
Contribution to the International Partnership for Information and Democracy's call: Addressing Disinformation and Attacks on Information Integrity on Environmental Issues Beyond Climate Change¹

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This contribution is jointly presented by Derechos Digitales², Instituto Nupez³, TEDIC⁴ and Fundación Karisma⁵, latin american civil society organizations whose work involves the conduction of research and advocacy to promote information integrity. The document will present a diagnosis and following recommendations on the protection of environmental defenders and activists, with a focus on Latin America.

The region that harbors more than 40% of the planet's biodiversity and is also the most dangerous for those who fight to protect it⁶. In fact, in 2023, it recorded the highest number of murders of environmental defenders⁷. This context, marked by ecological wealth and persistent structural violence, underscores the urgency of making their work visible and protecting it.

We understand that environmental defenders play a vital role in promoting the integrity of environmental information by acting as mediators between technical data, local realities, and the public. They help ensure transparency, accountability, and actively counter disinformation in contexts of environmental conflict, public policies, and ecological impact. But their contribution goes beyond information. Given they are embedded in the territories, they often possess deep, situated knowledge — traditional, scientific, or experiential — about how to effectively protect the environment. Their defense of land, biodiversity, and ways of life is

¹ Available at: <https://informationdemocracy.org/2025/05/20/call-for-contributions-addressing-disinformation-and-attacks-on-information-integrity-on-environmental-issues-beyond-climate-change/>

² More information available at: <https://www.derechosdigitales.org/>

³ More information available at: <https://nupez.org.br/pagina-inicial/pagina-inicial>

⁴ More information available at: <https://www.tedic.org/>

⁵ More information available at: <https://web.karisma.org.co/>

⁶ UNEP. Making Peace With Nature. 2021. <https://www.unep.org/resources/making-peace-nature>

⁷ Global Witness. Más de 2.100 personas defensoras de la tierra y el medioambiente asesinadas en el mundo entre 2012 y 2023. 2024. <https://globalwitness.org/es/press-releases/mas-de-2100-personas-defensoras-de-la-tierra-y-el-medio-ambiente-asesinadas-en-el-mundo-entre-2012-y-2023/>

inseparable from the defense of information integrity. Therefore, protecting environmental defenders also means protecting ecosystems and the integrity of environmental knowledge itself.

Grounded in this perspective and in research conducted by civil society and independent media in Latin America, this contribution is structured around three axes: (1) the first focuses on meaningful and self-determined internet access, recognizing that without reliable connectivity, defenders and communities are excluded from accessing, producing, and circulating environmental information; (2) the second addresses digital security, emphasizing how surveillance, online violence, and platform bias jeopardize not only the personal safety of defenders but also the continuity and credibility of the information they generate; (3) the third examines specific cases of disinformation that affect environmental defenders, highlighting how omissions, greenwashing, and coordinated campaigns distort public understanding of environmental conflicts and undermine community voices. Together, these three dimensions form the foundation for a holistic approach to protecting environmental defenders and the knowledge systems they sustain. The document concludes with policy recommendations that aim to strengthen these foundations and ensure their protection.

1. Meaningful and self-determined access to the internet

Structural access failures

In Latin America, meaningful access to the internet remains deeply unequal, particularly for rural, afrodescendant, indigenous and other traditional communities. These are precisely the communities most directly involved in defending ecosystems, biodiversity, and land against extractive and polluting industries. Yet they are also systematically excluded from robust connectivity policies.

This digital exclusion undermines information integrity related to the environment, given is directly related to the ability of communities to access information. One of the most significant regional framework that guarantees this right is the Escazú Agreement, adopted in 2018 under the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)⁸. It is the first binding treaty to specifically guarantee the rights of access to environmental information, public participation in environmental decision-making, and protection for

⁸ Available at: https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=treaty&mtdsg_no=xxvii-18&chapter=27&clang=_en

environmental defenders across Latin America and the Caribbean. The Agreement affirms that transparent, timely, and accessible information is essential to environmental governance and the protection of defenders' rights. Yet its effective implementation remains uneven, particularly in territories where digital barriers prevent communities from exercising these rights in practice.

These challenges are especially acute in regions where connectivity gaps are most pronounced, and where environmental defenders tend to be most active. The Amazon region offers a paradigmatic example. Derechos Digitales's research in the Amazon basin, across different South American countries, reveals serious deficits in both infrastructure and public policy responses⁹. Many communities depend on expensive, unstable mobile connections, often with limited data plans and low-speed networks. Fixed broadband penetration remains extremely low across rural areas. In Colombia's Vaupés department, for instance, fixed internet penetration stands at only 0.16 accesses per 100 inhabitants¹⁰.

Across the region, the private sector largely controls infrastructure deployment, which tends to prioritize urban centers, industrial operations, or large-scale extractive activities. Territories home to environmental defenders, such as indigenous or quilombola communities in Brazil, are often last in line for meaningful investment. Connectivity expansion in these regions has frequently aligned with commercial or security interests¹¹, while defenders' communication needs remain unaddressed.

