



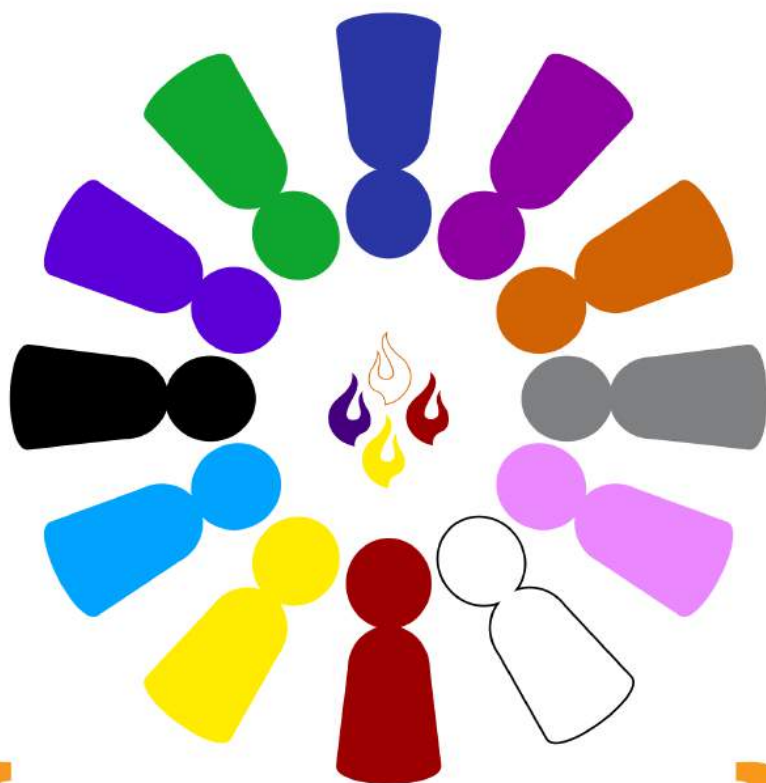
{ Taking Care of Us }

Guide for the
Collective Protection of
Human Rights Defenders
in Rural Areas

Compilation of the experience of







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Editorial

TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES

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This Guide is based on Protection International Mesoamerica's experience carrying out protection work with human rights defenders since 2007, in the Mesoamerican region.

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Presentation

In December 2007, UDEFEGUA and Protection International (PI), thanks to their representatives Claudia Samayoa and Enrique Eguren, decided to begin a collaboration to strengthen the protection of human rights defenders (HRDs) in the Mesoamerican region.

Headquartered in Guatemala, the project was named "Aj Noj Protection Desk Guatemala". It was incorporated into the structure of the two organisations and based in UDEFEGUA's office in the capital.

Given the experience both organisations had already accumulated in HRD protection, it was decided that the project would address the specific issue of protecting HRDs in rural and semi-urban areas - and so began an adventure that continues today.

In 2009, we began research (PAR) into the protection of HRDs in these environments (rural and semi-urban areas). This evidenced the importance and great complexity of collective protection and the need to focus on social networks to understand how territories were addressing this issue. We put forward the concept of "protection networks" and the need to introduce "territorial control" as a framework for analysing the power balance between HRDs and those who decide to attack these people and collectives for defending their interests in the territory.

The title chosen for the publication that followed this research was "Cuidándonos" ("Taking care of ourselves"), and this has been our team's focus of interest ever since. Taking care of ourselves and our territories. Taking care of ourselves as people and as collectives. Taking care of our ties and bonds, and recognising the damage that attacks generate and that prolongs a history of structural violence with extended periods of repression.

To be effective, our action could no longer be carried out in isolation, but had to support these complex processes. We dispensed with providing solutions to problems and equipped ourselves to support these processes of collective protection and strengthening of protection networks, based on the knowledge developed within HRDs' own networks and groups. This was when we decided that we should conduct our work within and from the territory. In these early years, the exchanges between Protection Desk Colombia and PI's PRTU Unit were crucial.

In 2015, the project took a new direction and was made into a new local office of Protection International in Guatemala, dedicated exclusively to supporting HRDs in rural areas. The research was given an injection of momentum, through attempts to systematise the ever-growing experience. Valentina Caprotti carried out the initial research into the theories supporting our work. We also started to address the gender perspective and the provision of specific support to women human rights defenders with the support of another partner organisation, JASS. Its Mesoamerican network made important contributions that we applied to our working methodology. The collaboration between María Aizpuru and the Tzikin Network allowed us to start working on communication as a tool for threat confrontation.

