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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Trade union participation of Afro-descendant women in Chocó, Colombia: a socio-legal and intersectional analysis

Participação sindical de mulheres afrodescendentes no Chocó, Colômbia: uma análise sociojurídica e interseccional

Yolanda Moreno Mena[1]
David Mendieta[1]
Natalia Andrea Salinas Arango[2]
[1]Universidad de Medellín, Medellín, Colombia.
[2]Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Medellín, Colombia.

Abstract: This study analyzes the dynamics of social exclusion affecting the participation of Afro-descendant women in trade union organizations in Chocó, Colombia, between 2000 and 2025. Adopting a socio-legal, intersectional, and territorial perspective, the study seeks to understand the barriers that limit their access to representative spaces and the strategies that strengthen their collective action. A qualitative case-study methodology was employed, combining documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews, and surveys conducted with 30 participants. The findings reveal persistent organizational racism, sexism within trade unions, precarious working conditions, territorial inequalities, and training gaps, all of which constrain women's leadership and the continuity of organizational processes. At the same time, the study identifies practices of resistance, support networks, self-directed learning, and the development of autonomous agendas that strengthen women's political influence across different trade union settings. The study concludes that achieving more equitable trade union participation for Afro-descendant women requires institutional and organizational responses grounded in differential, territorial, and intersectional approaches aimed at reducing existing inequalities.

Keywords: Structural discrimination. Freedom of association. Women's leadership. Territorial exclusion.

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Resumo: Este estudo analisa as dinâmicas de exclusão social que afetam a participação de mulheres afrodescendentes em organizações sindicais no Chocó, Colômbia, entre 2000 e 2025. Adotando uma perspectiva sociojurídica, interseccional e territorial, o estudo busca compreender as barreiras que limitam seu acesso a espaços de representação e as estratégias que fortalecem sua ação coletiva. Empregou-se uma metodologia qualitativa de estudo de caso, combinando análise documental, entrevistas semiestruturadas e questionários aplicados a 30 participantes. Os resultados revelam a persistência do racismo organizacional, do sexismo no interior dos sindicatos, de condições de trabalho precárias, de desigualdades territoriais e de lacunas de formação, fatores que restringem a liderança das mulheres e a continuidade dos processos organizativos. Ao mesmo tempo, o estudo identifica práticas de resistência, redes de apoio, aprendizagem autônoma e o desenvolvimento de agendas próprias que fortalecem a influência política das mulheres em diferentes contextos sindicais. Conclui-se que alcançar uma participação sindical mais equitativa para as mulheres afrodescendentes exige respostas institucionais e organizacionais fundamentadas em enfoques diferenciais, territoriais e interseccionais, voltadas à redução das desigualdades existentes.

Palavras-chave: Discriminação estrutural. Liberdade sindical. Liderança das mulheres. Exclusão territorial.

1 INTRODUCTION

The department of Chocó, located in Colombia's Pacific region, has historically been affected by structural inequalities that have constrained its social, economic, and institutional development. These inequalities are embedded in a broader context of profound territorial and socioeconomic disparities. In Colombia's Pacific region, particularly in Chocó, official indicators reveal significant levels of multidimensional deprivation in areas including education, health, employment, and housing (National Administrative Department of Statistics [DANE], 2021). These conditions have also shaped the forms of trade union organization found throughout the department.

Accordingly, any analysis of trade union participation in Chocó must recognize that organizational processes take place in contexts of accumulated inequality, where the formal recognition of rights coexists with material constraints on their effective exercise.

Geographically, the department is characterized by a highly dispersed population, reliance on river transport, and limited road infrastructure, all of which directly affect access to employment, the circulation of information, and political participation. Territory is therefore not merely a geographical space but a structural condition that shapes opportunities for organization and access to collective decision-making (National Center for Historical Memory, 2016). These conditions render an analysis of trade unionism in Chocó based on uniform or strictly urban parameters insufficient, as trade union activity takes place in contexts marked by material deprivation, territorial dispersion, and limited opportunities for political and trade union training (Walsh, 2009; Quijano, 2000).