This exclusion is not only geographical but also financial. TEDIC's research has documented troubling evidence regarding the misuse of public funds intended to bridge the digital divide in Paraguay. In particular, TEDIC's 2018 and 2024 investigations¹² reveal that Universal Service Funds (USF), administered by Paraguay's telecommunications regulator CONATEL, which are legally mandated to improve internet access in underserved and rural communities, have instead been diverted to finance surveillance technologies. These include the purchase and deployment of facial recognition cameras, distributed to municipalities and the Ministry of the Interior, rather than being invested in expanding or upgrading connectivity infrastructure in

⁹ DERECHOS DIGITALES. Latin America in a Glimpse: The Amazon. 2023. Available at: https://www.derechosdigitales.org/wp-content/uploads/DD_Amazonia_ENG_DD.pdf

¹⁰ DEJUSTICIA; DERECHOS DIGITALES. Latin America in a Glimpse Amazonia Colombia. 2023. Available at: https://www.derechosdigitales.org/wp-content/uploads/DD_Amazonia_3_Colombia.pdf

¹¹ INSTITUTO NUPEF; INTERNETLAB. Redes na Floresta: Mapeamento das políticas de conectividade na região amazônica brasileira. 2025. Available at: https://internetlab.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/relatorio_redesnafloresta_10062025.pdf

¹² TEDIC. (2024) Not with my face: Implementation of facial recognition cameras by the Paraguayan State. Link <https://www.tedic.org/en/facial-recognition-asuncion/>

marginalized areas. Rather than closing the digital divide, these investments reinforce state control and may contribute to the criminalization of environmental defenders, many of whom challenge powerful state-linked interests.

Further, connectivity is often disrupted or strategically limited in moments of social conflict. TEDIC's research on internet shutdowns in Paraguay's northern territories documents allegations of targeted service disruptions in areas of socio-environmental conflict where state military operations intersect with community mobilizations¹³. These shutdowns hinder the ability of defenders to document rights violations, share information, and seek protection during violent episodes. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on peaceful assembly and association has emphasized that such shutdowns, particularly during protests or security operations, represent a disproportionate violation of the rights to freedom of expression and access to information¹⁴.

Even where connectivity technically exists, quality and neutrality remain major challenges. The rise of zero-rating and bundled data packages across Latin America contributes to a fragmented internet experience¹⁵. Commercial offers often prioritize access to specific big tech platforms, while limiting open internet navigation, further narrowing the informational space available to defenders and rural communities. This fragmentation undermines both the quantity and diversity of environmental information available, restricting defenders' ability to access information, legal documents, global advocacy networks or security resources.

Community networks as an emerging rights-promoting alternative

In the face of this systemic exclusion, community networks have emerged as an important grassroots alternative. These networks, which are designed, built, and governed by local communities themselves, provide culturally relevant, low-cost, and resilient connectivity options. They respect the linguistic, cultural, and organizational autonomy of indigenous and traditional communities while addressing connectivity gaps left by commercial operators¹⁶.

¹³ TEDIC (2023) Internet shutdowns report – Northern Zone Paraguay. Available at:

<https://www.tedic.org/en/internet-shutdowns-report-northern-zone-paraguay-2023/>

¹⁴ Ending Internet shutdowns: a path forward. Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. Human Rights Council Forty-seventh session 15 June 2021, A/HRC/47/24. Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/149/66/PDF/G2114966.pdf?OpenElement>.

¹⁵ FUNDACIÓN KARISMA. ¿Cómo se Contrata en Latinoamérica el acceso a internet? 2017. Available at: <https://www.tedic.org/neutralidadenlaredenamerica/>

¹⁶ Baca, C.; Belli, L.; Huerta, E. & Velasco, K. (2018). Redes comunitarias en América Latina: Desafíos, Regulaciones, Soluciones. APC; FGV Direito Rio; Redes por la Diversidad, Equidad y Sustentabilidad A.C. Available at: <https://www.internetsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018-Redes-Comunitarias-ES.pdf>

Community networks in Latin America operate under multiple governance models, including self-provision, hybrid, and public-service frameworks. Experiences from different countries in the region demonstrate how these models not only improve technical access but strengthen local governance capacities, promote digital sovereignty, and protect the integrity of environmental information produced by communities¹⁷.

However, these initiatives still face significant regulatory and financial barriers¹⁸. Spectrum allocation remains highly restrictive, often requiring participation in costly auctions inaccessible to small non-profit networks. Legal recognition is uneven across jurisdictions, and bureaucratic hurdles often discourage grassroots deployment. Import tariffs, homologation processes for imported equipment, and complex licensing procedures create additional burdens.

Without proactive state support and protective policy frameworks, community networks risk remaining exceptional rather than systemic answers. Yet they represent one of the most promising pathways to ensure environmental defenders' meaningful access to information — both as a technical enabler and as a rights-based governance model that reinforces environmental and informational integrity.

2. Securing environmental defense in the digital age

As mentioned before, Global Witness documented in its 2022 report the murders of environmental defenders in 18 countries, 11 of them in Latin America¹⁹. This underscores the high risks associated with environmental defense in the region.

