



**Communities  
from Argentina,  
Brazil and Paraguay  
give their views  
on the EU-Mercosur  
Trade Agreement**

# not just about trade

FEBRUARY 2023





***“There is a saying. They cut down our trunks, but they forgot to cut our roots.”***

**Erileide Domingues, Guarani-Kaiowà  
of Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil**

**T**he European Union – Mercosur Free Trade Agreement (EUMFTA) is a trade deal between the European Union (EU) and four Mercosur countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay). It was agreed ‘in principle’ in 2019, but has been effectively stalled ever since. The FTA was put on ice amid rampant fires in the Amazon, and Brazil’s Bolsonaro government systemically dismantling environmental, human rights and land rights protections.

At the end of October 2022, the Brazilian people voted President Bolsonaro out of power, in favour of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (known as Lula). Lula ran on a platform of environmental protection, social justice, and defending democracy. Supporters of the EUMFTA are hopeful that Lula’s election might allow the deal to be revived. But regardless of who holds the Brazilian Presidency, the contents of the Agreement remain problematic. It still threatens efforts to develop sustainable or low-carbon agriculture across Mercosur, and locks-in international trade of agricultural commodities that cause (often illegal) deforestation. International trade in agricultural commodities has been linked to the ongoing destruction of the Amazon rainforest and other precious biomes like the Cerrado, as well as threats, intimidation, murder and violent land seizures directed at Indigenous, traditional and quilombola (Afro-Brazilian) communities across Mercosur.

## **Indigenous, traditional and quilombola communities in Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina have something to say...**

### **It is time to listen.**



Despite this, the voices from those communities have been absent in the negotiation and creation of the FTA. Even though it would have repercussions for their lives, lands and security, community members have not played any formal role in defining the terms of the deal.

This document summarises the key themes that emerged from a series of workshops and interviews about the FTA with representatives from local organisations, collectives, and Indigenous and traditional communities in Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay. It provides valuable insight into the positions and preoccupations of community members across Mercosur.

## Consultation workshops and interviews

Between July and August 2022, Instituto Socioambiental (ISA) and Instituto de Pesquisa Ambiental da Amazônia (IPAM) held three consultation workshops with representatives from local organisations and collectives from Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay. Representatives from Indigenous Peoples, traditional communities, and family farming organisations participated, alongside some other civil society organisations.

Each workshop was an opportunity to discuss and share information about the EUMFTA. Participants discussed their understanding of it, their expectations and fears.

In October 2022, IPAM organised a series of ‘Amazoniar’ interviews, in which prominent community organisers discussed their perspectives on the FTA. All of the quotes in this document are drawn directly from these conversations. The general text provides context, and reflects overall opinions expressed during the workshops.

**In total, 22 people from 20 local organisations participated in the workshops, and six people gave in-depth interviews. The full participation list is shown in a table at the end of this document.**





## **Context matters. And it sheds light on potential indirect impacts of the trade deal.**

**If the FTA does become a reality, it will not operate in isolation.  
The EU and the Mercosur countries all have complex trade,  
agricultural, environmental and social dynamics.**

**Indigenous and traditional communities across Mercosur countries  
face myriad challenges, threats, and injustices. They have long  
histories of trying to work in policy and political spaces to improve  
their conditions. Throughout this time, they have regularly  
been reminded that ‘on paper’ provisions do not guarantee  
real-world protections. It is impossible to understand attitudes  
towards the Agreement without understanding something of  
the contexts in which it would be implemented. The EUMFTA  
does not sufficiently engage with this context, particularly  
considering that the deal could become an indirect driver of  
deforestation and land grabbing. Context helps to highlight  
why its safeguards are insufficient, why trust is low, and why  
achieving meaningful participation is easier said than done.**





## **Ana Romero**, member of the Indigenous Youth Union of Paraguay

*“Two comrades [were] killed yesterday in a criminal confrontation in an Indigenous community where two brothers were killed. A religious leader and a young man. And the week before, we were coming out of a situation of a violent eviction... For the last two years they have been trying to exterminate us, with a lot of violence, with a lot of territorial dispossessions of land, destruction, criminalisation of leaders. ...There are all the possible norms and standards that protect us, but they are of no use to us... The laws are there. The regulations are there. There are also many recommendations that we have made at the international level and that the international community has made with Paraguay... it is practically a question of the political will of the State and the international community.”*

