COLLECTIVE PROTECTION OF INDIGENOUS, AFRO-DESCENDANT, LAND, TERRITORY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS IN LATIN AMERICA

This is the result of the participatory diagnosis carried out by **Peace Brigades International** and the **ALLIED Network** (Alliance for Land, Indigenous and Environmental Defenders).

Fanzine *May 2025*

ACTORS INVOLVED

pbi

Peace Brigades International (PBI)

Non-Governmental Organization
Provides international accompaniment to defenders and communities at risk.

ALLIANCE FOR LAND, INDIGENOUS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS

It is a member of the ALLIED Network

Global civil society network

Encourages multi-stakeholder action for systemic change: Recognition, Support, Protection of Indigenous, Land, and Environmental Defenders (ILED).

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Consolidate the knowledge of both PBI and the ALLIED Network on Collective Protection.

Identify concrete opportunities that will allow ILED individuals located in the Latin American region to strengthen their strategies in this area.

HOW?

Carrying out a participatory diagnosis in Latin America.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?

To understand the context faced by ILED people
+ the responses developed in response to it.

WHERE?

In-depth research in Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, and the Amazon tri-border region linking Peru, Brazil, and Colombia. Conducting 3 case studies in Colombia, Brazil, and Ecuador.

FINAL REPORT

PRESENTS

- A context analysis and the relevant legal framework when dealing with Collective Protection
- A Conceptual Framework of Collective Protection
- A mapping of existing strategies in the territories
- The final findings - contextual, in relation to the obstacles, capabilities, and strategies developed
- Recommendations to ALLIED and donors.

THEY WERE MADE

METHODOLOGY

aimed at strengthening the Collective Protection capacities of ILED people facing risk on the front line in the territories.

INCLUDES 4 MODULES

MODULE 1
Introduction to collective protection and context analysis.

MODULE 3
Introduction to the legal framework for the defense of human rights, indigenous rights, land and environmental rights, and the construction of advocacy strategies.

MODULE 2
Collective risk analysis and exchange of Collective Protection strategies between territories.

MODULE 4
Construction of emergency protective strategies.

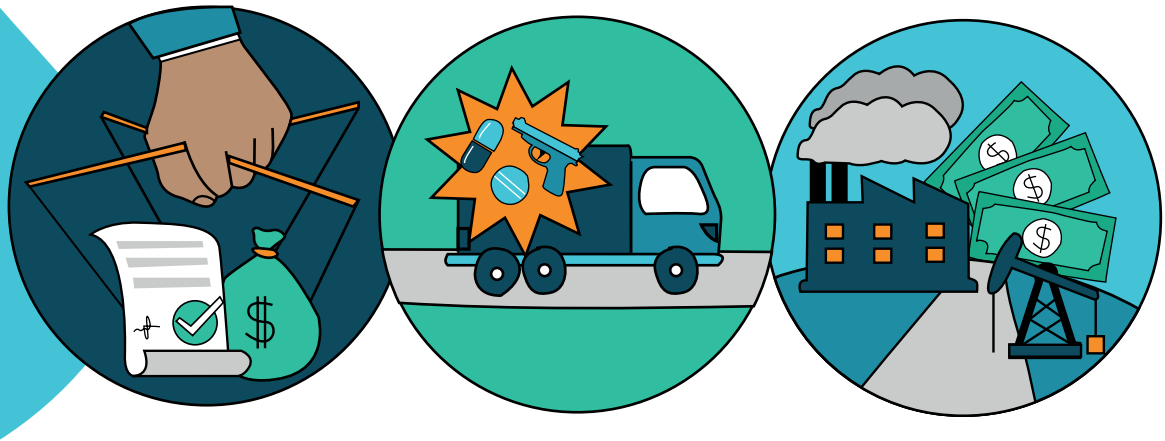
YOU CAN CONSULT THIS METHODOLOGY IN THE COMPLETE FINAL REPORT (AVAILABLE IN SPANISH):
https://peacebrigades.org/en/informe-sobre-protecci%C3%B3n-colectiva-y-acompa%C3%B1amiento-territorial-personas-defensoras-ind%C3%ADgenas-de-la

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE FINAL REPORT

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Macrocriminal networks are currently the main aggressors in the region.

The association of political, economic, and criminal power to establish criminal governance to generate profits has been observed in all the territories analyzed.
To this end, these actors diversify and combine their illegal activities and trafficking.



To enter and then maintain and establish their power in a territory, **macrocriminal networks seek to annihilate the collective processes of resistance and/or expel the entire population from the land they want to control.** This is achieved through various strategies → community division and/or the use of criminalization, violence and terror.

This association with depoliticized criminal actors is extremely worrying as they represent actors who are not sensitive to political costs and are not accountable to international law.

States are at the origin of the proliferation of criminal power, and today continue to benefit from its presence and the illicit activities perpetrated.
The association of economic, political, and criminal interests increasingly blurs the line between legal and illegal extractivist economic activities.

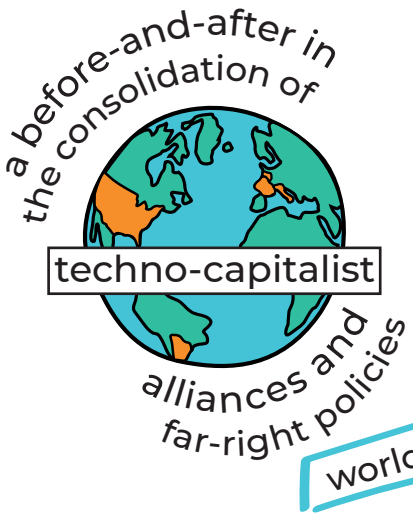
Despite an increasingly robust legal framework, States demonstrate a profound unwillingness to implement it.

