

## THE WOMEN RESIST "PROCEDE" AND SEEK ALTERNATIVES

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One cannot talk about the history of Chiapas without women. In indigenous and campesino communities, they are the ones who have stopped the advance of the military. They are also the ones who do the most work. They are responsible for there being firewood in the house; enough water for the family; the care of the children; the preparation of tortillas and the other foods as well as caring for the chickens and other domestic animals. It is on their backs that the wealth of the maquiladora factories rests, enriched thanks to the exploitation of their labour. They are also the victims of domestic violence as in all the corners of the world, and they endure the heavy burden of family alcoholism. When the husband and the sons go north looking for work, they are the ones that are left alone and without lands, without protection and often they never see their husbands return. And still, they are the victims of the worst crimes and "femicide" from Chiapas to Tijuana. Despite all this, it is they who resist and who look for alternatives to neoliberalism. Next, we pass the word over to Cecilia so that she can tell us her story as a campesina woman from the municipality of Comitán, Chiapas.

But first, we want to clarify some points so that one can understand this experience. The Ejidal Rights and Urban Lands Certification Program (PROCEDE is its Spanish acronym) is the mechanism by which campesino and indigenous lands that are already ejidal or communal, as well as urban lands, pass into a state of private property. With it, land taxes for the poor increase; the hills and mountains cease to be theirs and become federal property; they are distanced from the sources of water or obliged to pay greater taxes for having a river; and they are removed from their "territory", confining the people to a piece of land without access to even firewood and the regional environment that sustains them. Having the PROCEDE certificate is now a requisite for many credit documents or applications. This mechanism of land privatization allows corporations to rent or buy indigenous lands that sustain great biological, hydrocarbon, mineral or water wealth or to plant large expanses of monoculture crops that are socially and ecologically unsustainable and confine agricultural exports such as African Palm, Eucalyptus or genetically-modified Soya plantations.

On the other hand, to balance the poverty that these neoliberal policies cause, the World Bank (WB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) finance the populist program called, "Opportunities", previously known as, "Progress". This program is also used for electoral and political ends; the poor receive the crumbs of the multilateral bank in exchange for the indigenous women being sterilized; the handing over of food, educational support or health care, and even whether or not the community gets cleaned are conditional. Nonetheless, the poor migrants who manage to make it to the United States with the goal of combating the poverty of their own families provide more money than the multilateral bank.

Okay, we give the word to Cecilia: "We are a group that began due to problems with the PROCEDE program. Through this program, the government promoted the regulating of lands.

We were from communal lands and when PROCEDE entered the communities, the problems and divisions among peers began. They proposed that they were going to give them their agrarian certificate, that they were going to give each person their part so that they could parcel their lands off to the rightful persons. This came to have an impact, the program came to ruin the agreements. Because before, nobody could sell and now they can. Because that's what PROCEDE consists of, a way so that you can sell the land to whomever you want. There was manipulation by the delegates of agrarian reform and a professional who wanted a lot of money. Only 12 of our peers did not take part in the program, staying in resistance, looking for the way to organize themselves. But those who took part in PROCEDE were more numerous and they declared themselves in opposition to those in resistance, saying that they were going to take their lands, put them in jail and bother them because they didn't take part in PROCEDE. So, in order to resist, they became affiliated with an independent organization.

Starting with this program, there has been a lot of division in the community and there are no longer communal agreements about the lands. Now the authorities do not listen to us and the authority is only for them, not for us. Now everyone looks after their own interests, now they've divided into two groups. All of this is because of PROCEDE. We haven't been able to resolve this process. Nothing has stirred, there's no action from we who are in resistance nor from those such as PROCEDE. This program came into the community four years ago but it is in the past two years that relations have been at their lowest, in the assemblies as much as in the communal works. What is sad is that before, nobody could sell the lands and now they've already sold them to the city. The 12 who have resisted have tried to seek reconciliation and unity but the others do not want to dialogue or unify. With this government program, unifying is very difficult. It has reached the point where one's relation with one's own family as well as with one's own community has ended.