In addition to physical violence, threats in digital spaces have become increasingly common. The internet and social media now play a vital role in environmental advocacy, contributing to strengthen agendas, connect with broader networks, and raise awareness about environmental issues beyond climate change. However; harassment, intimidation, threats, and surveillance, once confined to face-to-face interactions or physical communication, have found new forms of

¹⁷ Cumbre Latinoamericana de Redes Comunitarias (2019). ISOC; CSIG. Disponible en: https://espectro.org.br/sites/default/files/downloads-redes/Declaraci%C3%B3n_CLRC-2018_1.1.pdf

¹⁸ DERECHOS DIGITALES. Contribución a la consulta pública “Comunidades de Telecomunicaciones”, convocada por la Subsecretaría de las Telecomunicaciones de Chile. 2025. Available at: https://www.derechosdigitales.org/wp-content/uploads/Derechos-Digitales_Contribucio%CC%81n-Consulta-SUBTEL_-Redes-Comunitarias.pdf

¹⁹ GLOBAL WITNESS. 2023. Standing firm
The Land and Environmental Defenders on the frontlines of the climate crisis. Available at: <https://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/land-and-environmental-defenders/standing-firm/>

manifestation online. Rising levels of online violence, disinformation, and targeted actions such as infiltration of WhatsApp groups are not isolated issues: they contribute to an increased risk of physical attacks, as well as generating direct psychological impacts²⁰. These digital threats often intersect with long-standing issues such as racism, sexism, and inequality²¹.

Addressing digital security is essential for environmental defenders, as digital threats increasingly endanger both their work and their wellbeing. States have the responsibility to support them, particularly by promoting security practices that are tailored to their specific realities and needs. In this context, strengthening digital security policies is not just a technical matter, it is a human rights imperative.

Digital security and information integrity are deeply interconnected. When environmental defenders, traditional communities and civil society organizations face threats such as surveillance, hacking, or content suppression, it is not only their personal safety that is at risk; it is also the integrity of the environmental information they produce, share, and safeguard. These actors play a critical role in documenting ecological harm, denouncing rights violations, and making locally grounded knowledge visible. Without secure conditions to collect, store, and disseminate this information, the public record of environmental struggles becomes fragmented, distorted, or lost. Protecting digital security, therefore, is not only about reducing harm; it is a prerequisite for ensuring that environmental knowledge flows freely, accurately, and safely in the public interest.

Fundación Karisma and TEDIC have carried out research and community engagement, between 2023 and 2024. The insights and recommendations presented in this section are based on findings from the reports “Hablemos de fortalecer la seguridad digital para la defensa del medio ambiente en Colombia”²², Ciberseguridad en defensoras y defensores de derechos humanos en Paraguay²³, as well as from other key resources including “Guía de Seguridad Digital para Defensores del Medio Ambiente en Colombia: Protegiendo Nuestro Planeta, Protegiendo

²⁰ HEINRICH BOLL STIFTUNG. FUNDACIÓN MULTITUDES. Online Gender-Based Violence against Women Environmental and Human Rights Defenders in Latin America. 2024. Available at: https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2024-11/online_gender-based_violence_against_women_environmental_and_human_rights_defenders_in_latam.pdf

²¹ CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE AND INNOVATION. Supporting Safer Digital Spaces. 2023. Available at: https://www.cigionline.org/static/documents/SaferInternet_Special_Report.pdf

²² FUNDACIÓN KARISMA. Hablemos de fortalecer la seguridad digital para la defensa del medio ambiente en Colombia. 2024. Available at: <https://web.karisma.org.co/hablemos-de-fortalecer-la-seguridad-digital-para-la-defensa-del-medio-ambiente-en-colombia/>

²³ TEDIC. Ciberseguridad en defensoras y defensores de derechos humanos en Paraguay. 2024. Available at: https://www.tedic.org/ciber_defensores/

Nuestra Seguridad en Línea” (2023)²⁴ and “Canoa Salvavidas Para Navegar Por Internet” (2024)²⁵. These documents offer concrete pathways to strengthen digital security with focus on the lived realities of those who defend the environment.

Understanding the risk landscape

Environmental defenders operate in an increasingly hostile digital environment, where their digital vulnerabilities are deeply intertwined with broader environmental and social conflicts. Across Latin America, defenders are experiencing rising levels of digital surveillance, hacking, interception of communications, unauthorized exposure of personal data, and online harassment²⁶. These threats intensify the physical, emotional, and legal risks that defenders already endure.

One of the most common tactics used to intimidate and isolate defenders is the creation of fake profiles and coordinated smear campaigns, designed to discredit environmental leaders and weaken public support. While social media and digital platforms can offer visibility and mobilization opportunities, they can also increase exposure to targeted attacks and misinformation²⁷.

Worryingly, digital tools are increasingly being exploited to sow division within communities. Disinformation campaigns, often spread through messaging apps or social networks, erode trust, fragment social cohesion, and undermine the collective strength needed for environmental defense.

These dynamics reveal an urgent need for organizations and communities to coordinate secure communication infrastructures and adopt comprehensive strategies for digital protection, not only to safeguard themselves, but to ensure the continuity and integrity of the environmental information they generate and rely on.