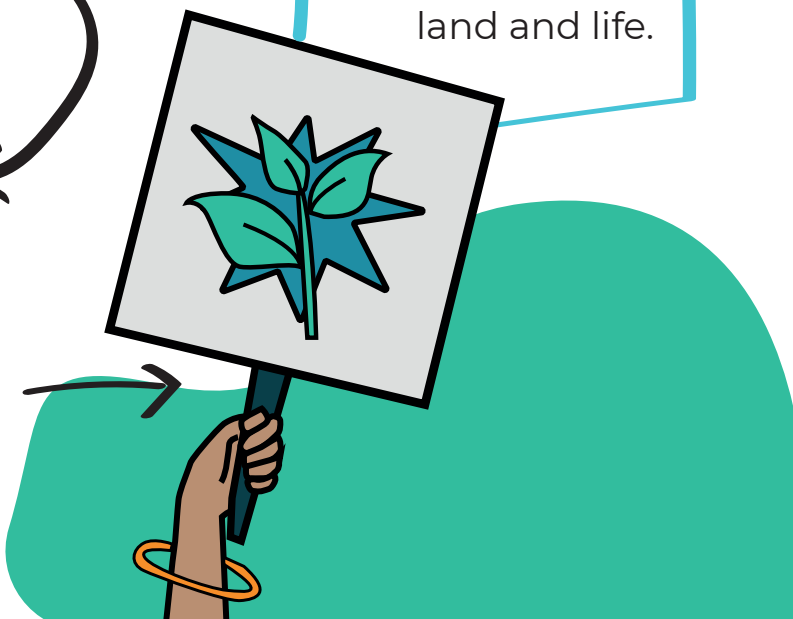
Even when there is interest on the part of the state apparatus to eradicate illegal armed groups, it is worrying to see the lack of truly effective subjugation and mechanisms for inter-institutional coordination.

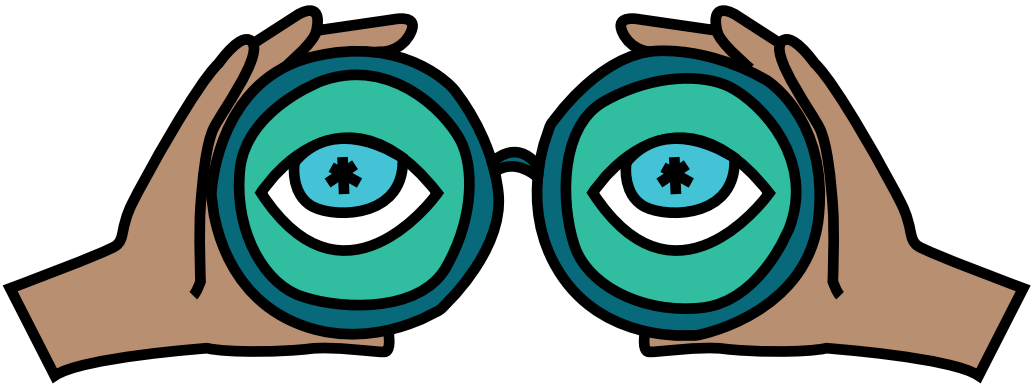
During the present investigation, drastic changes in context were observed, such as

The alarming deterioration of the security situation of a territorial defender who has actively collaborated in the participatory assessment.
The humanitarian crisis in various parts of Colombia, particularly in the Catatumbo region. • President Donald Trump's return to power in the United States

dramatic consequences for the region, for racialized, diverse bodies, and for the defense of land and life.







It is essential to reaffirm the profound need to understand this **violence** through the **lens of systemic and historical analysis,** in order to understand how it originates.

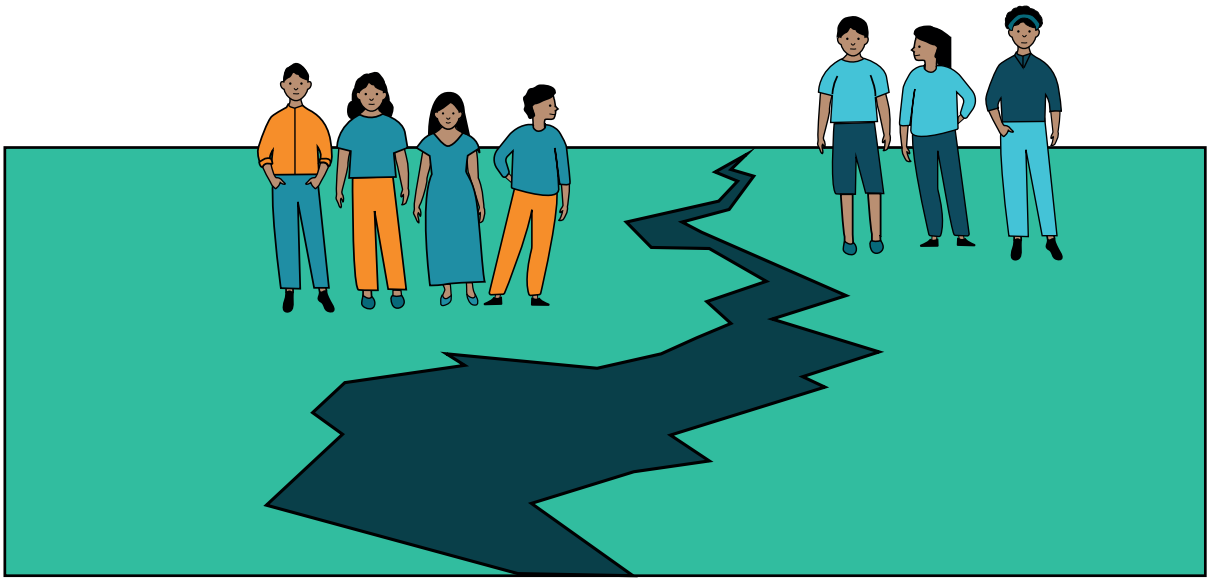
TODAY'S VIOLENCE CANNOT BE DISSOCIATED FROM THE HEGEMONIC RACIST, DISCRIMINATORY, PATRIARCHAL, AND CAPITALIST SYSTEM

in which we live.

OBSTACLES AND CAPABILITIES OBSERVED

As a result of the adverse context, it was observed with concern:

The precariousness with which many human rights defense processes are carried out by those who collaborated in the investigation.
ILED people agree in identifying community division as one of the main threats faced.