Territorial inequality is compounded by historical processes of racialization, gender subordination, and social precarity, which shape concrete experiences of exclusion while also giving rise to strategies of political participation and organization. From an intersectional perspective, these barriers do not operate independently but rather as intertwined systems of domination that produce context-specific inequalities in trade union participation and leadership (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000).

In the labor sphere, trade unionism in Chocó operates in settings characterized by informal employment, contractual instability, and organizational weakness, which undermine the sustainability of collective processes and increase the risk of workplace retaliation (International Labour Organization, 2019). These conditions are compounded by the disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic and care work borne by women, which limits their available time, territorial mobility, and political participation (Hooks, 2000). Furthermore, the concentration of trade union training in municipal centers or outside the department reproduces internal inequalities in access to organizational and legal resources.

The literature has documented territorial inequalities in Chocó, precarious working conditions in peripheral regions, and the various

forms of exclusion affecting Afro-descendant women. From a situated intersectional perspective, Viveros Vigoya (2016) emphasizes the need to understand social relations by examining how gender, race, and class intersect within specific historical configurations. This perspective is particularly relevant to the analysis of Afro-descendant women's experiences in specific territorial contexts. However, the literature review conducted for this study reveals that the specific intersection of territory, ethno-racial identity, gender, and the trade union participation of Afro-descendant women in Chocó between 2000 and 2025 remains insufficiently explored. This gap is significant because it limits a comprehensive understanding of both the structural barriers and the forms of agency that shape their experiences of trade union participation and organization.

Against this background, the study addressed the following research question: What social, cultural, and labor-related conditions influence the participation of Afro-descendant women in trade union structures in Chocó between 2000 and 2025? The issue examined forms part of the contemporary debate on social exclusion under the rule of law, as it highlights the gap between the formal recognition of rights and the material conditions required for their effective exercise. The trade union participation of Afro-descendant women in Chocó therefore provides a basis for examining how dynamics of structural exclusion restrict access to justice, collective representation, and processes of social inclusion in territorially marginalized contexts.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to analyze the social, cultural, and labor-related conditions that influence the trade union participation of Afro-descendant women in Chocó from a socio-legal, intersectional, and territorial perspective, with a view to understanding the structural barriers and forms of agency that shape their participation in peripheral territorial contexts.

Methodologically, the research adopted a qualitative case-study approach to examine the social, cultural, and labor-related conditions that influence the trade union participation of Afro-descendant women

in territorially marginalized contexts. Data were obtained through documentary analysis of international legal instruments, national legislation, relevant case law, and specialized literature on freedom of association, collective bargaining, and women's rights. The socio-legal perspective was integrated with intersectional and territorial approaches to examine the relationship between the legal provisions recognizing the rights to participation and freedom of association and the material conditions under which Afro-descendant women in Chocó exercise these rights.

The findings show that the trade union participation of Afro-descendant women in Chocó is shaped by the convergence of territorial, labor, economic, organizational, and care-related barriers, together with practices of racism and sexism that restrict their access to decision-making spaces, leadership positions, and sustained organizational participation. Nevertheless, significant forms of agency and collective resistance were also identified, including self-directed learning, support networks, community leadership, and organizational strategies aimed at expanding their representation and influence. The study therefore concludes that the formal guarantee of freedom of association is insufficient where structural conditions continue to restrict its effective exercise. Strengthening the participation of Afro-descendant women consequently requires institutional and organizational transformations grounded in intersectional and territorial approaches.

2 SOCIAL EXCLUSION, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

This theoretical framework brings together the analytical categories needed to understand the trade union participation of Afro-descendant women in Chocó from a socio-legal, intersectional, and territorial perspective. The analysis integrates insights from collective labor law on freedom of association with intersectionality, Black

feminism, feminist legal theory, and decolonial thought, recognizing that territory is not merely a geographical space but a structural condition that shapes opportunities for organization, access to rights, and participation in decision-making processes.