²⁴ FUNDACIÓN KARISMA. Guía de seguridad digital para personas defensoras del medio ambiente en Colombia. 2023. Available at:

<https://web.karisma.org.co/guia-de-seguridad-digital-para-personas-defensoras-del-medio-ambiente-en-colombia/>

²⁵ FUNDACIÓN KARISMA. Canoa salvavidas para navegar por internet. 2024. Available at:

<https://web.karisma.org.co/canoa-salvavidas-para-navegar-por-internet/>

²⁶ TEDIC. Ciberseguridad en defensoras y defensores de derechos humanos en Paraguay. 2024. Available at:

https://www.tedic.org/ciber_defensores/

²⁷ HEINRICH BOLL STIFTUNG. FUNDACIÓN MULTITUDES. Online Gender-Based Violence against Women Environmental and Human Rights Defenders in Latin America. 2024. Available at:

https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2024-11/online_gender-based_violence_against_women_environmental_and_human_rights_defenders_in_latina-america.pdf

Digital security as a pillar of environmental defense

Connectivity and the integrity of the digital environment are preconditions for environmental defenders to do their work safely. Yet in the context of increasing state and corporate surveillance, digital security must be recognized not just as a technical concern but as a core pillar of protection. This is particularly urgent for women environmental human rights defenders (WHRDs), who face compounded risks at the intersection of gender, territory, and technology²⁸.

According to joint research by TEDIC and Fundación Karisma²⁹, women defenders in both Paraguay and Colombia are increasingly reliant on digital tools to organize, document, and advocate for their territories — yet they do so in high-risk conditions with limited digital training and no formal security protocols.

In Paraguay, over 65% of surveyed WHRDs reported having only intermediate technological skills, and more than 75% lacked any prior digital security training. In Colombia, 1 in 3 women defenders surveyed had experienced online harassment, while over 40% had faced phishing attempts or account hijackings³⁰.

Frequent forms of technology-facilitated gender-based violence include cyberstalking and sextortion, non-consensual distribution of intimate images, doxxing and public exposure of personal information and confiscation or tampering of digital devices during state operations³¹.

The psychological impact and chilling effect of such attacks are profound, often leading to self-censorship and isolation. This silencing has a direct impact on the visibility and circulation of environmental knowledge, especially in territories where women defenders are key sources of localized data and testimony³².

The absence of comprehensive personal data protection laws in many countries in the region, including in Paraguay, further exacerbates these risks, leaving defenders without meaningful

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ TEDIC; FUNDACIÓN KARISMA. Riesgos digitales para personas defensoras de derechos humanos en Paraguay y Colombia. 2024. Available at: https://www.tedic.org/ciber_paraguay_colombia/

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ HEINRICH BOLL STIFTUNG. FUNDACIÓN MULTITUDES. Online Gender-Based Violence against Women Environmental and Human Rights Defenders in Latin America. 2024. Available at: https://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/2024-11/online_gender-based_violence_against_women_environmental_and_human_rights_defenders_in_latina-america.pdf

³² Ibid

recourse. As UN Women emphasizes, ensuring the privacy and digital integrity of women human rights defenders is essential to protecting their autonomy and safety³³.

Structural platform harms to civil society

While many environmental defenders and traditional communities operate outside formal organizational structures, others — including NGOs, grassroots groups, and community media — engage in environmental advocacy through civil society organizations (CSOs). These actors play a critical role in amplifying local struggles, producing and disseminating environmental information, and engaging in digital mobilization and policy advocacy.

However, their ability to communicate and organize online is increasingly constrained by structural harms embedded in dominant digital platforms and their business models. As part of the strategic and safe use of digital tools, it is essential to critically examine how these platforms impact CSOs' visibility, reach, and safety.

The research presented in “Connecting the Causes”³⁴ offers insights into the digital challenges faced by CSOs and independent media in Colombia. It outlines a troubling picture of how structural platform dynamics (algorithmic opacity, biased moderation, and inaccessible advertising systems) undermine the freedom of expression, visibility, and safety of organizations using digital tools for advocacy and community building.

Automated moderation systems disproportionately flag or suppress content related to environmental rights and other sensitive topics. Ambiguous community standards, often enforced without adequate context or transparency, push organizations toward self-censorship. Posts related to drug policy, gender identity, or political participation are regularly blocked or shadowbanned, limiting the ability of civil society to communicate freely.

Organizations reported adopting “safer” tones and avoiding essential terms in fear of visibility loss or outright content removal. For those working on sensitive issues like extractivism, forced displacement, or trans community rights, this dynamic fundamentally erodes their capacity to inform and mobilize.

³³ UN WOMEN. How women human rights defenders are under threat worldwide. 2024. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/how-women-human-rights-defenders-are-under-threat-worldwide>

³⁴ FUNDACIÓN KARISMA. Conectando las causas: el trabajo de sociedad civil y medios independientes en redes sociales es un desafío. 2025. Available at: <https://web.karisma.org.co/conectando-las-causas-el-trabajo-de-sociedad-civil-y-medios-independientes-en-redes-sociales-es-un-desafio/>

Another major obstacle highlighted is the inequitable access to digital advertising tools. The categorization systems imposed by Meta (Facebook/Instagram) force most CSOs' content into the "social issues, elections, or politics" category immediately subjecting it to tighter scrutiny and more limited reach. While commercial content faces fewer restrictions and receives better algorithmic treatment, advocacy-driven campaigns often see reduced performance, even when paid.

