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SUII Knowledge Exchange Programmes

**(Un)Earthing New Pathways for a Justice Transition:
Cultivating Hope and Food on Contested Terrains in
Scotland, Amazon and the Arctic**

Final Report

December 2022



Programme title	(UN)EARTHING NEW PATHWAYS FOR A JUSTICE TRANSITION: CULTIVATING HOPE AND FOOD ON CONTESTED TERRAINS IN SCOTLAND, AMAZON AND THE ARCTIC
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Main objectives and context

This programme critically addressed the globalised trends towards further land concentration and food insecurity that resonate across the biomes of Scotland, the Arctic and Brazil's Amazon. This project shared both ancestral and new academic knowledge from these regions to understand the implications of the financialisation of land for both the carbon and green economy, the opportunities for and limits to smallholder and community access to land, and sustainable production of food. Amidst increasing concentration and pricing of land and ongoing conflict over land use, the project had the following objectives:

- i) to open dialogue across borders, across disciplines and between plural forms of knowledge towards new pathways for sustainable land use and food production within and beyond Scotland;
- ii) to build a community of practice and trust between stakeholders in Scotland, Amazon and Arctic based upon shared values, meaning and practices for land use that question and depart from incumbent western and market-oriented approaches to a just transition that are making questionable progress at best;
- iii) to agree a charter of shared principles for a justice transition towards equitable land use and food production;
- iv) to identify key levers at the level of local policy making and international human and environmental rights protection to further sustainable land use and food production.

The project matters in Scotland where arable land has declined by 12-15% since 1980 and now stands at only 10% of the country's land mass. This higher value land; however, still accounts for about 30% of the total output from farming in Scotland (Scottish Government Total Income from Farming, 2020). Larger properties have been most sought after and Scotland has seen a re-concentration of land ownership (75% of the farms sold in 2013 were bought by other landowners and large businesses) and a threefold increase in land prices since 2000. The speculative target of land, the appetite for lucrative forest monocultures and the opaque character of land ownership draws parallels with experiences in other parts of the globe where distinct human-nature relations have marked resistance to land grabs, monoculture advance and new energy projects. As is outlined below, the project shared learning of new policy instruments in Scotland including



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land reform, transparency and local empowerment, and the plural ways in which other communities negotiate tensions between land asset capture for speculation, monocultures and energy forms on one hand; and rural or forest based livelihoods on the other.

Main outcomes and impact

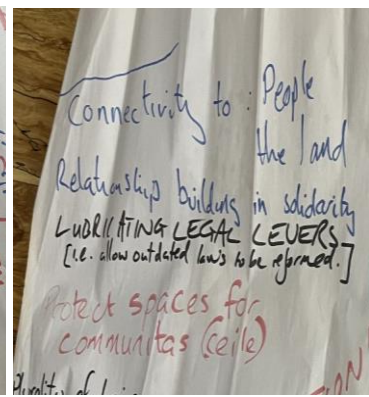
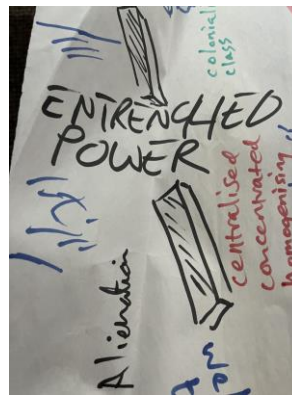
Establishing a community of practice and struggle

The methods undertaken set out to create ‘communitas’, as in the spirit of community, a feeling of social equality, solidarity and belonging together. The ‘practice’ reflects a commitment to put our shared learning into action; and ‘struggle’ makes explicit that issues of land and territory are contested sites in relation to food and energy, to justice and dignity.

One key success, therefore, was that the need for safe, social spaces to commune and discuss challenging issues was reflected in the dialogue that took place both in Skye and Strathclyde between 24 and 28 April 2022. It was largely thanks to the gallic welcome to the Isle of Skye by Iain MacKinnon and James Oliver, the field visits hosted by Catherine MacPhee and friends in Dunvegan, and the introduction to crofting by Donald Murdie that commonalities *were* found in shared respect for our different histories, and the significance of land not as asset but as source of memory, heritage and of injustice.

The project highlighted the dramatic contrast between contemporary struggles for land in the Amazon and Arctic linked to clearly defined communities and territories, and the more latent tensions with regards to land reform in Scotland and a discernible frustration with slow, institutional processes.

From the exchanges during the workshops, what emerged was the importance of recognising, valuing and illuminating contemporary community struggles. Here collective aspirations that are linked to the making of ‘home’, of land and territory, of plural cultures, lineage, genealogy and indigeneity run up against the concentration and homogenous use of land. The latter raises the second key theme of the exchanges, whereby institutions and the legislative processes continue to limit possibilities for broader, justice-based change that would favour historically marginalised peoples.





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The way in which power is entrenched, historically and today, remains a key challenge to be overcome if other pathways towards more equitable patterns of land distribution and food production are to be realised. Hence the conflicted role of the state and the courts is pertinent, whereby progressive land reforms and modest legal instruments to protect the less powerful are limited in their will or powers to oversee more dramatic redistribution.