Freedom of association constitutes a central analytical category in this study because of its role in the collective protection of labor rights. Ermida Uriarte (2012) argues that this right extends beyond workers' ability to form and join organizations, as it also enables the exercise of other collective labor rights, including collective bargaining and the right to strike. Villavicencio (2001), in turn, highlights its compensatory and conflict-resolution functions, insofar as it contributes to balancing labor relations, strengthening collective regulation, and providing mechanisms for resolving labor disputes. In this regard, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019) recognizes freedom of association and collective bargaining as fundamental rights for the protection of decent work. However, legal recognition alone does not guarantee their effective exercise, particularly in contexts characterized by precarious working conditions, organizational fragmentation, and weak institutional protection (Ermida Uriarte, 2012; Salvador Florian, 2024).

This legal dimension alone is insufficient to explain the barriers faced by Afro-descendant women within trade union structures. Accordingly, the study incorporates Crenshaw's (1989) intersectional perspective, according to which experiences of discrimination must be understood through the interaction of different axes of subordination, including gender, race, and socioeconomic status. From the perspective of Black feminism, Collins (2000, 2015) further develops this approach by showing that Black women's experiences are shaped by interconnected systems of power that influence their political recognition and opportunities for participation and leadership.

From the perspective of feminist legal theory, Fineman and Mykitiuk (1994) provide a framework for understanding these inequalities not as exclusively individual circumstances but as phenomena embedded

in institutions, law, and social relations. This perspective makes it possible to examine how labor and trade union rules framed in general terms of equality can coexist with practices and structures that produce differential effects on the basis of gender and ethno-racial identity.

The analysis also incorporates a decolonial approach, which relates contemporary inequalities to historical structures of power. Lugones (2008) and Walsh (2009) show how hierarchies of gender, race, territory, and knowledge associated with coloniality continue to shape social relations. Consequently, the limited presence of Afro-descendant women in trade union decision-making spaces can be examined in connection with historical processes of racialization, subordination, and territorial marginalization. This perspective is particularly relevant in Colombia's Pacific region, where armed conflict and territorial disputes have affected the social and organizational processes of Afro-descendant communities (National Center for Historical Memory [CNMH], 2015).

The territorial dimension complements this perspective. Following Viveros Vigoya (2016), intersectionality requires a situated understanding of power relations, whereby gender, race, and class are examined within the specific historical and territorial configurations in which they operate. In Chocó, territorial marginalization, precarious working conditions, limited institutional presence, and mobility constraints affect the effective possibilities for trade union organization and participation. Territory thus interacts with other dimensions of inequality and contributes to shaping differentiated experiences of access to spaces of representation and decision-making.

Bringing these perspectives together makes it possible to analyze the trade union participation of Afro-descendant women in Chocó beyond the formal recognition of rights. Accordingly, the study adopts freedom of association, intersectionality, organizational racism, sexism within trade unions, precarious working conditions, territorial inequality, and Afro-descendant women's leadership as analytical categories. These categories are understood as interrelated dimensions that enable

the examination of both the barriers that constrain the effective exercise of collective rights and the forms of agency developed to sustain and strengthen trade union participation.

3 RESEARCH PROCESS AND PARTICIPANTS' VOICES (METHODOLOGY)

The study adopted a qualitative case-study approach aimed at understanding the social, cultural, labor-related, and territorial conditions that influence the trade union participation of Afro-descendant women in Chocó. This design enabled an examination of the participants' experiences, perceptions, and organizational practices within their specific contexts, integrating these dimensions into the socio-legal and intersectional analysis guiding the study (Denzin; Lincoln, 2018; Creswell; Poth, 2018).

The study combined documentary analysis with fieldwork. The documentary component involved a review of international legal instruments, national legislation, case law, and specialized literature on freedom of association, collective bargaining, women's rights, equality, and non-discrimination. These sources provided the legal and conceptual framework for contrasting the formal recognition of rights with the conditions identified through the participants' experiences.