**Erileide Domingues, Guarani-Kaiowà  
of Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil**

*“We just want our territory demarcated, guaranteed and respected by the Brazilian government itself. They call us invaders. But who are invaders ? We didn’t cross the sea. We didn’t come from other countries. They are the invaders, and we call them that. There is a saying that they cut our trunks, but forgot to cut our roots. [Many anti-Indigenous people] say ‘What more land do the Indigenous want’? Look, they created CPI [parliamentary commission of inquiry<sup>1</sup>], they put the Indigenous people in a pigsty, let’s say, they made them like animals, they sustained them with the basic food baskets, they sustained them with the food that they themselves produced.... With time, the Indigenous people got tired. Tired of living that way, tired of being preyed upon, tired of being dominated by the whites. What impacts the Indigenous community a lot, apart from the crops [expansion], is the agro-toxins. In addition to the pesticides, there are the insects that run into the villages. And within that, the lack of food production. The scarcity. And let’s put it as the scarcity of everything, of health, of the lack of food production, diseases, on and on... It’s on paper that [spraying pesticides] from the plane must be at least 500 meters [from communities], but they don’t follow it.”*



**Julio Barbosa,  
president of the National  
Council of Extractive  
Populations, Brazil**

*“You and we all know that [the Bolsonaro government made it a priority] to eliminate civil society participation in any decision making. For example, the National Council of the Environment, CONAMA [the Ministry of the Environment] and other councils. These councils, in fact... were practically extinguished. If it doesn’t exist, it doesn’t work.”*

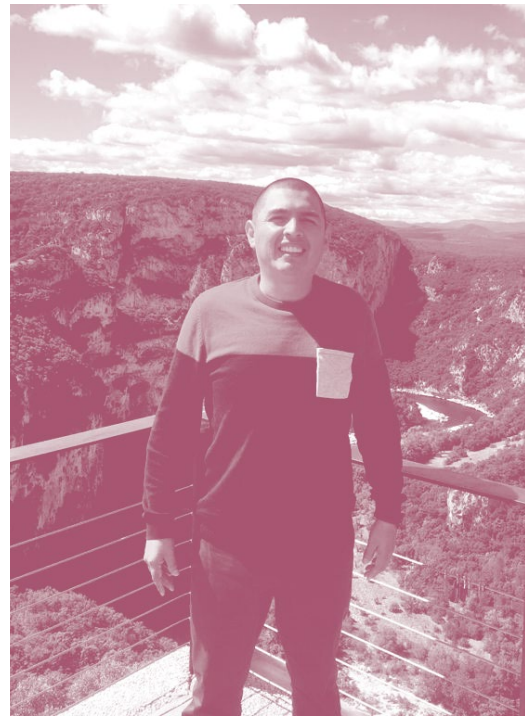
<sup>1</sup>During the COVID pandemic, a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) was set up to investigate the federal government’s neglect in dealing with the pandemic. A dossier was submitted by Indigenous People which accused the government of Indigenous genocide but it was ignored by the CPI.

**Ana Paula Santos Souza**, Altamira farming community and Professor at the Federal University of Pará, Brazil

*"I sometimes joke that in the Amazon fighting the illegal activities was already the biggest challenge, but fighting the legal ones is bigger. Because the legal one is the one that deforests. I don't know any soy plantations that are illegal. It may be immoral, but not illegal. The mines are also legal, the logging companies are selling legalised timber... The legal also destroys." how can I explain to a Westerner, to a businessman, to someone who invests money, that we don't think of private property?"*

**Hatia Penha**, member of the quilombola community Divino Espirito Santo in Brazil and of the National Coordination of Articulation of Quilombos, Brazil


*"These people need to know. That what they are consuming from Brazil comes from territories of sacrifice ... A lot of people died, and a lot of people are dying because of the greed of unbridled development. ... You are eating the best meat [but] you're leaving territories that have been completely devastated with the expulsion of people who don't have houses, who don't have schools, who don't have health posts."*



**Sergio Rojas**, member of Qom/Tobas people and of the National Council of Indigenous Women in Chaco, Argentina

*"I get the impression that companies only think about the money and don't think about the fact that these natural resources are running out... In our language there is no concept of private property."*



The background of the entire page is a solid dark blue. In the upper half, there is a large, light blue, torn-edge rectangular shape. Inside this shape, the text 'A deal that doesn't fully consider the diversity of populations across Mercosur is illegitimate and counter-productive.' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font. Below this, in the lower half of the page, there is a smaller, light blue rectangular shape with a thin white border. Inside this shape, a paragraph of text is written in a smaller, dark blue, sans-serif font.