The contributions from the field of law, and from a Scottish Land Commissioner, point to some possibilities for redress within Scotland via forthcoming human rights legislation, but concede that these remain limited in the absence of a more forthright commitment to affected communities. Indeed, the evidence from community participants pointed to financial rewards under the green economy continuing to accrue towards the powerful rather than historically dispossessed, with the current [£1 million grant to the MacLeod estate of Skye](#) for rewilding a case in point. Following presentations from Community Land Scotland, the partners also raised questions of the extent to which formal community sector also fell within the homogenising discourse and activity of land and ownership. 'Asset transfer' and the technical language of market-oriented, entrepreneurial solutions rested uncomfortably with the language and collective aspirations of participants. As the traditional fire was lit using ancient ways in the [Galgael Bealtanne](#) gathering, the flames of the Amazonian, territorial struggles against dispossession were contrasted with what Iain MacKinnon referred to as the cinders of past conflicts in Scotland. A detectable alienation from land and heritage, from the structures of land, of policy of law and of regularised community organisation are significant challenges for those remaking the future.

The avenues for doing so were investigated from above and below. In the former case, existing and incoming human rights legislation was considered during engagements in Skye and at Strathclyde University, with examples shared from Scotland and Arctic, and the notable contributions from Megan McInnes of the Scottish Land Commission, and Malcolm Combe and Daria Shapovalova. Alongside these, participants actively undertook deeper engagements with the subject of land, food, territory, belonging and community organising. This was captured by the visit to the Durinish stone in Dunvegan, Skye, that symbolised a remembrance and revival of community traditions and connections, and by the bread making workshop held by Col Gordon using native but undervalued grains that once sustained generations in islands such as Skye.



Weaving trust, understanding, respect and active solidarity is a process over time and across the different spaces of the participants' everyday lives. Within the timeframe of the project, it would be overreaching to



point to key ‘measurable deliverables’. The relationships, sincere dialogue and mutual confidence that were struck do not lend themselves to neat conclusions. What has been remarkable was the communication between Scotland and Amazon in the months following the activities. While the project led to further productive engagement between the indigenous and fishing peoples and the European Union and United Nations, the [community to community](#) cooperation proceeded. Following COP26, there was a general complaint among, for example, indigenous representatives that high-level engagements left little capacity for building meaningful relations. The support from Galgael to the reconstruction of indigenous homes attacked by illegal miners, and the consistent updates from the subsequent assemblies in Brazil offer inspiration behind the future activities emerging from this community of practice and struggle.



Key recommendations for end user / policy communities

The community of practice recognised that engagement from local government and decision makers despite several invitations, was limited. The channels of communication with Scottish Land Commission and Community Land Scotland have been extended and the project outcomes were presented to the recently formed Community Land Academic Network. As articulated above, the work considered high-level, legal engagement on one hand and deep, patient community-oriented engagement on the other. In relation to the former, recommendations that the human right, “to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as a human right that is important for the enjoyment of other human rights” can be linked to questions of land justice more concretely in Scotland. Community pressure, however, is central to this interpretation having effect on the ground. Secondly, advocates for land reform can enhance awareness among communities of the right to a fair hearing under article 6 ECHR, and the relevance of the Aarhus convention: where there is an environmental concern raised in relation to land owner activities, communities could anticipate support for their case being taken forward. It is important to state that the building of trust and relations that was achieved to a high degree here does not lend itself to a set of defined recommendations at this stage – to do so here would be an artifice. That said, in May 2022, the team co-ordinated a visit to the European Union Human Rights Representative to raise the issues discussed in this knowledge exchange. A formal submission was made to European Union and to United Nations that resulted in awards of £7,500 and £10,000 to fishing and indigenous human rights defenders, respectively.



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Planned follow-up activities

Galgael hosted a solstice event in July 2022 that broadened the engagement to a new audience in Glasgow and online participation, and a further event in November that included an update from the Amazonian partners. An application has been made to support a further exchange between communities in Isle of Skye with Brazilian visitors and in co-ordination with the Movimento Xingu Vivo, April 2023. The work was presented in Grenoble School of Management, 19 October 2022, and will feature in a conference presentation in the 2023 International Labour Process Conference. A British Academy Knowledge Frontiers proposal of £200,000 was submitted in October 2022 that investigates the trade links between Scotland, UK, Europe and extractive industries in Brazil's Amazon. An ESRC-FAPESP proposal is being prepared with Federal University of Para. A new PhD project supervised by Malcolm Combe and Brian Garvey that furthers the questions of land financialisation and food production began 1 December 2022. An open hearing with UN Special Rapporteurs for Human Rights, Environment and Toxins is being prepared following engagement with Geneva in October 2022. The follow-up solidarity activities with Amazonian partners has resulted in reconstruction of indigenous houses destroyed by [illegal miners](#).

Annexes:

- Daria Shapovalova (University of Aberdeen): 'Land rights and cultural survival: what are the governments' obligations? Focus on the Arctic'
- Malcolm Combe (University of Strathclyde): 'Unearthing new perspectives on and from Scottish land reform'