This project has been in the making ever since President Salinas de Gortari changed Article 27 of the Constitution and this changed all that is agrarian. The pressure on ejidos (communal lands) and communities came directly from the Secretary of Agriculture and from the Attorney General who made it necessary for these people to have title to their lands in order to receive help for projects or to be able to rent or sell and to have access to this policy. Some said, "Yes, we'll participate." Others said, "No! Communal relations are better!" The twelve were the ones who resisted. This is why they want to remove them from the community. But they said, "We are going to fight because this is our community!" Now, the communal assemblies have ended and the twelve have been left discouraged.

Now agriculture is accustomed to agri-chemicals and we are working the lands and we've seen that what to come is the big companies that come to sweep up the communities. Engineers have come here - technical people, to promote fertilizers and they come to seed the land to make demonstration sites, on how the corn fields will function really well with their fertilizers (*agri-chemicals from the corporation, Monsanto*). But in reality, they affect the corn crops and also the land. We should save the seeds and not use chemicals. Those that have a plague now want to use sprays. We have a culture of how to fight them, because these pesticides sterilize the land and with what they do, not only are our native seed crops affected but all is affected including the environment, water and everything. The water is all contaminated with plastics,

containers. Before we drank the water and now there's so much garbage that we can't drink it. In the corn fields, the containers of these liquids are seen, left there and all of this is carried away by the water. Before there weren't any fertilizers, nor chemicals. What we did is that in the summer that didn't rain, we went to the hill to gather animal fertilizer to fertilize the land. First we gathered it and we gave a pinch to each and that's how we did it. But later, when the use of fertilizers to enrich the land began and when the liquids to fumigate the land came, supposedly for greater production and effectiveness, one got used to it because it seemed easier. But now we see how it affects us.

At that time, there were no plagues because everything was treated naturally. But now fertilizers and insecticides are used. The more agri-chemicals are used, the more plagues there are. There are ways to make fertilizers but we are accustomed to these agri-chemicals and we are losing traditional agriculture. When I was young, the campesinos made their little space in the corn fields and when they gathered the harvest, they ignited fireworks or noisemakers, offered flowers, etc., to give thanks to Mother Earth for the harvest. But this change came to the people and now the "pinch" is over with, it's gone, and one doesn't thank the giver of the beans. In the pastoral, they tell us that we must rescue what we are losing, that there are ways for us to rescue agriculture and not lose our customs. It seems difficult because most use agri-chemicals in the corn fields and the flavour is tasted in the harvest. But detoxifying the land is more difficult. This is why the big companies keep coming.

As a beginning, we are trying to organize the women at the religious level and we have sown soya collectively. The past two years went well for us when the soya was very big and we women continue to work with soya. We work collectively, some start on the land, others look where to sell, and this is working very well because we deal with other parishes. Unfortunately, now we can't. Work in the fields is hard and discouragement set in and very few stayed to work and we've said that now we are very few and we can no longer work in the soya field. Being so few, we left it. We are five women working in the group. On Sundays we have time for reflection in the temple and more women arrive. We have said that, despite being few, God has given us much strength in the jobs that we have had. Because, when PROCEDE came, we united the women and the youth to see what we were going to do to not enter into the program because the majority were convinced to enter into it. But we saw that we would be bad off if we entered it and we said talked about this and PROCEDE at different meetings and spaces and they gave us words of breath and force and ideas and we came to apply them to our community but we didn't get much response. But at least we managed to keep the group to which the 12 stayed. They, too, weren't long in signing but we managed to keep our husbands and parents. We managed to keep the communal goods and we have the roles of communal goods guarded.

