

“Forgotten Voices: Building Resilient and Sustainable Communities”

**Marion Howard, Professor Emerita
Research, Actions, and Outputs 2023**

The GDS research project “Forgotten Voices: Building Resilient and Sustainable Communities”, led by Heller professor emerita Marion Howard, continues to gather, analyze, and apply research results on behalf of the Raizal people of Colombia’s San Andres Archipelago with project collaborators, the Raizal community and Suffolk Law School’s Clinic for Human Rights and Indigenous People.

In 2023, the team carried out participatory action research on site with the Raizal community in San Andres, Old Providence, and Santa Catalina Islands. Members of the US diaspora were also consulted. Qualitative methods rooted in participatory action research-- questionnaires, group and one-on-one interviews, and community consultations--were used to gather and analyze information on: i) climate change and hurricane impacts on indigenous fishers and recommendations for future actions of mitigation and adaptation, ii) the status of Hurricane Iota recovery efforts in Old Providence and Santa Catalina and ongoing impacts on human rights, and iii) Raizal community responses to Colombia’s recovery efforts.

Desk studies—review of data, literature, documents, laws and policies, legal cases, case studies, and other secondary sources—focused on several relevant topics including: i) recent UN actions to strengthen human rights for Afro-descendants, ii) the ongoing case of Nicaragua v Colombia over State ownership and control of the Raizal’s traditional marine territory and latest ICJ ruling (July 2023), iii) options and working examples of cross-border protected areas as tools to resolve territorial disputes; e.g., international peace parks, indigenous reserves, cross-boundary World Heritage Sites and Biosphere Reserves, and iv) Colombia’s national laws, policies, and regulatory framework directly related to the Raizal people as well as rulings of Colombia’s Constitutional Court on cases brought by or directed toward Raizal rights.

These research areas are ongoing and will continue in 2024 and longer but based on information gathered this year, some actions were completed. These include:

- GDS project representation at the 2023 UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and a side event, “Hurricanes, Rights & the Raizal: Addressing the Impact of Climate-Fueled Hurricanes Through Human Rights,” at the Ford Foundation Center for Social Justice (power-point attached).
- Review of the joint communique sent to Colombia from seven UN Special Rapporteurs¹ and of Colombia’s response. Both became public in January 2023. The UN communique is available at: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=27647> Colombia’s response and annexes are available at: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gId=37321> <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadFile?gId=37322>
- Subsequently, the UN contacted the research team with a request for clarification and local responses and to Colombia’s report. The project team shared this information with the Raizal community via social media, local radio, and in-person meetings and their responses were gathered and analyzed.

¹ Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living; Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change; Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights; Special Rapporteur on the right to food; Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; and Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons.

Additional information was collected firsthand by Raizal project researchers from on-site observation. An in-depth report based on the results was produced and sent to the UN in June 2023 (pdf attached).

- Analysis of the emerging UN global status and legal protections for people of Afro-descendant. The preliminary results of this research were presented at Suffolk Law School in October and a preliminary report was completed (available upon request). A next step will be to share this information with the Raizal, looking at the intersectionality of indigenous and Afro-descent status globally and nationally, with an eye to how best to build resilience and sustainability of the Raizal culture, environment, and livelihoods.
- Research on Colombia's legal definition of the status of the Raizal people, their territory, and cultural identity, including the National Constitution, laws, and Constitutional Court cases and compiling copies of all relevant rulings and laws. An extensive desk study is underway with many sources being consulted. A preliminary list of court cases has been produced with copies of rulings acquired that are being analyzed (available upon request). A next step will be to discover to what extent Colombia has complied with these rulings, and what impact these rulings have on local resilience and sustainability.