Many organizations lack the credit cards or financial infrastructure to navigate platform payment systems. Others must rely on personal staff accounts, creating accountability and tax difficulties. Moreover, when CSOs do manage to pay, they frequently experience diminished organic reach. This leads to frustration, wasted resources, and reduced trust in platforms.

This is reinforced by irregular metrics, unexplained drops in visibility, and the sense that once you start paying, future content must be boosted to be seen at all. For grassroots organizations and community media with limited budgets, these patterns constitute a systemic exclusion from digital participation. Across interviews, organizations described the difficulty of obtaining timely, human, or context-sensitive support from Meta and other platforms. Appeals are met with generic automated responses or long silences. Even organizations with formal verification status, or those that have tried to follow all rules, feel like they are navigating a "black box". They are simultaneously visible and invisible present on the platforms, but often muted or ignored.

This power asymmetry undermines democratic participation in digital spaces. Platforms fail to consult with civil society in developing content or advertising policies, and the absence of thematic categories that reflect human rights, journalism, or community development reveals a profound disconnect between tech design and public interest communication. The current model of platform governance will continue to harm civil society actors. CSOs and media must be recognized not as mere "users" but as essential agents of democratic life. Their digital presence requires safeguards and tailored support that reflects their social role and the specific risks they face.

Digital environments must ensure that environmental defenders and civil society organizations can operate, express themselves, and organize without fear. Protecting digital rights in the context of climate justice and social equity is essential to safeguard lives, preserve civic space, and ensure the circulation of environmental knowledge vital to the public interest.

3. How disinformation affects the work of defenders

Digital environments must ensure that environmental defenders and civil society organizations can operate, express themselves, and organize without fear. Protecting digital rights in the context of climate justice and social equity is essential to safeguard lives, preserve civic space, and ensure the circulation of environmental knowledge vital to the public interest.

But threats to defenders do not end with surveillance, censorship, or platform bias. Increasingly, these actors also face coordinated efforts to distort, suppress, or manipulate the information they generate and depend on. Not only, but also to access reliable information on what happens in their territories. Threats to information integrity — whether through omission, or targeted attacks — corrodes the credibility of science-based knowledge and marginalizes the lived experiences of frontline communities.

Understanding how information disorder shapes environmental conflicts is essential for advancing both protection and evidence-informed environmental action. This section explores some case studies on how disinformation manifests in different territories — and how defenders are confronting its consequences.

Case Study: wind energy and the erasure of community realities in Piauí, Brazil

The state of Piauí has become one of Brazil's main hubs for wind energy. Companies like Enel Green Power have expanded rapidly, supported by public policies aimed at promoting the energy transition and by a dominant narrative of alleged sustainable development. The growth of wind energy, especially in the Northeast and South regions of Brazil, has been widely celebrated as a sustainable and strategic solution to the climate crisis and the urgent need for energy transition. As a renewable source with low greenhouse gas emissions and high generation potential, wind energy is seen as an important tool in addressing global environmental challenges.

However, it is crucial to recognize that despite its environmental advantages at the global level, the implementation of wind farms has generated negative impacts in traditional territories, including quilombola and riverside communities. Enel's arrival in quilombola communities has been widely publicized as a positive milestone for clean energy generation and local development³⁵. News articles and official statements highlight the creation of temporary jobs,

³⁵ MEIONEWS. No Japão, Rafael Fonteles assina acordo para projeto de energia eólica no litoral. 2023. Available at: <https://www.meionews.com/piaui/no-japao-rafael-fonteles-assina-acordo-para-projeto-de-energia-eolica-no-litoral-484121>

infrastructure works, and supposed socio-environmental benefits³⁶. But for the residents of these communities, the lived reality tells a very different story.

Communities like Tapuio, located in the municipality of Queimada—one of the three municipalities affected by the Enel Green Power project—report a series of socio-environmental impacts caused by the disorderly expansion of wind farms. The main issues include restrictions on land use and natural resources, environmental degradation, noise pollution, suppression of native vegetation, and increased territorial insecurity. Many families now struggle to move freely within their own lands, facing fencing and barriers that impede traditional land use.

In the words of a local leader:

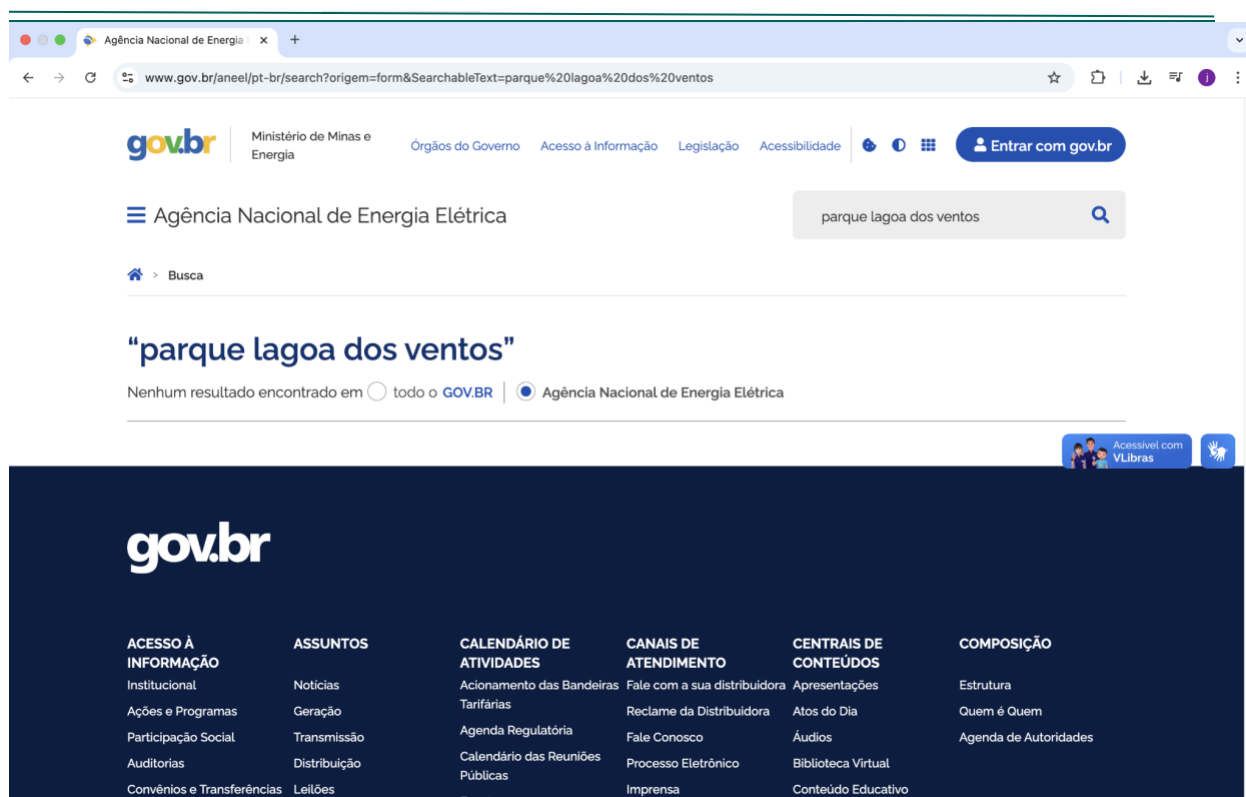
“The quilombola community of Tapuio has a history marked by resistance, ancestry, and collective ways of life. These are lifestyles based on sharing — whether in agricultural mutual-aid efforts, religious novenas, celebrations, or other cultural expressions. Since 2017, this way of life has been profoundly altered with the arrival of large ventures, such as Enel’s, which has brought severe impacts.”

This testimony, compiled from an interview conducted by Instituto Nupef in June 2025, helps to shed light on the impacts of what is now considered the largest wind farm in Brazil.

One of the main problems pointed out by the communities is the lack of clear and accessible public information about the project. The official websites and social media pages of the Piauí State Government and Enel itself do not provide basic and updated project data in an appropriate format or language³⁷. Information such as the total area of the project, the number and location of towers, the use of monitoring technologies (such as drones), or even estimates on the movement of vehicles and workers, is not available. A brief review of the municipal government’s web pages and social media also yields no information about the wind farm or the quilombola communities. When the project name ("Parque Lagoa dos Ventos") is entered on the website of the National Electric Energy Agency (ANEEL), there are no available results, as seen below:

³⁶ Some examples can be found at: <https://g1.globo.com/pi/piaui/especial-publicitario/enel-green-power/noticia/2022/04/14/maior-complexo-eolico-da-america-do-sul-leva-desenvolvimento-e-oportunidades-para-o-piaui.ghtml>; <https://megawhat.energy/destaques-do-diario/aneel-autoriza-operacao-comercial-de-parque-eolico-da-enel-no-piaui/>; <https://www.petroleoenergia.com.br/parque-eolico-piaui/>

³⁷ Municipal government of Queimada Nova, Piauí, webpage: <https://queimadanova.pi.gov.br/queimadanova/portalanoticias>. Access in June 2025. Instagram of the municipality of Queimada Nova, Piauí: <https://www.instagram.com/prefeituradequeimadanova/>. Access in June 2025.



This lack of transparency not only violates the right to access information, but also prevents meaningful community participation and increases the vulnerability of environmental defenders. Without access to reliable, user-friendly information, affected communities are unable to organize, explore alternatives, demand fair compensation, or prepare for the profound changes to their way of life. The communities face serious shortcomings in the processes of free, prior, and informed consultation—guaranteed by ILO Convention 169—which have not effectively ensured even minimal conditions for coexistence with the project. In reality, the populations most directly affected remain in the dark about key aspects of the development.