Empirical data were collected through semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and a descriptive survey. These methods were used to examine organizational trajectories, experiences of participation, barriers to access and continued involvement, discriminatory practices, training opportunities, and leadership and collective-action strategies. Combining these sources enabled the comparison of individual and collective experiences and the identification of common patterns and territorial specificities.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on thematic relevance, organizational experience, and territorial

representativeness (Hernández Sampieri; Fernández Collado; Baptista Lucio, 2014; Creswell; Poth, 2018). The study included 30 Afro-descendant women, comprising trade union leaders and women involved in territorial organizational processes from urban, rural, and riverside areas of the department. This diversity made it possible to incorporate experiences shaped by different territorial and organizational conditions.

The data were analyzed through thematic coding, combining deductive categories derived from the theoretical framework with inductive categories emerging from the fieldwork. The resulting categories included organizational racism, sexism within trade unions, precarious working conditions, training gaps, territoriality, and collective agency (Braun; Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2014). Intersectionality served as a cross-cutting analytical framework for interpreting the interplay of gender, race, class, and territory in the participants' trade union experiences.

To enhance the rigor of the study, source triangulation was employed, together with the systematic comparison of empirical evidence, the legal framework, and specialized literature, as well as a systematic review of the analytical categories (Denzin, 2012; Creswell; Poth, 2018). Oral sources were identified using codes: E for individual interviews and GF for focus-group contributions, followed by numbers to distinguish participants and testimonies.

With regard to ethical considerations, the study was guided by the principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and protection of participants' identities. Given the potential risks of stigmatization or organizational retaliation, personally identifying information was omitted, and the coding system described above was used for oral sources.

4 RESULTS

To contextualize the findings, the socio-territorial conditions and organizational trajectories of the 30 participants were

characterized. The women came from different municipalities and from urban, rural, and riverside areas of Chocó and varied in age, educational attainment, employment status, care responsibilities, and forms of organizational involvement. This heterogeneity makes it possible to analyze trade union participation as a situated experience shaped by both individual trajectories and labor-related, territorial, and gender-related factors.

Table 1 – Socio-territorial Characteristics and Organizational Trajectories of the Participants

Dimension	Observed Categories	Empirical Finding	Analytical Interpretation
Age	18–25 / 26–35 / 36–45 / 46–55 / 56+	Predominance of women between 26 and 55 years of age, with some participants over 56.	Life trajectories contribute to organizational experience, although they may coexist with prolonged periods of precariousness and care responsibilities.
Area of residence	Different municipalities / urban, rural, riverside, and mixed areas	Territorial diversity, with a significant presence of rural and riverside areas.	Territory shapes mobility, training, and access to decision-making spaces.
Educational level	Primary education through postgraduate studies	Wide variation in educational attainment.	Education influences recognition and access to formal leadership, without determining leadership capacity on its own.
Employment status	Formal employment / informal employment / community-based work / unemployment	High prevalence of informal employment and community work.	Precarious working conditions affect stability and availability for organizational participation.
Care responsibilities	Yes / No	Most participants report family responsibilities.	The dual burden of paid/unpaid work and care responsibilities limits time, mobility, and continuity of participation.

Dimension	Observed Categories	Empirical Finding	Analytical Interpretation
Membership and type of organization	Trade union / federation / association / collective; current, previous, or informal participation	Participation ranges from formal trade unionism to community organizations, with a significant presence of local associations and collectives.	Collective action takes flexible and territorially situated forms in response to institutional limitations.
Organizational trajectory	Less than 1 year to more than 12 years	Diverse trajectories, in some cases discontinuous.	Continued participation depends on material conditions, available time, and support networks.
Motivations for participation	Defense of rights / learning / community	Defense of rights, organizational learning, and community commitment predominate.	Participation constitutes a strategy for defending labor rights, resistance, and collective action.
Leadership and access to decision-making positions	Formal / informal / no position; leadership perceived as possible or difficult	Limited representation in leadership positions	A tension is evident between the capacity for agency and structures that restrict recognition and access to formal power.

Note. Prepared by the author based on information obtained during fieldwork (2026).

