

Wilma Chen. Photo: Claudio Vasquez Bianchi.

# DEFENDING WOMEN – DEFENDING THE PLANET



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## Facing the facts

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# WOMEN'S RIGHT TO LAND IS NOT ONLY A MATTER OF JUSTICE, IT'S ABOUT DEFENDING LIVES AND OUR PLANET

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**Sustainable small-scale agriculture accounts for up to half of the planet's food production, can increase biodiversity and counteract the effects of the climate crisis. But despite their crucial role for the future of our world, small-holder farmers are facing increasing threats. They are experiencing at first hand the repression of civic space seen in most countries of the world. Gender inequality exacerbates the situation, making women especially vulnerable.**

According to Front Line Defenders latest report, more than 300 Human Rights Defenders were murdered in 2019. 40 percent of them fought for the environment, land and indigenous peoples' rights. At least 13 percent of those that were murdered were women.

At the center of the situation are land conflicts. The increasing demand for minerals, electric power and products like timber, palm oil and sugar, is pushing small-holder farmers off their land. When they organise and stand up for their rights, they become threats to large-scale economic plans. Representatives of government agencies and private companies employ security companies, military, lawyers and security forces to silence or arrest those that resist.

A We Effect survey conducted in Guatemala, Honduras and Colombia in 2019, showed that 10 out of 11 partner organisations had experienced threats and violence linked to their members' right to land. The study showed that women were experiencing increased violence linked to land conflicts. Many women stated that they were living under constant threats linked to disputes of land.

This is especially the case for many indigenous peoples. The land and nature are integral parts of their lives, preservation and development of their culture. Indigenous

peoples' respect for animals and nature is of great importance for their identity but also for their spiritual values.

Women small-holder farmers often lack tenure rights and/or secure access to their land. Not formally owning land is putting women at even greater risk of land conflicts. Having a legal land tenure is often a prerequisite for receiving loans and attaining other financial services, which is fundamental to women's economic empowerment and safety.

Women's right to land is instrumental for defending several human rights, such as the right to a fair standard of living, the right to food and the right to economic development. It's crucial for sustainable food production, resilient agricultural practices and mitigating the effects of climate change.

Social gendered norms create barriers to women's ownership of land in many contexts. The fact that women often do not own or control land means they are not included in technical trainings offered to farmers by farming organizations. The exclusion of women from critical technical trainings and support, often means they are not able to implement mitigation strategies to address issues of land, conflict and climate change.

### THE FACTS

Globally 736 million people are living in extreme poverty. Over 75 percent of those are living in the rural areas and the majority are women. Women are working the fields but when it comes to ownership, only 13 percent of agricultural land is owned by women.



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## CONCLUSIONS

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Defending women and their right to land needs to be highlighted and put at the center of attention by the international community. Protecting and promoting the human rights of women is a matter of justice, defending lives and our planet. Both long and short-term comprehensive measures are needed to reverse the alarming development that is seen in Latin America and elsewhere, where people are persecuted, threatened and involuntarily end up in conflicts linked to land and the extraction of natural resources.

The implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is more important than ever. Securing and defending the rights of indigenous peoples and small-scale farmers is central to the work of the 2030 Agenda, in which UN member states agreed on 17 common sustainability goals to eliminate the world's extreme

poverty, reduce inequalities and address the climate crisis. Rural development, sustainable food production, resilient agricultural practices and land rights are central, among others, for Goal 1 (no poverty), Goal 2 (zero hunger) and Goal 5 (gender equality).

We need to transform norms and practices that hinder women's access and control over land. Organisations, companies and governments need to come together, across borders, to protect women and men that are risking their lives to demand their right to land.

Also, sustainable solutions, such as collective land rights and cooperative solutions to land ownership that go beyond short-term market demands, can help achieve the Leave no one behind-agenda in a stage in history where the world really needs a decade of action and delivery.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS

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We Effect calls on policy-makers to take the following actions to improve the situation of women small-holder farmers and women human rights defenders.