On certain occasions, in addition to the aggressors' intentional strategy of "divide to conquer," damage is generated by the actions of NGOs and/or donors who, due to their lack of understanding of the community dynamics and the territories, **strengthen the existing community ruptures.**

Hegemonic culture

against causes

Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, and ILED people are subjected to a process of "dis-identification"

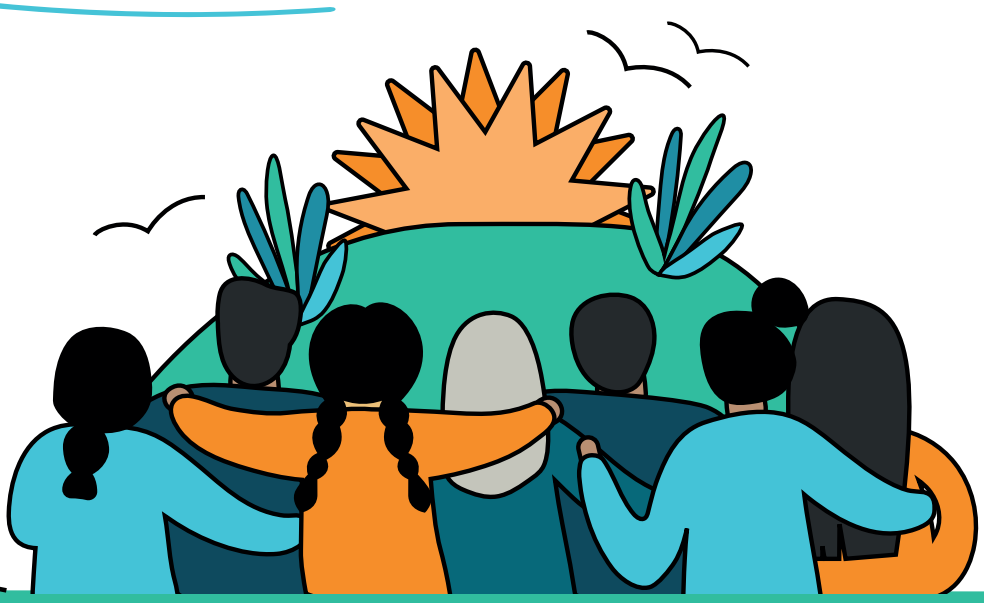
the depoliticization observed within some organizational processes

→ Losing the memory of the defense process,
→ forgetting the structural causes of the damage suffered,
→ and losing the sense of resistance often results in more internal divisions and struggles that are not sustainable over time.

Self-determination appears to be a fundamental strategy for communities facing the threat of dis-identification and depoliticization.

BUT

it increases the risk faced by ILED → implying that the aggressor give up an entire territory and profit opportunities, which they are often unwilling to accept.



In the face of obstacles, **the courage and perseverance shown by ILED people appear even more valuable.**

→ All of those interviewed and who participanted in the study already have one or more Collective Protection strategies in place.

→ Most of the Collective Protection strategies developed are profoundly preventive, life-creating, community-building, and wisdom-building.

→ ILED people often have strong and diverse allies and coalitions who know how to alert them when needed and to support them in meeting needs they cannot always meet on their own.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR COLLECTIVE PROTECTION

Collective Protection is intrinsically linked to the strengthening of political subjects.

It goes far beyond the digital, physical, or psycho-emotional sphere. It involves constructing and strengthening habits, social practices, measures, and strategies framed within the various spheres that socially and organizationally structure the collective.

These are the areas that, when seen holistically, can generate comprehensive and sustainable collective protection strategies in the long term.

- Preservation of identity, particularly between generations
- Recovery of the historical memory of the defense processes.
- Exercise of autonomy
- Respect for the spiritual and cultural practices of the group
- Protection of the territory and of the diverse lives that inhabit it

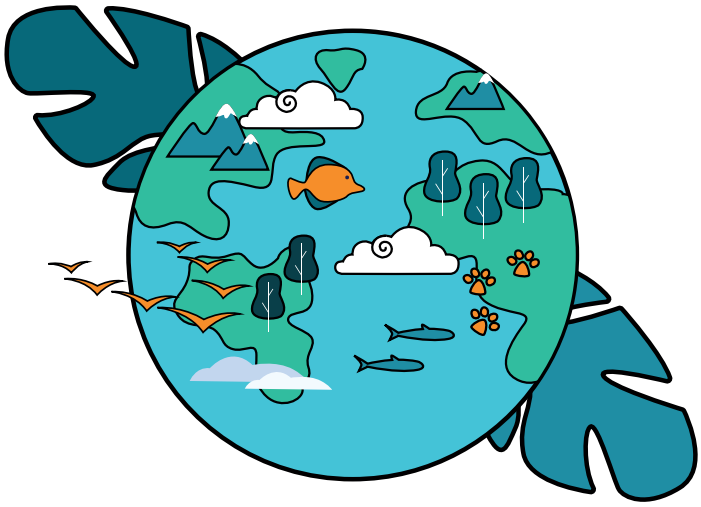
These are all fundamental parts of the Collective Protection strategies.
It is essential to clarify that:

→ **Collective and individual protection are not opposed, but interrelated and complement each other.**

MAPPING OF EXISTING COLLECTIVE PROTECTION STRATEGIES IN LATIN AMERICAN TERRITORIES

Each situation and territory is unique and requires its own response.
Just as biodiversity is key to an ecosystem's resilience, protection strategies must be diverse and adapted to each territory.
There is no one-size-fits-all answer.

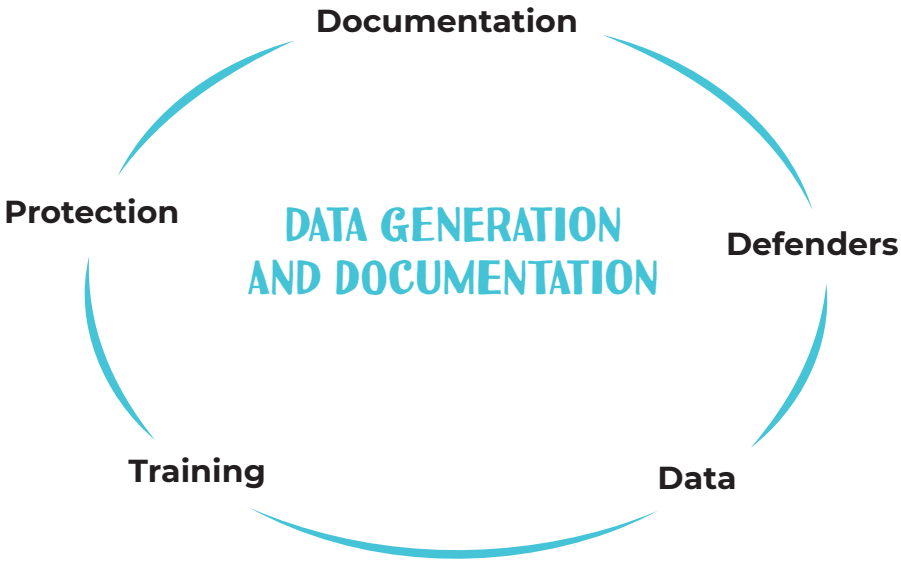
The combination of experiences, knowledge, and tools strengthens communities' capacity for resilience and care.