In 2016, we embarked on a new challenge, which was possibly the most transformative for how we address the problems facing HRDs in rural areas: the psychosocial perspective has caused a profound shift in our method and methodologies, and changed the way we view the processes we support.

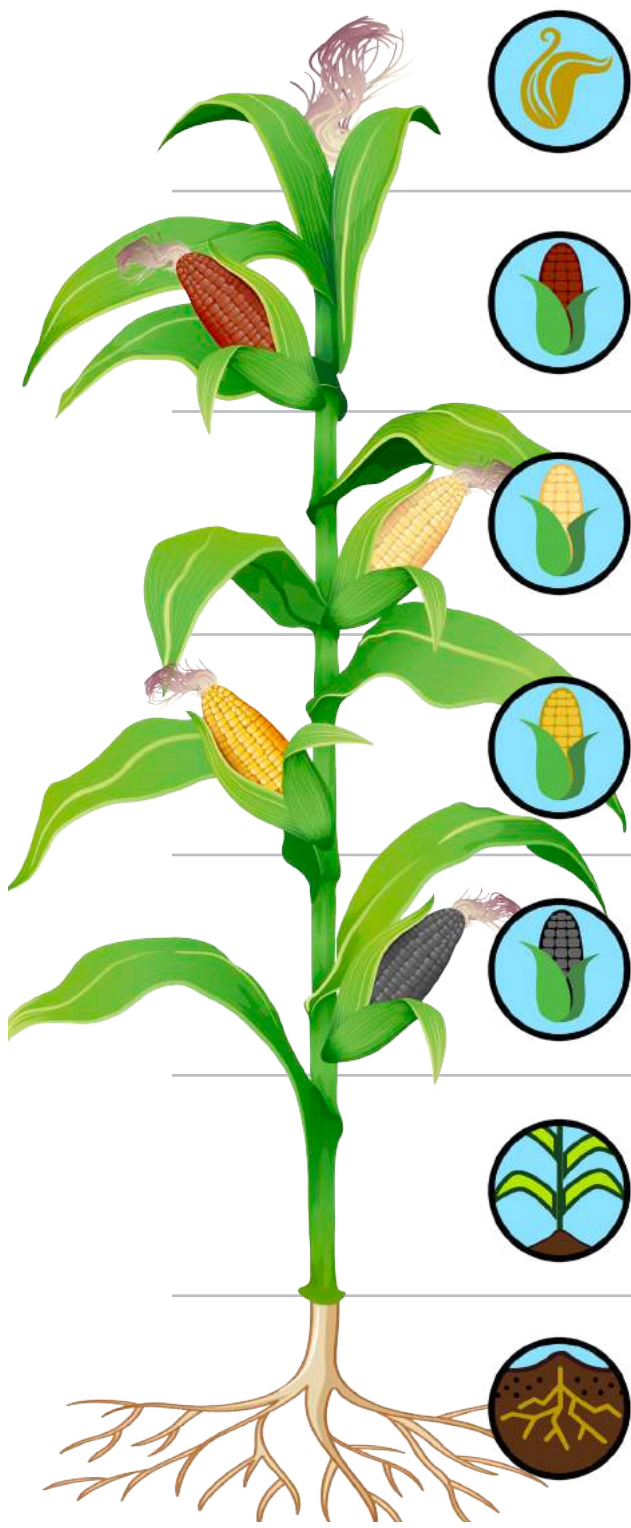
Our participation in the process of putting together a draft Public Policy for the Protection for Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala placed us at the centre of the pursuit to get all kinds of “duty-bearers” and “stakeholders” more involved in the respect and observance of the Right to Defend Human Rights (RDHR) in the territories, by recognising the difficult conditions of exclusion and racism under which people exercise this right in rural areas of Mesoamerica.

This publication seeks to provide an insight into the current state of our work supporting collective HRDs in their territories, and we hope that it might be a useful resource for these collectives and for all those dealing with this difficult issue.

Warmest regards,

Xabier Zabala Bengoetxea

PI Representative for the Mesoamerican region and
Coordinator of the teams’ work from 2008 until
February 2020.