We have seen other things that have come to affect us such as alcoholism. The community is young but they tried to sell us alcohol and the woman's group with the support of the youth, united. Ultimately, there is a person who has always been more rebellious in the community and he tried to sell it. That made it difficult for us because it is more difficult when it is somebody from here in the community. But we said that we were going to gather the men and women to see what steps we could take so that this doesn't happen in the community. In other communities there is a lot of drinking and it affects us greatly and the men told us, 'you women

take the first step',. If we confront them, they're going to attack us because men stick with the men. So, 'you confront the problem', the men told us. And commissions of three women left that were going to tell him that if he didn't get it, things were going to get worse. There were three commissioners and we others accompanied them. At first, he treated us badly but we managed to speak in good faith. Thanks to God he understood us and he stopped selling it. We have seen that in spite of being few, we are getting rid of problems with the help of the youth. We're out taking the steps and taking on the struggles.

As women, we don't receive the government's OPPORTUNITIES program. Through the church, we have talked about how it only tricks us, because on the one hand it does give us money but on the other hand it makes us prisoners, women have to be punctual to the talks at the clinic (*health clinics*) and they are obliged to go for consultations at the clinic even though they aren't sick. And if they don't go, they are fined half of what the OPPORTUNITIES program gives them. They are under a lot of pressure because they are under the charge of what these people say. And one must think about the consequences of this and this is why we have resisted. They say that they give vaccines to children there, that women have their pap smears there and since they get this, they are dominated by them. We have meetings and when they see at the church what we are going to talk about, the women don't arrive, they no longer participate because they have to go where they are told according to this program and that dominates them.

The day when the women have their reflections is when OPPORTUNITIES makes appointments (*the government does this so that the women can't attend the women's meetings*) and since they take off money if the women do not attend, well they have to go so that it's not taken away from them. With this program, you can't have a TV, refrigerator or stove. You have to be a person without income (poor). Now they are doing a census of the poorest and they give them balls and sports courts so that they'll go to the talk; this is the goal of the government for youth. Last week some women from a community that helped us sow our seeds told us that they couldn't come to the meeting because they were going to do a census of the homes and they couldn't sow seeds because they had to be home at the time they were told or at a certain place, and all of this divides the community.

There was need for transportation in the community, need for a tractor, but they couldn't organize themselves. It has become difficult for the women as for the men. The principles of a collective consciousness are lacking. For this reason, in our community, collective work is being encouraged. The political candidates do a lot of promoting of support. They tell us that they're going to give us 20 or 25 chickens, but we as a women's organization, we get the chickens and get them to produce. They want to come and tell us what we have to do but we already know. 'Have a little chicken farm and sell free range eggs so that we no longer buy in the city'. This is our common work and we don't want to drop it. We have drinking water for all; so the community united on the drinking water assembly. In assemblies and representation or in church work, we are supported. Some of our peers invite us to their community to promote agriculture. It's apparent that there are some who do not want to lose their collectivity. This is why we want to keep it, where we see the possibility of reinforcing the organization.

In reality, our husbands had us accustomed to not participating and as we went about learning about the work, we said, "we are free to participate, we are also called by God to work in the assemblies or the meetings" and we went about recovering the value that we have as women. This didn't seem right to the husbands and personally, it cost me a lot. I had to ask him permission 15 days in advance and he didn't even say "yes" or "no". But when the time came to leave, even as he said, "get going", he began with my children as if to say, "don't go!". But I didn't pay attention to him and I recovered my value as a woman and I went to meetings in Mexico City, Veracruz, Tuxtla, in San Cristobal and even to a women's congress at the border.

We now have more liberty to leave the house for three days and we also brought made our husbands more conscious. In the communal member assemblies, women were not valued. They said that their word was not valid and the husband had to pay fines if his wife spoke because they said that women had nothing to do with meetings. But with the problems with PROCEDA, we women confronted and recouped our place. They saw that women are useful in assemblies and we give our words and suggestions and we confront them and they saw that we women do have value. This is where the value of women in the community was seen. The men said then, 'we're going to present to all of the family, as communal members, as we are, as spouses and children; we are all going to participate in the assembly'. That's when the community was recovered and they began to take wives and children and to value us as women and as communal members.