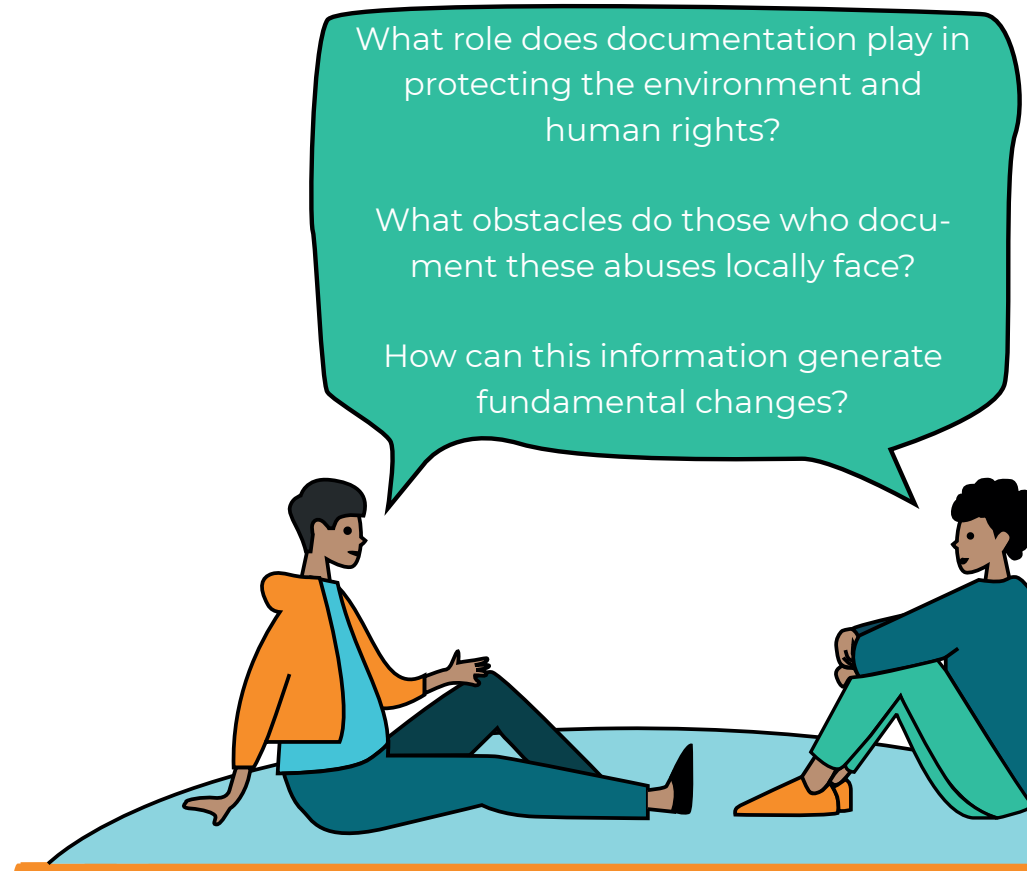


The following strategies are not exhaustive but emblematic due to their positive impact on ILED people and/or the territories in which they live.

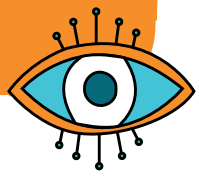
For more examples, see the full report (available in Spanish) at:

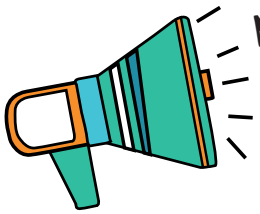
https://peacebrigades.org/en/informe-sobre-protecci%C3%B3n-colectiva-y-acompa%C3%B1amiento-territorial-personas-defensoras-ind%C3%ADgenas-de-la





Based on documentation and data generation, the Center for Information on Business and Human Rights (CIEDH) organizes spaces for collective analysis, provides training to grassroots defenders who want to document in the territories, and advises on which platforms to use and which criteria to follow for documentation.





MANY OTHER NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS DOCUMENT!

→ Ecumenical Center for Human Rights in Ecuador.
→ We are Defenders in Colombia
→ Global Witness and Frontline Defenders at the global level.

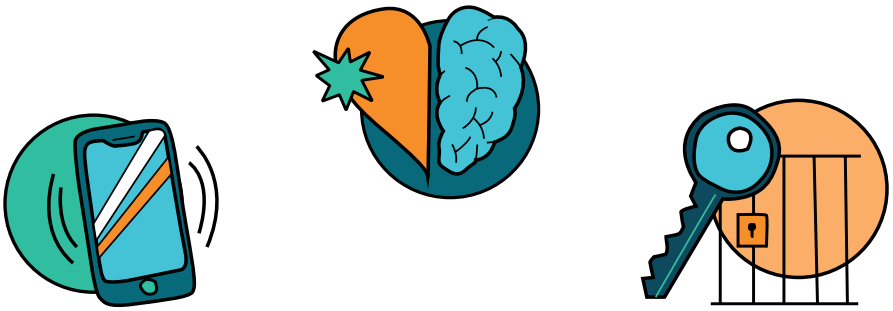
ANALYSIS (CONTEXT, CONJECTURE, AND RISK ANALYSIS)

Methodology of non-violent conflict transformation of Servicios y Asesorías para la Paz A.C. (SERAPAZ)

1. Conflict diagnosis.
2. Identify the actor that can generate transformations in the given context.
3. Identify the balance of power among the actors in dispute.