The absence of relevant public information becomes even more concerning when contrasted with the official discourse. On the Piauí State Government's website³⁸, the dominant narrative—echoed by media and public agencies—portrays the project as a savior of local families, presenting wind energy as a symbol of progress and sustainability. This misleading presentation of the implementation model serves to obscure the real impacts experienced by

³⁸ GOVERNO DO ESTADO DO PIAUÍ. Piauí tem maior parque eólico em construção na América do Sul. 2019. Available at: <https://antigo.pi.gov.br/noticias/piaui-tem-maior-parque-eolico-em-construcao-na-america-do-sul/>

historically marginalized communities. It also contributes to the criminalization of communities and leaders who question the so-called benefits of the project.

Rather than respecting the ways of life and territorial rights of traditional communities, the expansion of wind energy—as it is currently being carried out—reproduces long-standing colonial patterns of land appropriation. The difference is that today, this appropriation is legitimized by the discourse of energy transition and sustainability.

A quilombola leader from Maranhão, who is familiar with Tapuio’s situation, describes how these changes have affected daily life in the community:

“Life has changed. Women no longer feel safe walking alone along the quilombo roads, due to the high number of strange men — workers brought in from outside. Elderly people and children have also changed their routines, afraid of the intense traffic of high-speed vehicles. Even our novenas, which include processions on community roads, have been impacted. The cost of living has gone up — the market has become far too expensive. It's hard to survive. We want to continue living in our territory with dignity, safety, and autonomy, just as we always have.”

In light of this scenario, it is imperative to rethink the current model of wind energy expansion in Brazil. Clean energy is not enough—it must also be just. This means respecting the rights of local populations, ensuring transparency throughout the process, promoting effective participation, and making sure the benefits of the energy transition do not come at the cost of people’s lives, rights, and traditional ways of being.

The erosion of information integrity in these contexts is not accidental. It is a mechanism of exclusion, aimed at depoliticizing environmental conflict and facilitating the expansion of large-scale infrastructure without accountability.

Disinformation and Conservative Backlash Against Escazú in Paraguay

In Paraguay, efforts to ratify and implement the Escazú Agreement—which seeks to guarantee access to environmental information, participation, justice, and protection for environmental defenders and is therefore key to promote environmental information integrity—have faced a powerful backlash rooted in a convergence of conservative, agribusiness, and nationalist interests. This has been driven by a well-orchestrated disinformation campaign led by political

figures, business associations, religious leaders, and aligned media outlets, as portrayed by independent media investigations³⁹.

False narratives have been systematically deployed to frame Escazú as a threat to national sovereignty, often portraying it as a Trojan horse for foreign intervention. Similarly, the powerful Unión de Gremios de la Producción (UGP), representing agribusiness interests, denounced the agreement for linking environmental protection to human rights, enabling activist influence in matters they consider “strictly national”.

The opposition’s rhetoric has also weaponized moral panic. Conservative lawmakers argued that Escazú introduces “ambiguous concepts” that promote “foreign impositions” undermining “the family and traditional values,” even claiming it would “pulverize” private property. These assertions reflect deeper ideological anxieties among Paraguay’s right-wing sectors, where Escazú has been misrepresented as a vehicle for promoting gender ideology, abortion, and globalist agendas.

This framing taps into a broader cultural narrative that casts feminists, environmentalists, and international organizations as existential threats to national identity. The relationship between conservative moral movements and agribusiness in Paraguay is not merely ideological but materially intertwined. Mennonite agro-export cooperatives, including some accused of deforesting indigenous lands, help finance anti-abortion organizations that spread misinformation about reproductive rights and sexual education in schools.

The result is a potent alliance of agrarian, religious and political interests that successfully mobilized fear and disinformation to block Escazú's ratification. Environmental defenders in Paraguay now operate in a context where their legitimacy is routinely questioned, and their advocacy painted as subversive or externally driven. Rather than being protected by the state, they are often stigmatized as enemies of tradition and sovereignty, targets of a discourse designed not only to stall environmental regulation, but to preserve a deeply unequal status quo.

Disinformation as a systemic threat to defenders

Across these cases, a common pattern emerges: the manipulation of environmental narratives to serve entrenched political and economic interests. Whether through omission or fear-

³⁹ CENTRO LATINOAMERICANO DE INVESTIGACIÓN PERIODÍSTICA. ¿Quién tiene miedo a un tratado sobre transparencia ambiental en Paraguay? 2021. Available at: <https://www.elclip.org/quien-tiene-miedo-a-un-tratado-sobre-transparencia-ambiental-en-paraguay/>

mongering, disinformation creates an uneven informational playing field where communities are excluded from debate, denied their rights, and exposed to greater risk.

For environmental defenders, this reality means working in hostile epistemic environments, where community-based knowledge is dismissed, science is politicized, and digital spaces amplify the voices of power while muting resistance.

Strengthening the integrity of environmental information is therefore inseparable from defending environmental defenders themselves. It is not only about correcting facts; it is about reclaiming the right to produce, circulate, and access knowledge rooted in justice, evidence, and lived experience.

4. Recommendations: Protecting environmental defenders means protecting information integrity

Across Latin America, environmental defenders play a vital role not only in safeguarding ecosystems, but also in upholding the integrity of environmental information. They ensure that situated knowledge, scientific evidence, and local realities are visible in public debate. They document harm, challenge corporate narratives, and push for policies grounded in justice and sustainability.

