AN INTRODUCTION TO
COMMUNITY
CONSULTATIONS
IN GUATEMALA
This is a brief intro to the practice of community consultations in Guatemala. Welcome!

So... what is a community consultation?

It's an organizing tool—"a space where an informed collective can make decisions regarding the administration of land, resources, and other aspects of community life."

Like a vote?

Partly! But there are other elements:

- Popular education before vote
- Debate and consensus-reaching process
- Indigenous ancestral practice
- Anniversary celebrations to commemorate community resistance

When are they used?

Indigenous & campesín communities use them when confronting resource extraction projects like gold, silver, & nickel mines & hydroelectric dams.
IN GUATEMALA...
the first community consultations were in 2005.

Over 2 MILLION people have participated in consultations since then. 4 of 22 departments in Guatemala have participated.

IN 1996, WHEN THE 36-YEAR INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT ENDED WITH THE SIGNING OF THE PEACE ACCORDS, THE GUATEMALAN GOVERNMENT BEGAN TO OPEN UP MORE AND MORE TO INVESTMENT FROM PRIVATE COMPANIES SEEKING TO PROFIT OFF THE COUNTRY’S MANY NATURAL RESOURCES.

AND IN 1997, THE CONGRESS PASSED A MINING LAW THAT
✓ lowered barriers to investment
✓ cut taxes for foreign companies
✓ granted them access to local water sources

... all in the name of "DEVELOPMENT."
To combat the wave of extractive projects, land defenders have used consultations as a strategy that both draws on ancestral decision-making processes and leverages the power of...

An international law that recognizes Indigenous people's inherent right to free, prior, informed consent in decisions that would affect their land, water, lives, and ways of life.

In some cases, consultations have been part of successful strategies to:

- Stop the construction of a project before it began (like the hydroelectric project in San Pablo, San Marcos) and
- Temporarily suspend a fully operating project (like the silver mine in San Rafael Las Flores, Santa Rosa.)

Lucas Jorge, Indigenous leader in Ixquisis, Huehuetenango:

"In my community, we already held a consultation but the hydroelectric company doesn't respect it. They have invaded our territory, occupied by the Army and the police. The presence of security forces opens old wounds from what we lived through during the internal Armed Conflict."
A bill currently before Guatemalan Congress seeks to co-opt consultations by regulating them as a state-controlled bureaucratic process in order to ensure a “more stable investment climate.”

“A new form of genocide is hidden in this bill; as Indigenous Peoples, the State will only recognize our existence when a committee decides when, where, and how it wants to consult us.”

— The Western People’s Council (CPO) + A Coalition of Authorities & Institutions of Maya Peoples in Western Guatemala

In spite of the challenges of co-optation and violations of the right to consultation, (Indigenous & Campesinxs) land stewards continue to employ this tool for direct democracy in their fight for justice & recognition.

A consultation in Sacapulas, Quiché in April 2011. Photo: NISGUA
SOURCES & FURTHER READING:

- "Community consultations: A model of resistance" - NISGUA (p. 2, 5, 11)
- "Infografía: consultas comunitarias en Guatemala" - CEPPAS (p. 5)
- "Guatemala court confirms suspension of Tahoe mining licenses" - Reuters, Sofi Mochu (p. 11)
- See ACODET’s community consultation petition on the “Take Action” page of NISGUA.org

D. Pandolfi
2019