The findings show that the trade union participation of Afro-descendant women in Chocó is closely linked to their socio-territorial conditions. Participants' residence in urban, rural, and riverside areas indicates that territory affects mobility and access to training and decision-making spaces, which are frequently concentrated in urban centers. These constraints are compounded by informal employment, community-based work, and care responsibilities, which reduce the time and resources available to sustain continued organizational participation. Differences in educational attainment, in

turn, affect opportunities for recognition and access to certain formal organizational spaces, although they do not, in themselves, determine participants' leadership capacity.

The participants' organizational trajectories further show that participation extends beyond formal trade union membership. Their experiences encompass trade unions, federations, associations, collectives, and community organizations, giving rise to forms of collective action adapted to the department's territorial and institutional conditions. Continued involvement in these organizations follows diverse and, in some cases, discontinuous trajectories shaped by employment stability, care responsibilities, mobility resources, and the availability of support networks. The main motivations for participation include the defense of rights, organizational learning, and community commitment. Trade union participation therefore extends beyond labor representation and is also associated with strategies of resistance and the pursuit of social justice.

In this regard, participants' limited presence in formal leadership positions contrasts with the leadership they exercise at the grassroots and community levels. Several participants perform mobilization, support, rights-advocacy, and organizational coordination functions without these practices necessarily translating into institutional recognition or access to formal decision-making positions. This tension between agency and structure is central to the interpretation of the subsequent findings: women develop leadership capacities and strategies, yet their participation takes place within labor-related, territorial, racial, and gendered conditions that differentially constrain the effective exercise of freedom of association.

Table 2 – Organizational Racism and Trade Union Sexism

Dimension	Empirical Indicator	Finding	Legal Interpretation
Trade union sexism	Minimization of ideas	Normalization of unequal treatment.	Indirect structural discrimination.
Organizational racism	Delegitimization of Afro-descendant leadership	Low explicit self-identification, but differential effects.	Institutional racism with differentiated effects.
Manifestations	Interruptions, support roles	Sexual/racial division of labor.	Symbolic reproduction of subordination.
Differential demands	More is demanded of Afro-descendant women	Unequal merit standards.	Racialized glass ceiling.
Effect	Self-censorship and withdrawal	Impact on continued organizational participation.	Substantive limitation on equal opportunities

Note. Prepared by the author based on information obtained during fieldwork (2026).

A third relevant category concerns gaps in trade union training and access to information, particularly in rural, riverside, and peripheral areas. Participants indicated that training programs, instruction on legal and regulatory developments, and leadership training are largely concentrated in urban centers, restricting opportunities for organizational capacity-building in remote communities. This situation limits their capacity for political influence and collective bargaining and deepens pre-existing territorial inequalities.

The barriers affecting the trade union participation of Afro-descendant women do not operate in isolation. Rather, they accumulate and reinforce one another throughout these women's trajectories, creating intersectional barriers that restrict effective participation. At the economic level, the lack of resources for transportation means that attending meetings, assemblies, or training programs is perceived as an additional cost that is difficult to afford. As one participant stated: There's no money for transportation, so you end up not going (GF-1-P3, personal communication, 2026).

In the territorial dimension, river distances, poor road conditions, and lengthy journeys turn territory into a structural mechanism of

exclusion. This situation is summarized in a statement repeated by the participants: Trade union training does not reach the corregimientos [rural administrative districts]. (GF1-P2, personal communication, 2026), highlighting the concentration of training opportunities in urban areas.

In the area of care responsibilities, having children and the absence of support networks restrict the time available for participation, showing the effect of the sexual division of labor on political life. As one participant pointed out: A woman cannot attend meetings because she has to leave her children (E1, personal communication, 2026). Informational barriers were also recorded, such as late meeting announcements or unequal access to information, which ultimately reproduce internal hierarchies. Added to this is an organizational barrier associated with the limited openness of decision-making spaces, where grassroots members are not always included in decisions. Taken together, the accumulation of economic, territorial, gender, and racial factors confirms that intersectionality is a key tool for understanding the substantive inequality these women face in their trade union participation.