But their ability to carry out this work is systematically undermined — by lack of meaningful internet access, by hostile and insecure digital environments, and by pervasive disinformation that distorts environmental realities and delegitimizes their voices.

This contribution has shown how:

- Connectivity gaps prevent traditional, rural, and indigenous communities from accessing, producing, and disseminating critical environmental information;
- Digital threats, especially for women, compromise the security of defenders and the continuity of environmental monitoring and mobilization;
- Stated produced or backed Disinformation, both by commission and omission, reshapes public perception of environmental issues, often protecting powerful interests at the expense of science, rights, and lived experiences.

These are not isolated challenges. Together, they form a systemic attack on the conditions that make environmental defense possible. Ensuring information integrity is thus not only about

combating narratives that are not science-based; it is about enabling just and democratic environmental governance.

Policy recommendations: enabling information integrity for environmental defense

To address the structural challenges detailed above, we propose the following evidence-based recommendations, organized along three interrelated dimensions:

1. Ensure meaningful and self-determined connectivity for environmental information integrity

- Guarantee stable, affordable, and rights-based internet access in rural and environmentally sensitive territories:
 - Establish national targets for rural broadband deployment that explicitly prioritize territories inhabited by Indigenous and other traditional peoples, afro-descendant communities, and environmental defenders.
 - Ensure that Universal Service Funds are transparently allocated to finance public infrastructure projects that serve these communities, explicitly prohibiting diversion of funds.
 - Ensure private operators meet binding coverage obligations, service quality standards, and fair pricing structures in rural and marginalized regions.
 - Incorporate principles of environmental and digital justice into national digital inclusion strategies, ensuring that the most climate-vulnerable communities are also connectivity priorities.
- Prohibit connectivity disruptions that silence environmental defenders:
 - Enact binding legal bans on the use of internet shutdowns, service throttling, or platform blocking, especially during protests, land conflicts, or environmental disputes.
 - Ensure that telecommunications companies are legally prohibited from collaborating with state agencies to suspend or degrade connectivity in affected areas without independent judicial authorization.
- Recognize and actively support community networks as public interest connectivity models:
 - Legally recognize community networks as non-profit, autonomous actors eligible for special regulatory regimes that reflect their social function.

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- Simplify licensing procedures for community networks, including the creation of dedicated licensing categories for social or Indigenous use, modeled on successful experiences such as Mexico's social use concessions.
 - Reserve dedicated spectrum bands for community networks, and facilitate shared, unlicensed, or lightly licensed spectrum access for non-commercial use.
 - Provide fiscal incentives, including import duty exemptions for community network equipment, and facilitate affordable access to critical infrastructure.
- Regional and international action:
 - Encourage international financial institutions, development banks, and climate funds to include digital inclusion for environmental defenders as a priority investment area.
 - Promote the exchange of good practices on community network regulation and sustainability, digital inclusion policy, and intersectional approaches to environmental and digital justice.
 - Ratify and implement the Escazú Agreement and its Action Plan.

2. Integrate digital security into environmental and social protection frameworks

- Integrate digital security into protection policies:
 - Recognize digital security as a core pillar in the protection of environmental defenders and human rights advocates.
 - Design and implement gender-sensitive, intersectional strategies that reflect the specific risks faced by women, indigenous, afro-descendant, and rural defenders.
 - Allocate public funding and international cooperation resources to support civil society-led digital infrastructure, emergency response protocols, and capacity building.
- Recognize civil society as a distinct actor in platform governance
 - Acknowledge the unique communication needs and risk profiles of CSOs and community media, differentiating them from commercial actors or influencers.
 - Ensure meaningful participation of CSOs in the development of content governance and platform policies.
- Guarantee equitable access to digital visibility:

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- Establish algorithmic transparency and accountability mechanisms to monitor the discriminatory treatment of civil society content.
 - Applied strategies to build digital resilience:
 - Tailored training and digital literacy: fund programs led by civil society that address digital safety and the ethical use of technologies, adapted to local contexts.
 - Strategic and safe use of digital tools: support defenders in adopting secure communication practices, especially in high-conflict or low-connectivity areas.
 - Participatory threat analysis: Promote community-led approaches to identifying and mitigating digital risks.
 - Community-centered educational materials: support culturally resonant, low-barrier resources like Canoa Salvavidas, focused on collective care and emotional resilience.
 - Rights-based governance of environmental data: establish frameworks for data sharing that respect community autonomy and consent.

3. Address disinformation and narrative manipulation in environmental conflicts

- Establish State's representatives enhanced responsibility for the production of disinformation
- Mandate transparency in public communication about environmental infrastructure projects, ensuring accessible, updated, and community-oriented data.
- Establish independent observatories or participatory monitoring systems to track and verify the environmental, social, and territorial impacts of large-scale projects.
- Hold corporate actors accountable for greenwashing and narrative manipulation that obscure or deny harm.
- Support independent media, community journalism, and participatory science initiatives that elevate local knowledge and evidence-based environmental reporting.
- Promote digital literacy programs that equip communities to identify and respond to disinformation, including in local languages and formats.