This detailed analysis exercise allows SERAPAZ, and the actors involved to build routes and agreements that respond to the specific situation, thus allowing for a favorable resolution of the conflict.[1]

1 Meeting held with Leon Perez, former coordinator of the land and territory area of Serapaz, September 2024.



HOLISTIC SELF-PROTECTION MEASURES (PHYSICAL, PSYCHOSOCIAL, DIGITAL)

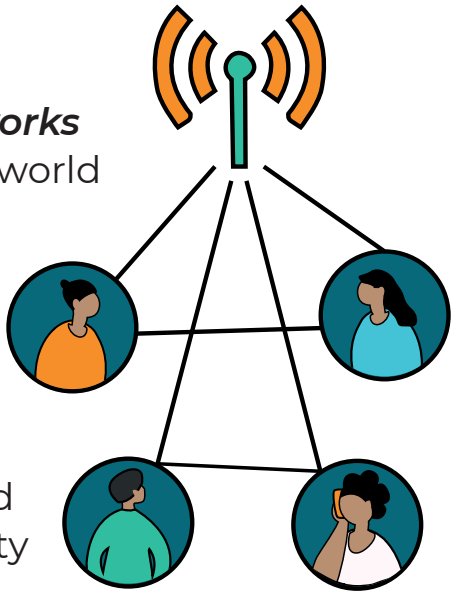
Digital security strategies[2]

Starlink and Community Networks

Communication to the outside world

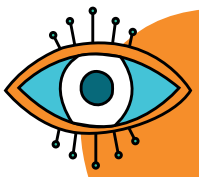
Community networks

installation of strategic nodes within the community, operated and managed by the community itself.



Starlink

Satellite connection with portable and fixed options to connect your devices.



ALERT: owned by Elon Musk, known for supporting right-wing and far-right authoritarian governments.

1 Meeting held with Leon Perez, former coordinator of the land and territory area of Serapaz, September 2024.

PSYCHOSOCIAL PROTECTION STRATEGIES

FLORESTA REST HOME[3]

The Casa de Respiro da Floresta responds to the need for temporary exits from risky spaces in times of increased threats, paying special attention to the impact that relocation has on human rights defenders, their communities, and their organizational processes. It welcomes indigenous people, quilombolas, and campesiños, providing a space where individual and collective protection measures can be built to favor their safe return. In the future, the goal is to acquire a larger space with plants, vegetable gardens, and animals. This would allow the defenders to continue their agricultural practices and have a more comfortable and familiar environment.

3 Meeting with Claudelice Silva dos Santos, from the Zé Claudio e Maria Institute, November 2024. (https://culturesofresistance.org/cultures-of-resistance-awards/instituto-ze-claudio-e-maria/)

PREVENTIVE PHYSICAL SECURITY STRATEGIES

AN EXAMPLE OF ACTIONS BETWEEN TERRITORIES[4]

In the Amazon region, communities and networks of indigenous peoples have created transnational strategies to respond to the constant displacement and uprooting of their threatened leaders. In southern Colombia, few leaders are left in the territory after multiple displacements and threats. An alternative strategy has been developed to transfer the threatened leaders to other indigenous communities that are part of a trust network. This allows for an exchange of strategies between different communities and the continuity of the organizational process and territorial resistance.

This strategy has worked mainly in places where the illegal armed actors do not have a high level of coordination with those in the community where the threatened leader is taking refuge.

4 Meeting held with Carlos Fernandez, Independent Consultant, November 2024

CONSTRUCTION OF SHELTERS AND HUMANITARIAN CAMPS

HUMANITARIAN SHELTERS:

permanente spaces delimited by the communities, aimed at strengthening the organizational processes in the midst of violence.

CAMPS

temporary and are established only during high-risk risk scenarios, dismantling once the risk level lowers. Both spaces are protected by International Humanitarian Law and are used to facilitate advocacy for state humanitarian assistance.[6]

The humanitarian shelter of Senú Faná in the Indigenous Community Los Almendros # 2, Antioquia, was opened in 2022 by social organizations and communities of Bajo Cauca with the accompaniment of Corporación Jurídica Libertad (CJL) and created by the 14 Indigenous authorities of the municipality, as well as 3 villages near the Indigenous land reservation.

6 Survey completed by Corporación Justicia Libertad (CJL).

TERRITORIAL PROTECTION MEASURES

CREATION OF INDIGENOUS GUARDS: THE EXAMPLE OF CAUCA, COLOMBIA

Established in 2001 in response to violence by illegal armed groups

Mission: to ensure the Collective Protection of the resguardos, collective properties of the indigenous peoples recognized as such by the Colombian State[7]. "The Indigenous Guard is conceived as an ancestral body and as an instrument of resistance, unity, and autonomy for the defense of the territory and the life plan of the indigenous communities. It is not a police structure, but a humanitarian and civil resistance mechanism. It seeks to protect and disseminate their ancestral culture and the exercise of their own rights."[8]

7 https://www.minagricultura.gov.co/Normatividad/Paginas/Decreto-1071-2015/CAPITULO-5-Naturaleza-Juridica-de-los-Resguardos-Indigenas-Manejo-y-Administracion.aspx and Articles 63 and 329 of the Political Constitution Colombian of 1981. https://www.suin-juriscol.gov.co/viewDocument.asp?ruta=Constitucion/1687988

8 https://www.cric-colombia.org/portal/proyecto-politico/defensa-vida-ddhh-cric/guardia-indigena/

Made up of children, young people, and adults.

HOW DOES THE GUARD FUNCTION?

Traveling through the resguardos to monitor what is happening, watching over the checkpoints to keep track of who is entering and who is leaving, and inquiring about the well-being of the families in the community. These checkpoints established by the Guardia not only guarantee the security of the communities but also reaffirm their autonomy and strengthen their resistance.

The CRIC Indigenous Guard has been a reference for other guards throughout the Americas, including the regions this report focuses on: Ecuador, Peru, Mexico, and Brazil.
Other examples of these guards and their organization can be found at the full report.