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Point of departure
With whom, where and how Protection International Mesoamerica works towards collective protection in rural areas
(Conceptual approximation)



Point of departure

With whom, where and how Protection International Mesoamerica works towards collective protection in rural areas (Conceptual approximation)

Through years of working with defenders of territory, **Protection International Mesoamerica** (PI Meso) has defined, contextualised and applied concepts to guide work to strengthen the protection of human rights defenders in rural areas.

PI Meso's methodology and work has been derived from experience, participatory research and constant communication with human rights defenders (hereafter HRDs is used to refer to both individual and collective human rights defenders) in rural areas mainly in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

The objective of this publication is to provide an insight into the theoretical framework and methodological contributions PI Meso has developed after 12 years of working to protect HRDs.

Protection work is structured around a number of issues, which are addressed in this publication: threat analysis and the application of risk analysis, territorial control, protection networks and social practices, communication for threat confrontation, the psychosocial perspective and psychosocial support, and the specific protection of women HRDs. To understand PI Meso's strategy and tools for collective protection, it is necessary to consider the concepts that form the basis of PI Meso's work:

1. The community, the collective subject and the community organisation
2. Collective protection and protection networks
3. The territory
4. Community social psychology and community feminism
5. Communication for threat confrontation





1.1 The psychosocial approach and the gender approach



The **psychosocial approach** places emphasis on community organisations with the capacity to understand the responses and behaviour of people who live alongside violent phenomena in territories where there is a high level of human rights violations, as occurs in the sociocultural, ancestral and political context of these populations.

Psychosocial trauma often occurs in communities who have suffered severe consequences of armed conflict. Before these communities have recovered from the aftermath, a new period of violence begins for them, caused by the presence of extractive projects. Psychosocial trauma is a key consideration in analysing and working with communities exposed to ongoing attacks, abuse and oppression.

PI Meso's work in collective protection intersects with the psychosocial and gender-focused approaches.

The psychosocial approach is anchored in **community social psychology**. Maritza Montero defines community psychology "as the branch of psychology aimed at studying the psychosocial factors that allow the development, promotion and maintenance of the control and power that individuals may exercise over their individual and social environment to solve problems they are suffering and to make changes in their environments and in the social structure."





This definition has the following implications:

- ❖ A different role for psychology professionals as agents of social transformation who share their knowledge with other social actors, come from the community, possess know-how and are guided by the same objectives, towards which they work together.
- ❖ The positioning of the sub-discipline as an interdisciplinary field, because its contemplation of social changes takes on an objective also put forth in other social sciences.
- ❖ The detection and stimulation of psychosocial potential.
- ❖ A different way of confronting, interpreting and reacting to reality.
- ❖ Using psychology for positive social and individual transformation.
- ❖ Changes in the habitat, in individuals and in individual-group-society relationships. Changes in an individual lead to changes in the groups they belong to, including the community, and vice versa (the changes in these groups result in transformations in individuals). This creates a dialectical relationship of mutual transformation (Montero, 2004).

In a similar vein, the **gender approach** bases analysis on theories such as **community feminism**, One of the principles of this theory is understanding all of the forms of oppression experienced in the region, and it argues for the deconstruction of the unequal relationships this oppression creates, for example, through decolonisation and depatriarchalisation.

The concept of gender is critiqued, as explained by Julieta Paredes: "Gender denounces the subordinate relationship of women to men and community feminism reiterates that this social subordination, which is one of the mechanisms of the system, is referred to as gender; it is the theoretical re-conceptualisation of a relational political category of denunciation."

Community feminism originated in Bolivia and Guatemala, where indigenous women are reclaiming feminism from a different perspective to hegemonic Western theory. This model of feminism questions not only the issue of gender, but also oppression on the basis of race and social class, and methods of exploitation and expropriation of land by the capitalist system. The land-body relationship is a focus of discourse to understand how the bodies of women, like territories, have been violated, colonised and destroyed by a capitalist and patriarchal system.





It is also important to mention that it represents an epistemological break with Western feminism in that it addresses the issues of these indigenous women in their own society. They have created their own movements and theoretical constructions that attempt to explain their situation of subordination, within a reality of colonial, imperialist and transnational relationships. "From the perspective of community feminism, the definition of feminism refers to the struggle and political approach to life of any woman anywhere in the world, at any stage in history when there is has been rebellion against an oppressive patriarchy" (Paredes, 2010).