- ▶ **All nations** have a responsibility to protect women human rights defenders in their countries. Companies and investors with existing or planned operations or investments shall follow the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and, in line with these, carry out risk and impact assessments with regards to human rights (so-called human rights due diligence).
- ▶ **Stronger efforts** are needed to fulfill the promises made and the strategic objectives in the Beijing Platform For Action regarding women's land rights, for example paragraph 61 (b) where governments agreed to "undertake legislative and administrative reforms to give women full and equal access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance

and to ownership of land and other property, credit, natural resources and appropriate technologies". Efforts must go beyond legislation and administration, governments should take responsibility for working actively to transform norms and practices at all institutional and administrative levels to affirm the rights of women to land.

- ▶ **The UN** and international development cooperation should increase development cooperation aid and prioritize efforts directed to rural development that specifically strengthen women's economic, social and political empowerment, as well as efforts for fairer use and access to natural resources such as land.
- ▶ **The UN and all nations** should recognize, and emphasize, the possibilities that co-operative and collective land rights have for women's economic empowerment and promote women's access to and ownership of land and other natural resources.

***"Women are oppressed and murdered because they demand their right to land. They shoot teargas at us, for protesting the Parliament's abuse of our country's laws"***

Land and Human Rights Defender in Honduras,  
We Effect report "Cause of Death: Farmer", 2020.

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***"Our local leaders are murdered, so that the indigenous people no longer claim their rights"***

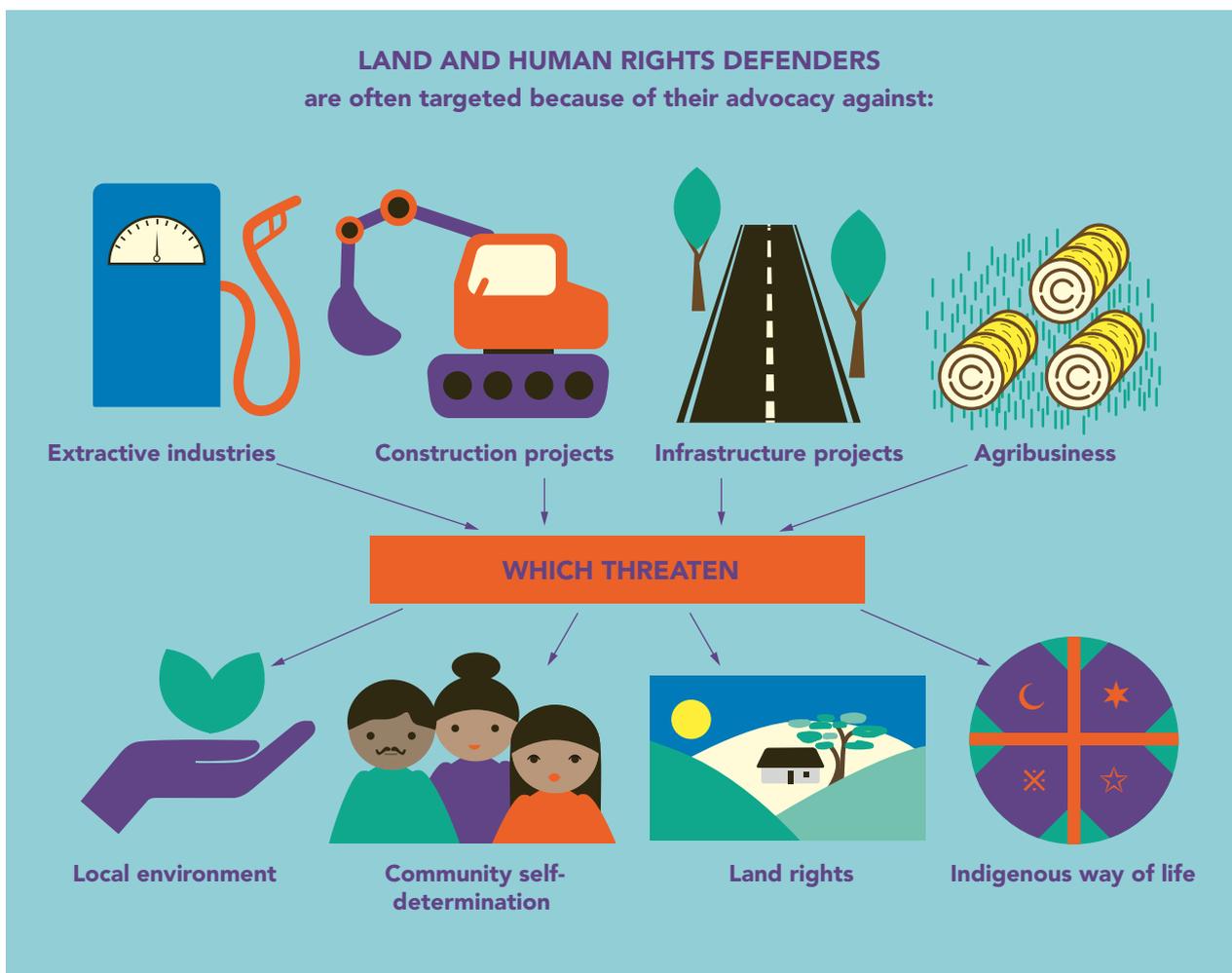
Land and Human Rights Defender in Guatemala,  
We Effect report "Cause of Death: Farmer", 2020.