Table 3 – Cumulative Intersectional Barriers

Dimension	Concrete Manifestation	Empirical Finding	Intersectional Interpretation
Economic	Lack of resources for transportation	Participation seen as an additional cost.	Economic precarity constrains collective action.
Territorial	River distances and poor road conditions	Hours of travel and risk.	Territory operates as a structural mechanism of exclusion.
Care	Children and absence of support networks	Structural time constraints.	The sexual division of labor affects political participation.
Informational	Late announcements	Indirect exclusion from training.	Unequal access to information reproduces internal hierarchies.
Organizational	Limited openness in decision-making	Grassroots members not included in decisions.	Internal structural problem within trade unionism.
Accumulation	Economy + territory + gender + race	Simultaneous barriers.	Intersectionality helps explain cumulative substantive inequality.

Note. Prepared by the author based on triangulation (2026).

The findings reveal structural conditions of labor and economic precarity that affect the continuity of Afro-descendant women's trade union participation. Contractual instability, low incomes, informal employment, and the lack of social protections compel many participants to prioritize their families' subsistence needs over organizational activities. These conditions of precarity undermine sustained leadership processes and reduce participants' ability to assume long-term trade union responsibilities.

These barriers are compounded by shortcomings in labor-related and trade union training, as well as difficulties in accessing information and decision-making spaces, particularly in remote, riverside, and peripheral areas. Transportation costs and limited institutional presence hinder participation in assemblies, training activities, and decision-making processes, thereby deepening existing territorial inequalities and limiting organizational capacity-building in remote communities.

In several cases, participants responded to this lack of institutional support through self-directed training. As one interviewee stated: "I trained myself because no one trained me" (E1, personal communication, 2026). This statement illustrates how, in the absence of adequate organizational and institutional support, women develop individual and collective strategies to sustain their participation, strengthen their leadership capacities, and pursue better conditions of representation within trade union spaces.

4.1 Collective Agency, Deliberation, and Organizational Transformation

Alongside these forms of exclusion, the findings also reveal significant expressions of political agency and collective resistance. Afro-descendant women develop strategies aimed at strengthening solidarity networks, creating autonomous training spaces, promoting community leadership, and influencing internal trade union reforms.

These practices demonstrate an active appropriation of trade unionism as a tool for social transformation and the defense of rights.

Participants not only identify barriers but also put forward concrete proposals aimed at transforming trade union structures and expanding effective participation. One of the most frequently expressed demands is the establishment of trade union schools within the territory, understood as a means of fostering political empowerment and strengthening leadership. As participants in the focus group stated: "We want trade union schools in our territory" (GF1, personal communication, 2026). Participants also emphasized the need for material support, particularly for transportation, food, and care responsibilities, since effective participation depends on minimum logistical support. As one participant stated directly: "If they do not provide transportation support, we will not go" (GF1-P1, personal communication, 2026).

Another central proposal concerns strengthening women's networks, which participants value as spaces for mutual support, sustained organizational participation, and political solidarity. As one interviewee put it: "It is among women that we strengthen one another" (E3, personal communication, 2026). Participants also emphasized the need to adopt internal anti-discrimination protocols or procedures in order to establish formal mechanisms of protection against exclusionary practices. As another participant stated: "There must be rules when discrimination occurs" (E2, personal communication, 2026).

Participants also support affirmative action measures, such as quotas or parity criteria, to address historical inequalities in representation. Finally, they emphasize the importance of legal advice and legal training, considering legal knowledge essential to strengthening the defense of rights and the sustainability of organizational processes. In some cases, participants also identified the need to promote forms of trade union organization composed of or led by Afro-descendant women as an alternative means of strengthening their representation and capacity for influence. These proposals demonstrate that participants

do not merely identify obstacles; they also formulate concrete strategies for democratizing trade union structures, sustaining organizational participation, and expanding their capacity for influence within the territory.

Table 4 – Proposals Put Forward by Participants

Proposal	Components	Empirical Finding	Transformative Interpretation
Territory-Based Training	Local Trade Union Schools	Repeated demand in interviews and focus group.	Training as a condition for political empowerment.
Material support	Transportation, food, and care support	Participation depends on concrete support.	Substantive equality requires material guarantees.
Women's networks	Mutual support	Networks strengthen continued participation.	Solidarity as a political strategy.