In this regard, PI Meso works distinctly with female HRDs, considering the particularities of attacks against them, marked by unequal gender structures. The approach used integrates their identity at the community level, related to the conception that "any human group can set up and build a community, which from the perspective of community feminism is an alternative approach to individualist society"¹ (Paredes, 2010).



1.2 Communication for threat confrontation.

Communication for collective protection focuses on threat confrontation. In this sense, communication is conceived as a fundamental tool in three respects: breaking the isolation of community organisations who defend human rights, deterring the aggressor network and persuading the population and duty-bearing authorities to respect the Right to Defend Human Rights (RDHR).

PI Meso understands communication as processes of exchange of information at different levels (local, national, international) and of varying formality (formal or informal) that, within the framework of collective protection, is generated from and for the purposes of the territory.

As part of the strategy of using communication to confront a threat, spaces are created to strengthen the capacities of community communicators and advocacy proposals for collective protection are formulated.

¹ Paredes, J. (2010). *Hilando fino, desde el feminismo comunitario*. La Paz-Bolivia: Mujeres Creando Comunidad.



WHAT DOES PI MESO RECOMMEND?



PI Meso frames its work in the defence of human rights by supporting processes to strengthen collective protection in territories where its support is agreed.

It takes an integral view of protection based on group actions, without ruling out individual work with a HRD in some circumstances, as may be the case in crisis or emergency support.

Group processes are structured around meetings with participants from the collective HRD subject. Existing ties and the act of sharing situations of violence and repression transform these meetings into spaces for mutual support and the pursuit of solutions. During the meeting, the group can serve as a space to develop trust and acceptance, ideological reinforcement, expression and solidarity²

The meeting is a space for sharing, through creativity and spontaneity, from the individual to the group and from the group to the individual.

Once the process is under way, these group meetings can take on very diverse issues and be adapted to the context and territory, time and space; the common link is the defence of territory and a demand for respect of the Right to Defend Human Rights (RDHR).

PI Meso distinguishes between three types of action group: the operative group, the support group and the exchange group.



The operative group

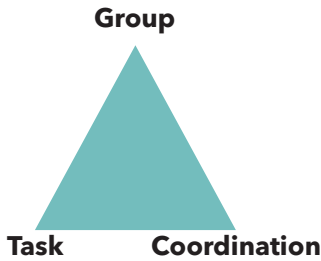
PI focuses support around group processes to strengthen collective protection in collective HRD subjects, based on Enrique Pichón Rivière's operative group theory.



² Beristain C. M. & Riera, F. 1992. *Afirmación y Resistencia - La comunidad como apoyo*. Virus Editorial: Barcelona, p. 193.



OPERATIVE GROUP



The operative group is composed of HRDs who have links with one another, such as their commitment to defence of their territory.

There should be some degree of representivity in the make-up of the group, the aim being for the group to be representative of the collective HRD subject in the territory. PI's facilitators take on the role of coordinating and observing, and approaching the "task" using different techniques of analysis and psychodrama. They are also responsible for answering questions that arise within the group.

The "task" is a response to what these collective subjects have asked of PI: to strengthen their collective protection against threats. The "task" is, therefore, what unifies the group around a common objective: to produce collective knowledge while also influencing individual subjectivity.

Considering that each person has a referential schema (CROS)³ for understanding reality, the operative group creates a

collective space that allows individual referential schemas to destructure; these are then restructured within a collective schema, formed from within the group, unifying criteria related to the task.

This process has cohesive effects and allows the group to address - from the perspective of their different roles - their anxieties, fears, resistances, resonances and hopes, to facilitate learning and the collective process of knowledge production.

The integration and interaction of the group strengthens the construction of common objectives, collective knowledge and the extent of achievement of the task (which is to confront the threat and protect HRDs in the collective subject).

The most important considerations for the group are the practice and effectiveness (didactic materialism) of the social relationships built within it, and care of psychosocial health (social psychology).

The main purpose of PI's facilitation is for the group to achieve production of collective knowledge about its collective protection, in order to strengthen personal relationships and trust within the group.

At the same time, each participant develops their own identity process.

Operative groups may be composed solely of women, if working with women HRDs, or young people, when working on community communication.

