which have been outlined by women defenders who currently resist and propose an agenda for life based on their own notion of well-being. In order to analyse PPPs from a feminist perspective, the Mexican case provides the following dimensions: the phenomenon of corporate capture of the State, territorial conflicts in the framework of environmental, social and cultural impacts of projects and proposals for community re-existence based on the sustainability of life.

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