Note. Prepared by the author (2026).

5 DISCUSSION

The findings show that the trade union participation of Afro-descendant women in Chocó is shaped by the interaction of social, cultural, labor-related, and territorial factors that have cumulative effects on their organizational trajectories, leadership opportunities, and continued participation in trade union organizations. This finding supports an intersectional and situated understanding of the phenomenon: gender, ethno-racial identity, economic precarity, and territory do not operate as independent dimensions but rather as interrelated dimensions of inequality embedded in specific historical contexts (Crenshaw, 1989; Viveros Vigoya, 2016). In Chocó, this interaction is particularly significant given mobility constraints, limited institutional presence, and the unequal territorial distribution of resources and opportunities.

One of the main socio-legal implications of the study lies in the gap between the formal recognition of freedom of association and the

material conditions required for its effective exercise. Although this right is legally recognized, the findings show that precarious working conditions, transportation costs, care responsibilities, and the concentration of training opportunities in urban centers restrict effective opportunities for participation. In this regard, the findings are consistent with Ermida Uriarte (2012), who argues that the effectiveness of freedom of association requires organizational capacity, material resources, and institutional conditions that enable its effective exercise. They also complement the position of the International Labour Organization (2019) by demonstrating that, in peripheral territories, the fragility of collective action stems not only from explicit anti-union practices but also from structural conditions that make sustained participation difficult.

The identified practices of organizational racism and sexism within trade unions further demonstrate that these barriers do not arise exclusively from conditions external to the organizations. The minimization of women's ideas, their assignment to secondary roles, the higher standards imposed on them for access to leadership positions, and their underrepresentation in decision-making bodies reveal internal mechanisms that constrain the recognition of their leadership. These findings are consistent with Collins (2000), insofar as they show how the interaction of racism and patriarchy produces specific forms of subordination affecting Black women, and with Fineman and Mykitiuk (1994), insofar as these inequalities are not exclusively individual experiences but are linked to institutional structures and power relations. From a decolonial perspective, their persistence can also be understood in relation to historical processes of racialization, territorial subordination, and institutional marginalization (Lugones, 2008; Walsh, 2009).

Labor precarity and organizational fragmentation further deepen these constraints. Informal employment, contractual instability, and economic dependence reduce participants' autonomy and the resources available to sustain collective processes, while territorial conditions hinder trade union training and coordination. These findings

complement Salvador Florian's (2024) analysis of contemporary challenges to collective bargaining in Latin America by showing that, in Chocó, the capacity of trade unions to exert influence is further constrained by territorial inequalities and limited opportunities for institutional dialogue.

Nevertheless, the findings also demonstrate that participants do not occupy a merely passive position in relation to these structures. Self-directed training, solidarity networks, community leadership, and the development of self-defined agendas constitute forms of agency through which women sustain collective action and contest access to spaces of representation. Trade union participation thus emerges as a process characterized by tensions between structural constraints and agency, in which women's organizational practices broaden the traditional scope of trade unionism by linking labor-related demands with territorial, community, gender, and anti-racist demands.

Taken together, the study contributes a socio-legal understanding of freedom of association that extends beyond its formal legal recognition by situating its effectiveness within the concrete conditions that enable its exercise. Bringing together intersectionality and territory demonstrates that the exclusion affecting Afro-descendant women's trade union participation in Chocó cannot be explained solely by gender, ethno-racial identity, or labor precarity considered in isolation, but rather by their interaction with territorial conditions that amplify existing inequalities. From this perspective, territory constitutes a necessary analytical dimension for understanding both the structural constraints and the forms of agency that shape trade union participation in historically marginalized contexts.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that the social, cultural, and labor-related conditions influencing the trade union participation of Afro-descendant

women in Chocó operate in an interrelated manner. Organizational racism, sexism within trade unions, labor precarity, care responsibilities, training gaps, and territorial inequalities overlap and shape women's access to, continued participation in, and leadership within trade union organizations. Consequently, the formal recognition of the rights to equality and freedom of association does not, in itself, guarantee the material conditions necessary for their effective exercise.