³ The Conceptual, Referential and Operational Schema" (CROS) is the referential schema of each individual, i.e. the experiences, expertise and feelings that affect the way the individual thinks and acts.



The support group

The support group carries a greater psychosocial burden.

It consists of groups of people (women HRDs) who find themselves in the same situation of violence and repression, based on age or gender.

A system of support is formed within the group to work on psychosocial aspects and initiate change within the lives of its members.

To provide group support to members, the group's main asset is its own specific process. The group is much more than just a sum of persons. Communication and activation of the group's process are the source of support for its members.

To provide this support, the group can draw on six resources (it is important that the group develops these, to be able to give integral, effective mutual support⁴:

- ❖ The capacity for mutual support
- ❖ Control of impulsive reactions
- ❖ Recognition of feelings
- ❖ Generalisation of experiences
- ❖ Development of collective power
- ❖ The taking forward of solutions



The exchange group

Exchanges are another form of group meeting. These are spaces where representatives of different territories meet to share their experiences in the area of collective protection, and to promote the creation of alliances within the external network.

Exchanges may take place in the national or international sphere and are a way of sharing, collaborating and learning from different situations that relate to the defence of human rights.



⁴ Beristain, C. M. & Riera, F. 1992. *Afirmación y Resistencia - La comunidad como apoyo*, Virus Editorial: Barcelona, p. 196.



FIRST PRACTICE



Related practices

Group processes are driven by people coming together to form a circle, in which they all participate from the same equal position. This circle also cultivates group consciousness, since all participants can see and listen to each other, fostering cooperation and communication.

. The circle also has a centre, from where energy is channelled. At the start of the group work, various items are placed in the centre of the circle (candles, water, flowers, things taken from nature, photos or any others of their choice) that help to make the energy of the day, of the ancestors or of the deceased present, creating an energetic link within the group.



Warm-up exercises

Before starting meetings, warm-up exercises are conducted to prepare participant's body, mind and heart. This creates a physical, intellectual and emotional readiness to start the day and a space of trust, inclusiveness and group communication. Some of the warm-up exercises developed by PI Meso are explained below.





INVOCATION

Xabier Zabala, *PI Guatemala* (2017)

The workshop is started by invoking the energies of the cardinal directions and the energy of the day, creating an energetic space before beginning the meeting.

The group forms a circle.

The four candles are placed in position (red - east; purple - west; white - north; yellow - south) with a glass of water in the centre. Participants can add to this basic composition with things from nature, flowers, photos, etc. of their choice.

The meaning of each direction is explained and volunteers are requested from the group to light a candle each. The volunteers should explain why they chose a particular direction or colour. In the circle, the group then performs stretching exercises known as "MAYAN YOGA", which is a type of yoga incorporating elements of Mayan cosmovision: Breathing in, sweep your arms out to the side and up, drawing an arc out from each side ("Ajaw, the power of the universe"); then breathe out, bringing them arms down to the heart, palms together and elbows out drawing a horizontal line from the palms ("the ancestors").

Breathing in again, reach the arms forward and draw them out in an arc to the sides, creating a horizontal line with the shoulders and heart ("sacred places, hills, volcanoes, lakes, forests, etc."); then breathe out, relaxing the legs and arms, moving all four joints of the shoulders and hips in a circular motion ("4 Balam, the four cardinal directions, the four elements: fire, earth, wind and water, and the four colours of corn: red, black, white, yellow"). Repeat four times.





INTRODUCTIONS

Crossed introductions

The members of the group introduce themselves to one another in pairs. Then, in the plenary session, each person introduces their partner, including their name, where they come from, what they hope to get from the meeting and what their totem is (the being they identify and feel a special union with). The purpose is for the group to get to know one another and understand the expectations for the work day.

Introduction of participants through the energy of their date of birth (their "nahual ")

Xabier Zabala, PI Guatemala (2019)

Nahuals signify the energy, spirit and strength of beings and elements of nature. Every person has a nahual corresponding to their date of birth.

Each person takes themselves to one side to read the description of their nahual, and their gifts and difficulties.

Each of the 20 nahuals corresponds with a cardinal direction or colour, of which there are four families (red, black, white and yellow). The group gathers themselves around the centre in a circle, with each person positioned at the direction corresponding with their nahual.

From this position, each person introduces themselves, explaining how they identify with the description of this energy (whether this be a gift or difficulty).