**A deal that doesn't fully  
consider the diversity  
of populations across  
Mercosur is illegitimate  
and counter-productive.**

Several participants in the consultation workshops highlighted that some of the terms and framing of the EUMFTA seem to be at odds with environmental objectives, including the EU's own ambitions to eliminate imported deforestation. A positive deal would recognise the diversity of lives and livelihoods across Mercosur and seek to support those which are in line with broader social and environmental imperatives.

A portrait of a woman with dark skin and long, thin braids, wearing black-rimmed glasses and a light-colored top. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred green, suggesting foliage. The entire image has a yellow-green color overlay.

**Katia Penha**, member of the  
Quilombola community Divino  
Espírito Santo in Brazil

***“When a tree is felled, thousands and  
thousands of generations are felled  
along with it.”***

**Katia Penha**, member of the Quilombola community Divino Espirito Santo, and of National Coordination of Articulation of Quilombos, Brazil

*“There are two things that are very serious in Brazil. One, selling products abroad and leaving the people starving in their own country. That’s very serious. Cane plantations don’t generate work. It’s family farming that fosters work... family agriculture feeds [Brazilian people] ...The European market has to understand that [for] the Brazilian people, with what is in [the agreement], there is no way forward. How are we going to export meat if we’re starving?”*

**Ana Paula Santos Souza**, Altamira farming community, Brazil

*“You have to think that here you also have family farmers, you have fishing populations... There is also established agribusiness, there are large farms... Investments are always very much based on products and not on people. It’s always an investment for soy, investment for mining, investment in I don’t know what, and nobody even asks who the people are in those places. ...This diversity of people also extends to the diversity of products, of initiatives. [A legitimate trade agreement] has to contemplate this.”*

**Ana Romero**, member of the Indigenous Youth Union of Paraguay

*“Mercosur is more purely about free trade now, but within free trade there are other variables, other approaches such as territorial, as well as vulnerable populations such as Indigenous Peoples....”*





## Meaningful participation is vital. And overdue.

Across the consultation workshops, participants showed interest and appetite in being part of the next steps of the Agreement, if and when it moves forward. This does not mean they support or accept the content of the FTA; most do not. Some highlighted that they should have been a part of the negotiations earlier, because it is difficult to make changes after an Agreement has been largely established. Without early participation, the needs and views of Indigenous and traditional communities become little more than an afterthought. Whatever the future of the FTA, community members want to give their opinions and perspectives, to be a part of the process. Since it will affect them, they need to be heard.

***“How are you going to negotiate that  
which is non-negotiable?”***

Katia Penha, member of the  
Quilombola community Divino  
Espírito Santo in Brazil



## **Sergio Rojas**, member of the Qom/Tobas people and of the National Council of Indigenous Women in Chaco, Argentina

*“What I would call for [is] a clear negotiating table, where the Indigenous communities are a direct part of the negotiation.”*

## **Hatia Penha**, member of the Quilombola community Divino Espirito Santo, Brazil

*“We need to be within this participation. ... The pen will never be with us... but at least we will make those people who are going to use the pen think and reflect and see the other side. So, first is to have a process of governance, of safeguarding. The people need to be within that process of governance ... some things need to be safeguarded. We can't just sell everything. How are you going to negotiate that which is non-negotiable?*

*...Why just create something, to say you're listening to us? ... Now, if we have this process of going to the table [with] the power to say that we do not accept, and that it's going to modify the Agreement, then yes, it would be [worthwhile]. ... Then it would be a fair Agreement and a balanced and fair governance.”*

## **Ana Romero**, member of the Indigenous Youth Union, Paraguay

*“It would be the most valuable thing possible for our voices to be present in the agreements. Because their [EU and Mercosur] policies and their visions are affecting us in a violent way... and we can practically no longer put forward proposals for ancestral knowledge and practices, given that they are taking away and dispossessing us behind our backs. ... There has to be a dialogue, agreement and consensus and necessary guarantees for us. Our present and our future depend on that.”*

## **Julio Barbosa**, member of the National Council of Extractive Populations, Brazil

*“Whoever is in charge of the negotiations needs to understand that the participation of civil society is important, and especially the participation of the peoples of the Amazon... I would very much like the negotiators of this Agreement to not only listen to what these peoples think, but also to open spaces where these peoples can give their opinions at the debate and negotiation tables.”*





**Communities need  
more knowledge and  
understanding to make  
a meaningful contribution.**

Overall, there is low mobilisation of local leaderships on the EUMFTA. This is partly because of the many urgent challenges facing community leaders. It is also because the deal is very technical, inaccessible, and little understood. Most people do not have much knowledge about the Agreement. Some are sceptical that it will ever go ahead, and unsure what it might mean for them. Others recognise that if they are not well informed now, it will be harder to make changes in the future.