The youth say: 'it's apparent that there is a change in the community such that we cannot work. We must emigrate from the community to look for work. Parents can no longer maintain us, we can no longer do what we did before and individualism comes into play. Our grandparents told us that the corn field and agriculture are done through mutual help. They did the land collectively. Nobody worked only their land because there was unity. But development started with its ways of work and individualism started. The person who had more no longer wanted to help the other. Before, one had to help with clearing the land and with jobs and it worked. What came to divide us were the government's programs. This is the same problem that we live. This is what has come to break our communal relationship. Because in our group, if there is need, we look after it among ourselves and the other group is no longer going to come and help us and this is what is broken. So one objective of the community is to recoup this common life in the land and the animals.

When we began with the group of youths, there used to be more youth meeting. I was almost a child but my sister went. Almost all of the youth of the community got together and we got along very well and took turns at each homes and there were groups and we reflected on the word of God. There were games, activities and songs. But since the PROCEDA program came, there have been disagreements between parents and children and bit by bit they were getting apart and later they almost never met. All this came into effect when PROCEDA came because it began the divisions and we who came together were the children of the communal members. The others went their way because this prevented the "communal" youth from hanging out with the youth from the other group. That's when the division of youth began and the numbers attending the meetings also decreased although they were invited. They no longer attended the

meetings. And very few of us were left to meet but if we got enough youth together we did meet. We hope to initiate it again.

My most yearned for dream is to gather the people of the community together. In those months we met and did visits to the ill every Saturday with acquaintances. This is the fantasy and the dream to once again get together those that used to meet and my desire is to make a choir and involve more people in the community. We would like to be more organized to have new ideas and new common works but we have to work a lot, too. For me the dream is, despite all that has hit the community, to be youth from reflection to consciousness, to take action, to be committed, responsible youth that denounce and act as youth in the community and who reject the project of death. Where unity can be seen and fathers and mothers are not left alone and we want to work and have our human rights and our words respected and from these have action begin. That's where it began, from the reflection, the desire to organize into a group doing a more real analysis of society. We should meet to manifest ourselves before that which is harming us, before the injustices of our community. Take action and generate awareness about what we are living from the problem that comes to meddle in our communities. We are talking about self-esteem, sexuality, human rights and to relate it all before all else, the impact of the youth. Emigration - we who are here can make a project as youth. With a small chicken we can start to work. It's a dream of being able to unite the group to work in community. "We have an group of youth that can organize youth in a collective community doing communal work or accompanying the other areas of work. The human rights group is a commission that works and trains to help communities in the zone with their problems. The alternative health and natural alternative medicines group is where I work. We are coordinated with San Cristobal, las Margaritas, Comalapa, Chicomuselo, Salto de Agua and other municipalities. From these same groups, there are also actions related to economics that coordinate collectives in the zone. The interests and necessities of the communities are better observed. Organic production is promoted in the collectives and there is one person from each collective that forms a commission of agricultural promoters that are in training. The youth have a photography collective because sometimes union photographers went and charged more than they should.

We are also beginning agricultural alternatives. There the first steps in this region regarding agriculture have been taken - fertilizers, insecticides, shaping the land, controlling plagues, seeds and the treatment of grains, etc.. Two years have passed without treating beans with powders but rather with herbs and in the case of plagues, they no longer use chemicals. There are four of us receiving training and we are seeing to the weeds, turning over the soil, cleaning - what one does. We are trying to advise the communities of the zones and also provide for them also not only in the collective; and we are in other municipalities with Independencia, Comalapa. Sixty families live in the community and there are about 3-5 members per family. In the community, the collective has a cooperative store with pigs, hens and rabbits. The women are the ones in charge of the cooperative and the men are in charge of the animals. In another community, the collective is around a grinder, pigs, etc.. In another there is a collective for groceries and another has a transportation collective and a sheep collective. These belong to the same zone. These collectives promote organic fertilizers and one person from each collective came out to form this commission. It's the same for the photography. It's called, "The Collective" because the money is common. It is held in a group savings account to help with the

necessities of the collective or with associates of the people of the communities. It is something that is held in common for all and that can be used for necessities. It is not individual profit but rather a collective of works. Each one takes a turn selling, attending to the animals one day a week, the pigs, another does the hens, etc..