EXERCISE OF AUTONOMY

SELF-RECOGNITION

In Peru, although national legislation allows for the recognition of Indigenous communities, it does not recognize the concept of a Nation. Faced with this omission in the national legal framework and the continued refusal of state authorities to address it, the Wampi population opted for self-recognition, a right guaranteed by international standards. Thus, in 2015, they became the first indigenous people to have self-formed and be recognized as a Nation in Peru. The Wampi Nation defends the titled territories, but also the occupied ones. "The defense of the territory is assumed under the premise that the occupied states are inherited from the grandparents. We developed this self-awareness of assuming this defense of the titled but also occupied territories, which the states had expropriated from us".[9]

9 Meeting with Shapiom Noningo, Technical Secretary of the Autonomous Territorial Government of the Wampís Nation, October 2024. (https://nacionwampis.com/)

RECOVERY OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

Recovering, socializing internally and between generations, and keeping the historical memory of a defense process alive is fundamental to ensure that it is sustained over time. It is a major challenge since the opposing actors intentionally keep us responding, thus preventing us from looking, understanding what is happening, and remembering the experiences of resistance developed over time. In Xochicuautla, State of Mexico, the inhabitants have seen community peace affected by the construction of a highway near their territory, violating, among others, the right to consultation and a healthy environment. In the final agreements that were signed between the government of the State of Mexico and the community under the observation of national organizations and international bodies, the people demanded that the State build a House of Memory in the community to show the process of resistance of Xochicuautla against the construction of the highway. Community members will also build the House of Memory to generate employment. It will be built thanks to the recovery of the rubble of a house that collapsed in the context of the State repression perpetrated against the community's defenders.[10]

10 Meeting held with members of the community of Xochicuautla, State of Mexico, Mexico, September 2024

ORGANIZATIONAL AND/OR COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING

Construction of Community Groups and Community Celebration created in response to specific threats in the Amazonian Pearl (ADISPA)[11]

A women's group continued to organize despite threats against its president by illegal armed gangs

Projects of reforestation on the riverbank.

They were expanding their actions towards training and *gathering*[12], which shields them from the armed group since the latter does not know how to react to these activities, which are also

ORGANIZED BY WOMEN!

This strategy allows them to resist peacefully and protect the community without direct confrontation.

11 Meeting held with Carlos Fernández, Consultant, November 2024.

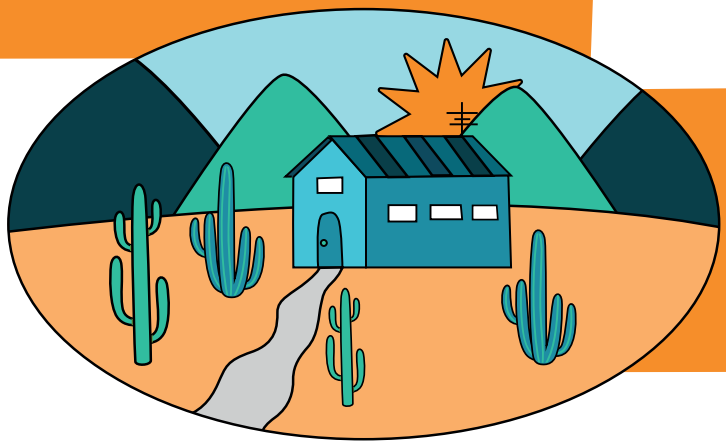
12 With "juntanza" we refer to the union of people, in this case it is given to celebrate.

PROTECTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY AND RESPECT FOR SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS AND PRACTICES

PROTECTING CULTURAL IDENTITY

Collective care does not only mean "going to therapy". Actions that strengthen the community are essential to reaffirm the collective identity and the sense of struggle.

Yaqui Tribe, Sonora State, Mexico[13],
It built an autonomous school in response to the imposition by the hegemonic powers of their culture over their own.



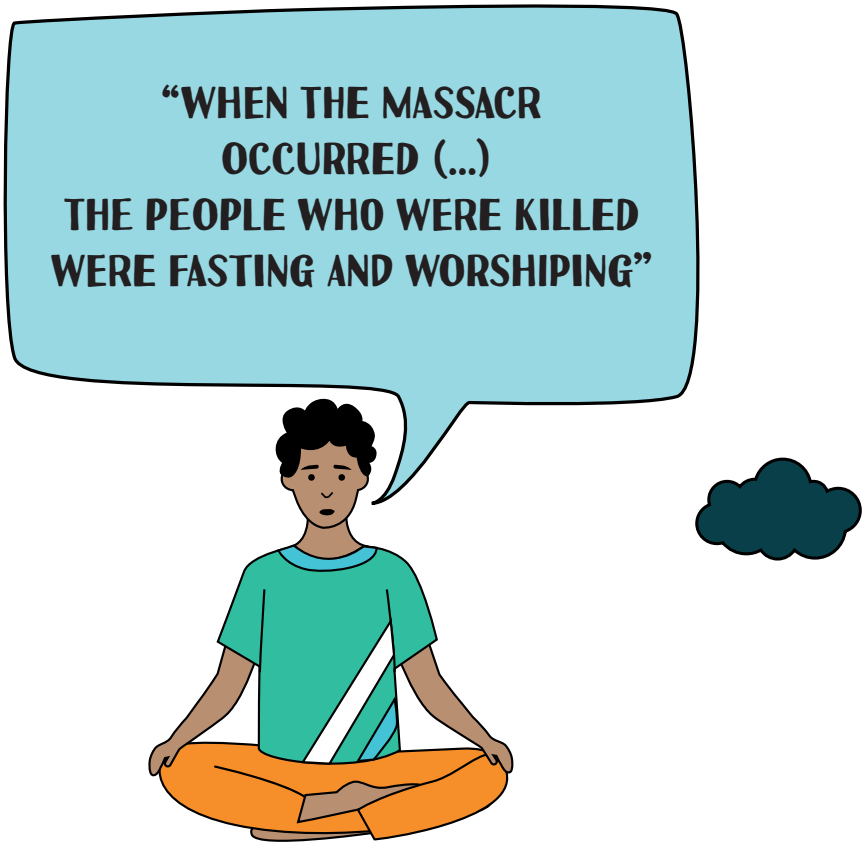
It has been operating for 5 years with teachers from the same village.

It has economic challenges, but to this day, it has made it possible to foster knowledge of one's identity from an early age to ensure the continuation of the struggle through generations.