It is essential to communicate with local peoples about the Agreement and its potential impacts on their lives and territories. Those impacts must include indirect impacts.



## Julio Barbosa, member of the National Council of Extractive Populations, Brazil

*“We know that all the agreements that have been made up to now are agreements that do not take into consideration the native peoples, whether in the Brazilian Amazon or in the entire Mercosur region. For this reason, I think that our great challenge is first of all to understand... our concern is very much about this, that all these agreements... they always bring a lot of harm to the native peoples of the Amazon.”*

**Sergio Rojas, member of Qom/Tobas people and of the National Council of Indigenous Women in Chaco, Argentina**



*“We have to consider the translation of this project, with the law, with the Indigenous languages. ... I think it is very important for the Indigenous communities to be informed and for them to be advised by technicians and experts. Because if we also put Indigenous communities at the negotiating table... it is essential that there is an expert, a technician of these characteristics who can explain to the Indigenous communities, and based on that, a decision will be made. For me, the most logical thing is that the Indigenous communities can make a collective decision.”*



## **A monitoring observatory would benefit from community engagement.**

Even if the current, illegitimate Agreement is ratified, establishing robust monitoring systems with a role for communities will be important. Brazilian civil society would like to establish a Human Rights observatory. Communities and organisations are supportive of monitoring and trying to influence both the content and the implementation of the Agreement, if it is ratified. This is despite their misgivings about the FTA as a whole.

It is also important to monitor the impacts of the FTA. Some workshop participants were especially keen to emphasise that impact monitoring must extend to tracking the indirect impacts, given that the links between international trade, agricultural expansion, land grabbing and deforestation are not always direct but are very real. In a legitimate agreement, these indirect impacts would also be considered and addressed in the agreement itself. Monitoring, for instance through an observatory, would be most effective with a meaningful role for civil society and communities.

Monitoring activities should also be linked to systems for remediation. Some are sceptical about any such structures, given the significant power imbalances. But they are willing to try.



***“Co-management [of  
a trade agreement]  
that involves  
Indigenous Peoples  
and other larger  
groups, it is not  
easy. But it is not  
impossible, and  
there is no other  
way.”***



**Ana Paula  
Santos Souza,**  
Altamira farming  
community and  
Professor at the  
Federal University  
of Pará, Brazil



## Ana Paula Santos Souza, member of the Altamira farming community, Brazil

*“If you think of an investment that perceives, accepts and respects the diversity of people, understands and includes the diversity of initiatives and products, the management model also needs to be different. A co-management. A co-management that involves Indigenous Peoples and other larger groups, it’s not easy. But there are two important things about it: it is not impossible and there is no other way.”*



## Ana Romero, member of the Indigenous Youth Union of Paraguay

*“I think that observation would also be a strategy for us. Because from our side, being in that team of observers, it’s also going to be an integral and intercultural vision. So, it would be very helpful for us to be part of that, wouldn’t it? From there we will also be able to draw recommendations, we could also somehow rethink political, economic, social situations. And we as Indigenous Peoples have people who are prepared for that.”*



## Sergio Rojas, member of Qom/Tobas people and of the National Council of Indigenous Women in Chaco, Argentina

*“It seems to me that we as Indigenous communities, but also civil society in general, have to play a role... to monitor and control to prevent the [sustainability commitments of the] Agreement from being violated. Because, well, it happens a lot in Latin America, when a company or an agreement says one thing but then ends up doing something else. Now, I don’t know how effective Indigenous communities can be in this [monitoring], if it can really benefit them [or] if they can really be effective within it. In other words, I have a lot of doubts, don’t you? ... Generally, we understand that an agreement is always going to be in favour of those who have more money, right? [Nonetheless] it seems to me that the Indigenous communities are indispensable in the participation of an Oversight body. Communities that are on the ground, their participation is essential, because they are the ones that know the territory, they are the ones that know all the things that are there. ... I don’t know what rules we could discuss with this Agreement in order to establish a principle of non-violation of the [sustainability commitments of the] Agreement and to be able to comply effectively with it.”*

## Conclusion

Indigenous, traditional and quilombola communities, and family farmers across Mercosur are sceptical about the EUMFTA. Based on the consultation workshops and interviews carried out, it is clear that some doubt that the deal will ever be enacted. If it is implemented, most of the workshop and interview participants doubt it will deliver anything positive for communities or the biomes where they live. Many are particularly concerned about the indirect, negative impacts that the deal would bring, by exacerbating conditions that promote land grabbing, deforestation and agricultural expansion.