Sharing with the group the gifts and difficulties they identify with creates a space of openness and trust.





BODY WORK

Preparing the body before conducting the exercises is a practice that generates trust within the group, relieves stress and improves subsequent concentration. There are various exercises for body work:

- ✦ Walk through the room and greet your fellow participants with a look, a smile, with your elbow, or with your legs.
- ✦ When walking through the room, if you hear the number 1, this means walking as slowly as possible; conversely, 10 means walking as fast as possible; and 5 would be a normal walking speed. The facilitator starts saying numbers from 1 to 10, and the group walks at the corresponding speed.

Walking increases oxygen levels in the body, improves blood flow, and takes the focus away from words and onto body language, by communicating with the body.

- ✦ **Music to get moving and dancing:** The group splits into pairs, and stands facing one another with their hands very close, but without touching, so participants feel the energy of their partner. The music for dancing then starts (to be selected according to the customs of the territory). One of the pair instructs the other that they should follow their movements closely, but without touching. Afterwards, they swap roles, so the other partner leads. Gradually, bigger groups are formed of 4, then 8, in which one person always leads the dance and the others copy. The exercise ends with the whole group dancing in a circle; people go into the middle to lead the dance and invite the next person to replace them.

Spirituality, recreation, games, bodily expression and art foster the healthy and transformative creative capacities of beings and communities.





TRUST-BUILDING GAMES

These are a series of fun exercises that can be used in any learning module and are useful for building trust between members of the operative group. They include the following:

- ❖ **Mother and baby penguin**, In pairs, one person is assigned the role of the mother penguin and the other of the baby penguin. The mother must guide the baby (who keeps their eyes closed) using a sound that must be different for each pair. The baby will have to trust their guide (mother penguin) to lead them using this sound through the room without encountering any obstacles. The sequence is repeated, with each pair switching roles.
- ❖ **Guide**, In pairs, one person closes their eyes and allows the other to guide them without speaking, and only by touching their shoulders. Then, four people with their eyes closed are lined up in a row, and another person guides them to form a row with all of the participants. They must pass on the message that the guide gave to the person in front of them.
- ❖ **Fall**, All of the participants line up in two rows, one in front of the other. They hold hands tightly, then one of the participants who trusts the group steps onto a table placed next to one end of the two rows. They allow themselves to fall backwards, with their body in a straight line, onto the arms of the group. The two rows then move their arms in synchronisation to propel the person along until they have reached the other end of the rows. At all times, the group must look after the person who volunteered and placed their trust in the group.





Threat analysis



The threat analysis for collective subjects in rural areas is based on the conceptualisation set out in PI's New Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders¹.

In looking at risk analysis (risk = threats x vulnerabilities/capacities), PI realised that the key to reducing risk is reducing threats and their impact. The analytical focus, therefore, is on the threats. This is because PI considers threats, in all their complexity, as the conditioning factor from which the need for protection ensues.

This methodological analysis breaks down the components of a threat in order to improve the collective human rights defender (HRD) subject's analysis and understanding of it.

It is comprised of three main steps:

1. analysis of the security incidents, threatening circumstances and whoever is responsible;
2. analysis of the aggressors and the aggressor network, from the main beneficiary of the aggression to the intermediaries and those implementing the aggression; and
3. reaching an understanding of the context, both at the micro level - what is occurring in the territory and in the local environment - and at the macro level - its connection to the national and international levels.

An act of aggression against an individual HRD becomes a threat if it becomes apparent that this same act might be repeated against other members of the collective HRD subject. This is why it is important to identify threats, along with the patterns² that signal which threats are most likely to be repeated.



¹ Eguren, E. & Caraj, M. 2012. New Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders. Brussels: Protection International. This chapter has been put together based on the definitions in this Manual. The author has decided not to cite the source for all of the definitions taken from the Manual in order to allow the text to flow more naturally. This manual can be referred to for a more detailed, conceptual and methodological study of risk and threat analysis.

² The regular occurrence of incidents, according to some sort of schedule.



What is a threat?

It involves an inherent possibility that someone may damage the physical, psychological or moral integrity of another person or their property through an intentional and often violent action. A threat is a declaration or indication, either implicit or explicit, that has the conscious aim of causing damage, normally to gain something. Identification of a threat is important for assessing the probability of its realisation.