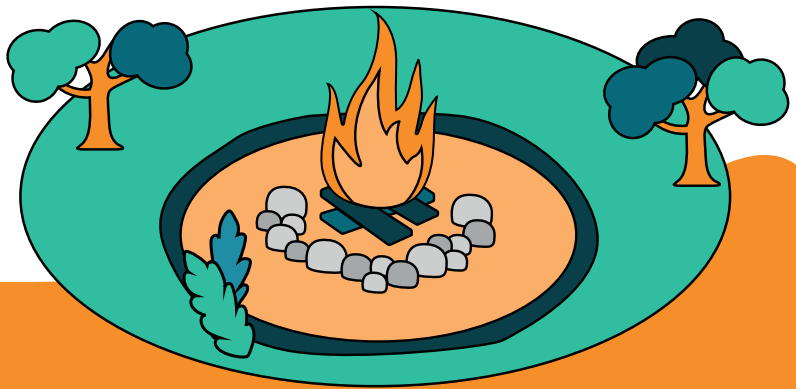
13 Meeting held with Mario Luna, member of the Yaqui Tribe, Pueblo Vicam, Sonora, Mexico.

MAINTAINING TRADITIONS AND SPIRITUAL PROTECTION

Community of Las Abejas, Chiapas, Mexico
Prayers and fasting are an integral part of the community's protection strategies.
Guadalupe Vásquez Luna, survivor of the Acteal Massacre, says:



For her, it means that they gave their lives to ask for a better future for the other people in the community.

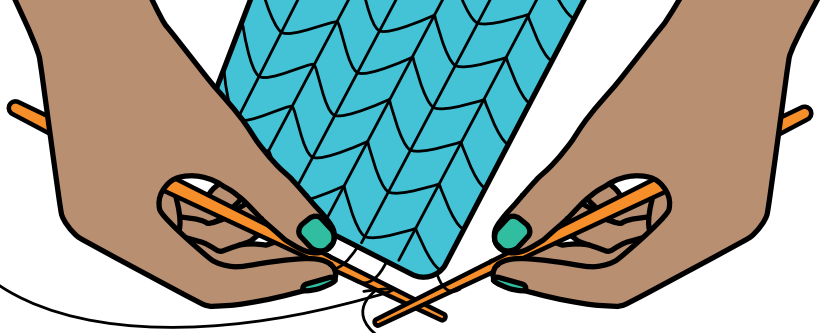


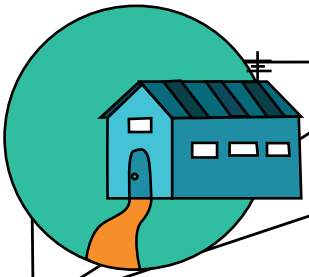
POLITICAL ADVOCACY

ACADESAN COLLECTIVE ACTIONS

The advocacy of ACADESAN, an organization of black communities with collective land titles in Chocó, has marked a crucial change in how public policy in Colombia addresses the protection of rights defenders and communities at risk. In 2023, after years of struggle, they reached an agreement with 23 national government agencies to implement 49 Collective Protection measures. These include the strengthening of organizational processes through, for example, workshops and meetings of ACADESAN's knowledgeable people organized in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture for the recovery of ancestral knowledge, the mitigation of the impact of the armed conflict, among other actions, through the delivery of boats and launches of different sizes to carry out humanitarian missions or accompany forced displacement, according to the needs that arise. This approach recognizes that individual protection is insufficient in the face of the risks arising from armed conflict, forced displacement, and environmental degradation.[14]

14 Parra Bayona with opening remarks by Elizabeth Moreno Barco, Weaving links between self-protection and collective protection: the experience of ACADESAN in Colombia, Accountability Research Center, Accountability Working Paper 18, 2024.
https://accountabilityresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Parra_proteccion_colectiva_WP_18_ADA.pdf





STRENGTHENING OF A SUPPORT NETWORK

MULTI-ACTOR RESPONSE TO AN EMERGENCY

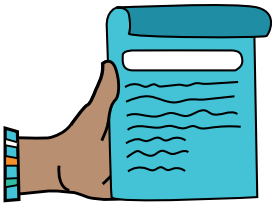
Articulation between church actors, civil society organizations, international organizations, authorities, local communities, etc.

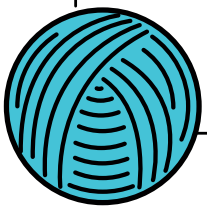
Networks save!

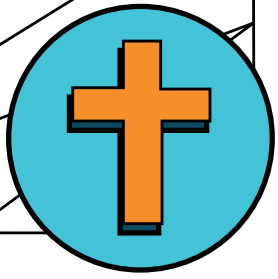
Collective action saves!

National and international lobbying

- Call
- Letter writing
- Public or private (analyze according to risk situation), collective complaints
- Clear requests







COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

Creation of reactive alerts for denunciation and visibilization: Human Rights Network of Putumayo, Colombia[15]

Objective:

to defend territory, life, and peace in response to oil expansion in the region.