Many communities across Mercosur are engaged in ongoing and longstanding struggles to resist land grabs and assassinations, and to protect the integrity of the biomes where they live. Over the course of these struggles, people have become sceptical of the power of 'on paper' safeguards to protect against atrocities carried out on the forest floor.

The community members who took part in the consultation workshops and interviews also have some clear messages for how to construct a genuinely positive trade deal.

First, family farmers and Indigenous, traditional and quilombola **communities need to be properly informed** about intentions to create a deal, the negotiation

objectives, and potential impacts and implications for their communities. Without clear and understandable information, communities will not have the tools they need to take part in any kind of meaningful consultation or decision-making process. With clear and timely information, communities can share their unique insights and perspectives that would make for more successful and more equitable trade instruments.

Second, **communities should be full participants in the negotiation of trade instruments**. As they will be affected, they have a right to play a role in shaping its construction. In addition, a deal that is constructed with meaningful participation from communities is more likely to reflect



the diverse needs and priorities of different groups. The resulting deal would be more likely to be constructed around principles that respect human rights and environmental protection, and would also face less hostility and opposition in its implementation.

Third, **communities need to play a meaningful role in monitoring the implementation of a trade agreement**, in whatever form it is implemented.

The primary reasons are threefold.

- Community monitoring will ensure that what is monitored is relevant to their lives, security and livelihoods.
- Communities are uniquely placed to identify impacts and infractions at a local level, and can provide valuable evidence of the implementation, violation, and impact of a trade deal.
- Finally, communities must be able to use that evidence to seek remediation if violations occur.



Cover photo: Christian Braga / Farpa / CIDH

Photo Page 13: Mídia NINJA

Photo Page 20: Amazônia Real

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## Annex - Consultation participants

### 1<sup>st</sup> Consultation, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2022

Organisations	Country
<a href="#">Imaflora</a> (Institute for Forestry and Agricultural Management and Certification)	Brazil
<a href="#">Ekilibre Amazônia</a>	Brazil
<a href="#">UNIVAJA</a> (Vale do Javari Indigenous People's Union)	Brazil
<a href="#">Conectas Human Rights</a>	Brazil
<a href="#">Network of Indigenous Legal Promoters of Paraguay</a>	Paraguay
<a href="#">UJIP (Indigenous Youth Union of Paraguay)</a>	Paraguay
<a href="#">Observatory of Autonomous Protocols</a>	International
<a href="#">CONAMI</a> (National Council of Indigenous Women of Argentina) / Om/Tobas People (indigenous community)	Argentina
<a href="#">University of São Paulo</a>	Brazil

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Consultation, 18<sup>th</sup> August 2022

#### Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities

Organisations	Country
<a href="#">Imaflora</a> (Institute for Forestry and Agricultural Management and Certification)	Brazil
<a href="#">Conectas Human Rights</a>	Brazil
<a href="#">CNS</a> (National Council of Extractivist Populations)	Brazil
<a href="#">IPAM</a> (Amazon Environmental Research Institute)	Brazil
<a href="#">CONAQ</a> (National Coordination of Articulation of Quilombos)	Brazil
<a href="#">ISA</a> (Socioenvironmental Institute)	Brazil
Pankararu People (indigenous community) / <a href="#">University of Brasília</a>	Brazil
<a href="#">NMG Lawyers</a>	Brazil
<a href="#">Vem de Áudio</a> (podcast about the Amazon)	Brazil
Guarani Kaiowá People (indigenous community)	Brazil

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Consultation, 19<sup>th</sup> August 2022

#### Family Farming

Organisations	Country
STTR (Rural Workers Union)	Brazil
<a href="#">FETACRE</a> (Agricultural Workers Federation of Acre)	Brazil
<a href="#">IPAM</a> (Amazon Environmental Research Institute)	Brazil
<a href="#">INTA</a> (National Institute of Agricultural Technology)	Argentina
Wapichana People (indigenous community)	Brazil

### Amazonian conversations,

#### held throughout October 2022

- Ana Paula Santos Souza, Altamira farming community and Federal University of Pará Professor, Brazil
- Ana Romero, member of Indigenous Youth Union of Paraguay
- Erileide Domingues, Guarani-Kaiowá of Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil
- Júlio Barbosa, president National Council of Extractive Populations, Brazil.
- Katia Penha, member of quilombola community Divino Espírito Santo and of National Coordination of Articulation of Quilombos, Brazil
- Sergio Rojas, Member of Qom/Tobas people and of National Council of Indigenous Women in Chaco, Argentina

***“A deal that doesn’t fully consider the diversity of populations across Mercosur is illegitimate and counter-productive.”***

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