The study's main contribution lies in demonstrating, from a socio-legal, intersectional, and territorial perspective, that the effectiveness of freedom of association must be analyzed not only in terms of its formal legal recognition but also in relation to the material and structural conditions that enable its exercise. In the context of Chocó, territory is not merely the setting in which inequalities occur; rather, it constitutes a dimension that interacts with gender, ethno-racial identity, and employment status, either deepening or shaping Afro-descendant women's opportunities for participation and representation.

Despite these constraints, participants develop forms of agency through self-directed training, support networks, community leadership, and the development of self-defined agendas. These practices demonstrate that women not only confront exclusionary structures but also develop organizational capacities to contest access to spaces of power and expand forms of collective action.

Based on these findings, trade union training grounded in intersectional and territorial approaches should be strengthened, access to organizational spaces for women from rural and riverside areas should be facilitated, and internal mechanisms for democratization, parity, and the prevention of discrimination should be promoted. Labor and trade union policies should also take into account the mobility constraints, care responsibilities, and economic precarity that materially restrict participation, so that the protection of freedom of association extends beyond its formal recognition toward effective guarantees. These recommendations synthesize the measures developed throughout the

study concerning protection, training, institutional presence, democratization, and anti-discrimination protocols.

Finally, the findings should be interpreted in light of the qualitative and situated scope of the study and are therefore not intended to be statistically generalized to all Afro-descendant women or all trade union organizations in Chocó. Future research could broaden the territorial and organizational diversity of participants, develop comparative studies with other peripheral territories, and incorporate participatory methodologies to further examine the relationship between legal and regulatory transformations, territorial conditions, and the effective exercise of collective rights.

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YOLANDA MORENO MENA

Universidad de Medellín. Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics and Physics; Master's Degree in Conflict and Peace. PhD Candidate in Law, Universidad de Medellín. Classroom teacher. Research line: Afro-descendant women and civic participation. Quibdó, Colombia.

Professional address: Universidad de Medellín, Carrera 87 No. 30-65, Los Alpes, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia.

Orcid id: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-5731-5109

E-mail: yolanda54257@gmail.com

DAVID MENDIETA

Universidad de Medellín. Attorney, Specialist in Constitutional Law, and Master's Degree in Law from the Universidad de Antioquia. Diploma of Advanced Studies (DEA) and PhD in Constitutional Law from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Full-time Professor at the Universidad de Medellín. Member of the Legal Research Group at the Faculty of Law, Universidad de Medellín (A2 MinCiencias category). Research lines: 1) Democracy and the Rule of Law, and 2) Citizenship and Human Rights. Medellín, Colombia. Editor of the journal Opinión Jurídica.

Professional address: Universidad de Medellín, Carrera 87 No. 30-65, Los Alpes, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia.

Orcid id: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6944-6815

E-mail: dmendieta@udemedellin.edu.co

NATALIA ANDREA SALINAS ARANGO

Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana. Social Worker, Master's Degree in History, and PhD in Philosophy. Full-time Professor at the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana. Coordinator of the Territory, Socio-Cultural Dynamics, and Families Research Group (A1 MinCiencias category). Research lines: 1) Cultural, Political, and Gender Studies; 2) Citizenship, Violence, Peace, and Political Culture for Democracy. Medellín, Colombia.

Professional address: Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, Circular 1ª No. 70-01, Laureles, Medellín, Antioquia, Colombia.

Orcid id: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1369-514X

E-mail: natalia.salinas@upb.edu.co

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Data Availability

The authors declare that all data used in the research are available in a public repository, in accordance with open science practices. Revista Sequência encourages the sharing of research data that ensure the transparency, reproducibility and verification of published results, while respecting applicable ethical principles. Accordingly, disclosure of information that would allow the identification of research subjects or compromise their privacy is not required. Data sharing should therefore prioritise scientific integrity and the protection of sensitive data, ensuring that results are made public without undue exposure of participants.



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