15 Meeting held with the Putumayo Human Rights Network, November 2024. (https://www.facebook.-com/Red.DDHH.Putumayo/)

Interethnic space

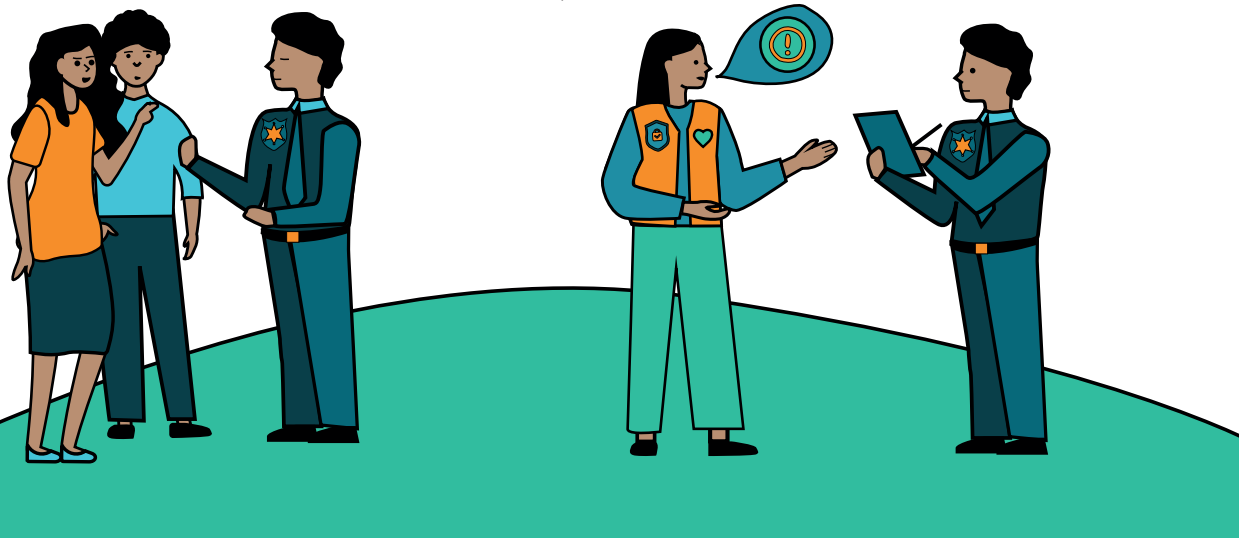
indigenous and campesiñp communities

1 Focus on pedagogy, training

tools, updated information, and supporting them to defend their rights.

2 From public outcry to indirect reports to protect against reprisals

Using international organizations to denounce local events.

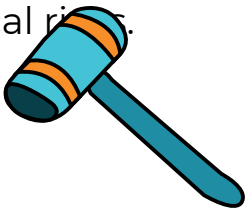


Before reporting: exhaustive impact analysis with the affected family or community, obtaining their consent, and assessing possible consequences

The complaint (public or private, direct or indirect)

1 makes the situation visible + seeks to generate solidarity, external support, and pressure on the responsible institutions to act effectively.

2 Encourages formal investigations.
Objective: to provide legal coverage and support justice efforts while minimizing local ri[illegible].



LEGAL DEFENSE

The Mecheros-UDAPT Case, Ecuador[16]

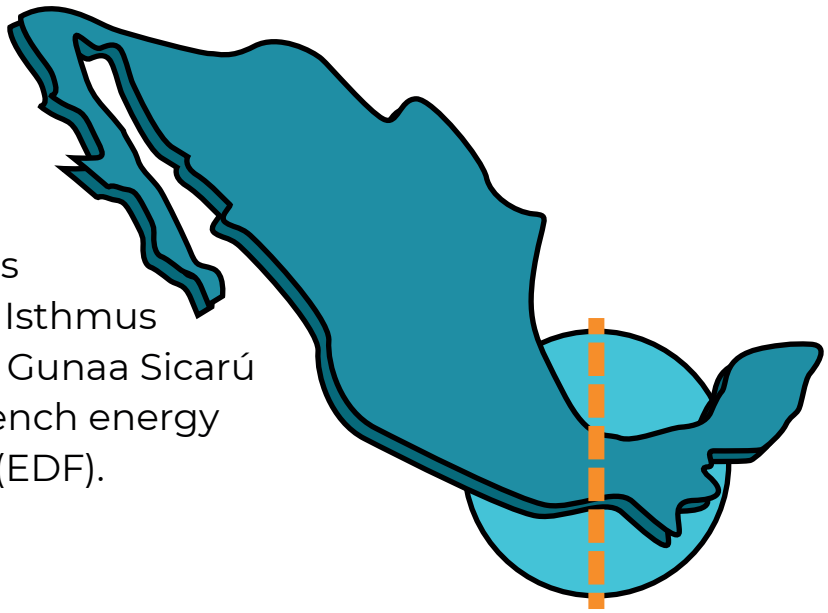
UDAPT recently won an emblematic case against oil tankers in their region. In this case, the judicial strategy is based on the lawsuit filed in 2019 by nine Ecuadorian girls, between 7 and 15 years old when the process was initiated against the Ecuadorian State, for the use of lighters to burn residual gas from oil production. In a second instance ruling, eliminating these lighters near towns was ordered, and water studies were required to detect the possible presence of heavy metals. The Constitutional Court is now reviewing the case while the situation in the affected areas remains critical. The communities face high rates of serious diseases such as cancer, especially among women.

16 Meeting held with UDAPT members, October 2024 (https://udapt.org/conocenos/)

(Despite the ruling, the authorities have not implemented effective measures, limiting themselves to redirecting gas to non-populated areas instead of definitively eliminating the use of the.

INTERNATIONAL LITIGATION AND DUE DILIGENCE

Resistance by an indigenous Oaxacan community in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec against the Gunaa Sicarú wind farm project of the French energy giant, Electricité de France (EDF).



Support from environmental/human rights NGOs

The community of Unión Hidálgo litigated before the Civil Court of Paris using an extraterritoriality clause of the French law on Due Diligence of Companies.

EDF is accused of

failing to fulfill its due diligence responsibility (violation of the right to free, prior, and informed consent).

threats, aggressions, and intimidations against human rights defenders.

CRUCIAL STEP

In June 2024, the Paris Court of Appeals admitted the lawsuit filed by the community.[17]

17 Paris appeals court admits civil lawsuit against EDF's wind farm in Mexico, Estefania Diaz, Prodesc, June 18, 2024. https://prodesc.org.mx/el-tribunal-de-apelaciones-de-paris-admite-demanda-civil-contra-el-parque-eolico-de-edf-en-mexico/

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Emergency financial support funds

Alternatives to the failures of government institutions

Frontline Defenders' emergency fund enables the financing of emergency measures for:

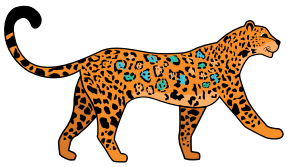
- digital security
- psychosocial support
- physical security

Support funds

reactive response to security incidents and serious threats.

However, the Frontline Defenders has expanded its concept of protection to a more preventive approach.

Having adequate light at night or connectivity is also security.

Meeting with Julia Lima, Protection Officer for the Americas, Frontline Defenders, July 2024.

Coordination and content editing: Zia Kandler, Mélanie Paboeuf
Illustration and graphic design: Ivaan Salazar García