

From Colombia to Kenya, 25 cases of threats and attacks against human rights defenders reveal how development financiers can fuel abuses or help fight them

JUNE 4, 2019 - A new report from the [Coalition for Human Rights in Development](#) and the [Defenders in Development Campaign](#) reveals the alarming impact ill-planned investments in infrastructure, energy, and other development activities are having on the safety and wellbeing of human rights defenders around the world.

Uncalculated Risks contains 25 case studies highlighting the grave dangers faced by those who advocate for their communities and the environment in the context of development activities and the role of public development banks in exacerbating or mitigating those risks.

Development banks have a wide range of tools, resources and leverage to ensure their investments respect human rights and involve meaningful participation of affected communities, finds the report. Yet, too often development financiers turn a blind eye to human rights risks – and end up fueling abuses by governments, companies, and other actors.

“Inclusive and sustainable development requires an enabling environment for human rights defenders - where all people are free to express their views, to exercise their rights, and to fully participate in the decisions impacting their lives and their communities,” said Coalition Coordinator Gretchen Gordon. “Yet instead, many activities supported by development banks exacerbate risks for defenders by ignoring the rights and interests of local communities and marginalized populations, and the power imbalances which leave them vulnerable.”

In Colombia, the Inter-American Development Bank, together with Brazilian, Chinese, and German financiers, backed a massive dam project that displaced thousands in an area plagued with violent conflict. Movement leaders speaking out against the dam have been stigmatized, harassed, illegally detained, and killed.

“Before any investment, development banks must use their influence and resources to guarantee an enabling environment for the defense of human and environmental rights and freedom of expression, which includes opposition against mining, energy or agroindustrial investments and megaprojects,” said Isabel Zuleta, member of Movimiento Rios Vivos of Colombia. “The best evidence of the existence of this enabling environment is the guarantee that defenders are able to remain in their territories and are not forced to leave for their safety or security.”

In Kenya, Forest Service guards implementing a conservation project financed by the European Development Fund burned the homes and shot Sengwer indigenous people defending their right to live on their forest lands.

“The foundations of any development project are strong human rights safeguard polices and consent of the parties involved, thus reducing threats faced by human rights defenders, especially

marginalized indigenous people,” said Elias Kimaiyo, Sengwer community journal leader, Kenya. “If the banks and governments had listened to us, then the violence and killing would not have happened -- the funds could have been used in a constructive way to help conservation and not used for human rights violations.”

As respect for human rights, civic space and the rule of law deteriorate around the world, so do the conditions for development. With contributions from civil society groups and defenders across the globe, *Uncalculated Risks* traces the human stories and financial decision-making around development interventions to reveal a widespread development and human rights challenge that cannot be ignored.

Notes to editor:

1. Contact: Gretchen Gordon, Coalition for Human Rights in Development
ggordon@rightsindevelopment.org, +1-202-330-3305 or
Adam Shapiro, Front Line Defenders, adam@frontlinedefenders.org, +1-202-294-8813
2. Interviews with defenders and advocates available on request
3. Graphics and photographs of defenders and projects available upon request
4. *Uncalculated Risks: Threats and attacks against human rights defenders and the role of development banks* is available for download at:
www.rightsindevelopment.org/uncalculatedrisks

The report is authored by the Coalition for Human Rights in Development, with cases and contributions from: CEE Bankwatch, Plataforma Internacional Contra la Impunidad, Inclusive Development International, Fundar Center of Analysis and Research, Amazon Watch, Protection International, CooperAcción, Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN), Crude Accountability, El Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (COPINH), Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA), Bank Information Center, Movimiento Xingu Vivo Para Sempre, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PM CJ), Equitable Cambodia, Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, Nomogaia, Forest Peoples Programme, Movimiento Rios Vivos Antioquia, International Rivers, Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL), BIC Europe, China-Latin America Sustainable Investment Initiative (CLASII)