In the organization, working with the Cooperatives Registry, not much has been done around education. There is an appointment for education but its not being carried out. The school in the community is no more than a classroom. Before, they went to the Rosario primary school but now they have a classroom. All of the classes are in the same room and it's one row for each year. A teacher comes to give them classes. In the photography collective they talked about how to start a tortilla-making project using organic corn from the region. How to begin? And we saw that it's very distant. We are eight associates and we said it requires good resources and a firm planting of the objectives because we want to do it though we said that can't do it. However, if it were our vision, because right now those that produce corn take it to the market and buy tortillas as the Maseca store. It was a collective dream to do something alternative, to produce organic corn and a tortilla factory but we lost enthusiasm. We don't have a place to work from, the money we have is insufficient and we changed the project for another. We bought equipment to do brochures on the computer, a copier and an enlarger for black and white photos.

From our community, what we can say is that the politics has been such that we want to manage the projects that are sent to the communities and control the divisions that they cause. They manage and buy dignity. The right to say something is given to you buy a project in exchange for doing something or saying nothing. There is a violation of freedom of expression because if I speak, they dismiss me. Fox's project treats our country as if it were his company, Coca Cola; he thinks of its economic resources but not in humans. In the meetings of the presidents of the countries, their interests are to take the riches that we have: water, land and even humans, and this affects us because it exterminates our social and humane life and given these policies, in our municipalities, there are many problems. There are five candidates for each party and they cut the people up into little pieces. The system controls us and dominates us which is what they want as there is a lot of confusion with this. But there is a lack of shelter, electricity, habitat, food and they make us participate in this program. These parties keep grabbing. The Zapatistas are poor people like ourselves. They have known how to resist and value their rights as the poor and they haven't let themselves be manipulated by the governments. They have autonomous communities where they name their own authorities and they do communal work in their communities but for themselves, not for other communities. They are an example for us, the campesinos. They knew how to defend themselves and organize themselves. There are few who have known to resist and many who have let themselves be manipulated by the gifts that the government gives. As in the case of the candidates who offer many things when they are not seated but later pay no attention to the poor. Many candidates are coming down to the communities but they give you something in exchange for your signature and we need to think about this as the poor campesinos that we are. The same need that we have calls us to work in collective. Later, because we have reflected on the word of God to work united and collectively, we work together and we have time together, meetings and we form a collective. We sow together. We are few who are resisting. The majority stuck to that of

the government and we are few who reject it. Sometimes we lose enthusiasm and we say it'd be better to get something since only we are fighting. But we say "no", there are many people that are resisting and this same need made us organize. The Zapatistas haven't sold their dignity in spite of being poor. At best, they don't have more than we have: corn and beans. They don't even have shelter but they say that they are not going to go and they are working with what they have achieved and shared. The women and children are learning about what they are doing. We are closer to the city and we lose what is seen in the interior communities. We become urbanized and we lose many customs and we are losing our identity. The same system show us the city and you immerse yourself in it. There, in the communities as well as in the cities, communication is difficult. The Zapatistas keep many valuable things well organized. They don't wait for outsiders to come. They, themselves, their means of taking in a person, of doing a job and of making a decision, all are done collectively and we are used to decisions that come from outside, from the government and they say that they're going to see what the others say because you already voted. And with the Zapatistas this doesn't happen because they have an assembly in which children, women and men participate. In a confrontation after 1994, it was the women and children who defended their right to life. This is why they promote autonomy because it is their own decision and their own way of life. They don't want to depend on the government but rather they want to decide their way of life and we should learn from them. We want to make a collective of chickens because men want to work in agriculture and they can. What is important is to see the reality that we are living and the co-existence that feeds the community, for us this is very important."

Here ends Cecilia's narration. There is no doubt that a different world is possible.