A threat always has an **origin**, which PI calls an **aggressor network**. Within this network, one opposing stakeholder/main aggressor (the beneficiary of the attack) can be identified: they are a threat because they are affected by the HRD's work, and consequently make threats. A threat also has an **objective**, which is linked to the impact of the work to defend rights, and a **specific means of expression**, i.e. a particular way in which it is expressed. There are different types of threat, depending on from whom (origin), why (objective) and how (means of expression) it is made. These are not mutually exclusive but, most often, complementary to one another.

The exclusionary threat : This type of threat exists in the local and national contexts in which actions to defend human rights are developed, and it arises due to the exclusion of large sectors of the population who are ignored in decision-making about issues that directly affect them. One such example is when a community is not consulted about ambitions to exploit natural resources in their territory, and extractive companies push their projects through.

Governments, patriarchy and racism play a significant role in this exclusionary action. This type of threat hangs over the territory, environment and sustainable development of communities.

Stakeholders who are prepared to threaten to defend their interests will attempt to take action against those who stand in defence of the territory. The activation of social groups to defend territorial rights thus culminates in these groups being targeted (a new type of threat). On many occasions, PI Meso has seen how – as a consequence of a racist, stigmatising and exclusionary viewpoint towards a territory's population – aggressors threaten the territory with projects to make exclusive use of it, and take steps to gain control of the territory and population (by buying consciences, or buying local and departmental authorities). In this way, they prevent social movements from opposing their interests.



The incidental threat: Corruption of and co-option by authorities, unorganised crime, and gangs or drug traffickers. These are mostly examined during analysis of the context.



The targeted threat: This is a threat with a specific purpose that is directed with intention at someone. Normally the most common type of threat suffered by HRDs, its objective is to silence, curb and modify their work in defence of the collective subject's rights, as well as to have an impact on the emotions and day-to-day behaviour of its members.

Targeted threats can be divided into:

Indirect threats: These are directed at other HRD individuals or groups who are either in nearby physical areas or carry out similar work, which is why any increase in the probability of these threats being realised (also against the collective subject conducting the analysis) is assessed. One example is the criminalisation of leaders of other community organisations acting in defence of territory.

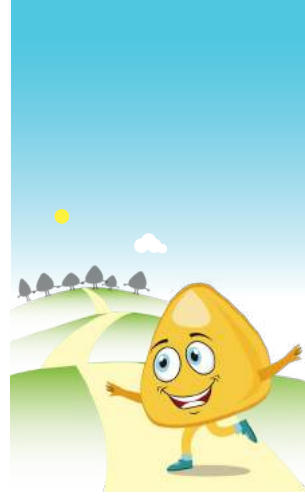
Direct threats: These are directed explicitly at the HRD collective subject (or its members) that is carrying out the analysis. In this case, the declared threat is defined as a declaration or indication of an attempt to cause damage or suffering to individual or collective HRDs, as a way of "punishing" them and silencing them for the work they carry out. This is normally with the specific objective of weakening and interrupting processes of collective resistance. HRDs usually receive threats as a result of the impact their work has for the territory in question, and the influence they have on the national and international context.

From the perspective of practice theory (covered in Chapter 3), threats are a set of practices and resources that aggressors use with the specific objective of neutralising the work of HRDs.

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WHAT DOES PI MESO RECOMMEND?



2.2 Threat analysis

HRDs who live in rural areas may come up against multiple types of threats. From experience, PI Meso believes it is important to share and collectively analyse a threat to assess when and how it comes about in time and space.

Indeed, not all threats result in violent acts; sometimes they go no further than a stated threat. This depends on many factors, such as the political power and resources of the aggressors, and the collective subject's capacity for deterrence.

A threat is both a personal and collective experience at the same time, because it not only affects the receiver in some way, but also those who live and work around them. In fact, threats usually provoke feelings of vulnerability, fear, defencelessness and nervousness among members of the community organisation, even if they are not the target of a direct threat.

This is why it is said that **threats also have a psychological component**. For example, in the specific case of a collective HRD subject in a rural area, death threats may have repercussions within the organisation. As well as the emotions evoked, these threats also sow mistrust and fear that may undermine unity among members, or even break down the social fabric of a community.

Other factors to be considered are an individual's past experiences of violence and the gender dimension to threats, since particular types of attack are directed towards women. Consequently, every threat has a different impact, which reinforces its capacity to have an effect on security - **in emotional, moral, economic and physical** terms.