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# WE EFFECT'S WORK ON WOMEN AND LAND

- Together with local farmers and indigenous organisations, We Effect's work on women's equal right to land focuses on gender equality, sustainable food production, mitigating the effects of climate change, rural development and adequate housing.
- The programs are designed by our partners and combine cooperative methods for income-increasing projects with social, economic and environmental sustainability.
- Through advocacy efforts, We Effect works for the right to land and supports organisations and human rights defenders to protect their rights and hold governments and companies accountable for their actions.



Adaptation of infographic from the report "Deadly Shade of Green, Threats to Environmental Human Rights Defenders in Latin America", Article 19, 2016.

RESULTS FROM WE EFFECT REPORT CAUSE OF DEATH: FARMER (2020)



In Honduras and Guatemala all surveyed organisations experience **LIVING UNDER CONSTANT THREATS** caused by their work for **THE RIGHT TO OWN AND FARM THEIR OWN LAND.**



**5** *OUT OF* **11**

organisations state that their members have been forced to **FLEE THEIR HOMES BECAUSE OF VIOLENCE AND ATTACKS.**



**ALL ORGANISATIONS REQUEST A BIGGER INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE AND SUPPORT IN THEIR COUNTRIES.**

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# WE MUST NEVER FORGET BERTA

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**Berta Cáceres fought for years to defend the rights and territory of the Lenca people in Honduras. In 2016, she was brutally murdered in her home.**

As founder and coordinator of the Consejo Cívico de Organizaciones Populares e Indígenas de Honduras (Copinh) – one of We Effect’s partner organizations in Honduras – Berta Cáceres worked relentlessly to protect the environment and the Lenca people’s right to land. Berta’s vocal criticism of reckless dam and mine projects made her an enemy of the state and investing compa-

nies. On March 3 2016, four men killed her in her home. In 2019, the men were sentenced to 34 years in prison. Additionally two men, who had links to the company that built the dam Berta Cáceres opposed, were sentenced to 30 years in prison for helping to organize the murder. A former Honduran army major was also sentenced to 30 years.

Berta Cáceres daughter Bertita has now taken up her mother’s fight for justice. She is now the new coordinator of Copinh.

***“Berta lives, she is present in all spaces.  
It gives us joy, hope and courage to continue”***

(said by Bertha Zúñiga Cáceres)



Berta Cáceres. Photo: Erik Halkjaer



We Effect is the Swedish cooperative movements' development organisation, founded in 1958. Today, We Effect is the world's largest cooperative development organisation. We work in partnership with 160 organisations in more than 20 countries to fight poverty, hunger and achieve gender equality.