It is therefore paramount that community organisations are aware of and recognise patterns of attack in order to strengthen or implement collective protection tactics suitable for the specific situation. In addition, collective communication about threats received is important to share the emotional burden they impose.

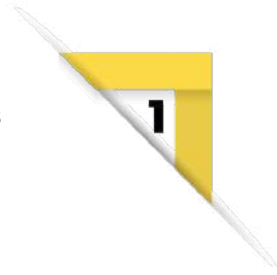
It is also important to consider the historical memory component of a threat.

By comparing a map of serious human rights violations committed during times of political violence with a map of locations where extractivist policies are being carried out, it becomes apparent that these territories coincide. They are, in fact, the same territory, and the collective memory component is entrenched in the victims' psyche. Currently, in territories that have had violent clashes with the apparatus defending megaprojects, the mere physical presence of the repressive apparatus that caused violence and use of methods of psychological warfare during the internal armed conflict triggers fear within communities.

The economic elite and corrupt system co-opted by companies have perfected this as a resource for domination. It is necessary to address the present, while learning from the past. Everything is interconnected in time; we look to the past for future solutions.

The five steps of threat assessment:

Determine the facts



Determine the most common patterns of attack in a specific territory over time



Determine the perpetrators: the main aggressor and the aggressor network



Determine why they are threatening us, what they are threatening us for, and their resources, capacities and weaknesses; and



Arrive at a collective, shared understanding of the threat assessment





2.2.1 Analysis of security incidents



The first two stages of threat analysis are carried out through what PI calls **security incident analysis**. This section covers the analysis of incidents from the perspective of HRDs in rural areas.

A **security incident** may be defined as **any fact or event that affects the security of a HRD, community organisation or the collective subject** involved in defending territorial rights. The impacts that define these incidents may be at the physical, material, economic and psychological levels.

It is advisable to record all incidents, because they may be seen as indicators of the particular security situation of a specific community organisation. In fact, in the collective analysis of security incidents, it is crucial that participants are as precise and detailed as possible when reporting each incident.

It is therefore important that the collective HRD subject develops a **practice of recording security incidents**, as a collective protection practice.

This means all members of a community organisation noting down every incident that happens to them personally or collectively. Each community organisation will adopt their own way of recording these, depending on the specific context and taking into account their everyday practices.

For example, they may use a shared notebook in which everyone can write incidents down (ensuring that this notebook is kept in a safe place), compile incidents during community meetings, or agree that each person will have their own personal notebook that they fill in. All options are valid: the important thing is to systematically record incidents.



How to record a security incident:

- **What happened?** (Focus on describing the facts)
- **Where and when did it happen?** (The exact place, date and time)
- **Who was the perpetrator?** (Include as many details as possible, e.g. the vehicle registration number, a description of the aggressor or the suspect, etc.)
- **Who was attacked, and was any damage caused to them or their property?** (Include as many details as possible about the damage caused)

A rigorous record of security incidents can be useful when reporting crimes to national or international authorities, which usually ask for very detailed information in order to follow up the report.

PI Meso facilitates the collective analysis of security incidents after the recorded facts have been shared. The importance of carrying out analysis regularly must be emphasised because, as mentioned above, it may vary with time.

In conducting the analysis, security incidents should be ordered chronologically, intentional incidents separated from indiscriminate, opportunistic incidents, and all incidents finally divided into different categories with the aim of identifying **patterns of attack**. Categories are chosen depending on the context, specific situation and the objectives of the collective subject. For example, there may be patterns relating to the time, types of attack (direct attack, intimidation, criminalisation, surveillance, etc.), symbols used, place and recurrence.

This categorisation is important for raising awareness of and analysing the **most common attack patterns³ in a specific territory**. For example, it might be useful to reflect on how aggressors' practices are reproduced in the territory, community and community organisation. On this basis, collective protection strategies can be formulated to neutralise and transform patterns of attack, rendering them ineffective.

The ultimate objective of this analysis is that these same defenders acquire a methodology for analysing their own **security incidents, and that this analysis of security incidents becomes a social practice⁴** for collective HRD subjects, as a routine collective protection practice.



³ For detailed analysis of attack patterns in rural areas of Guatemala, see UDEFEGUA's Annual Report for the years

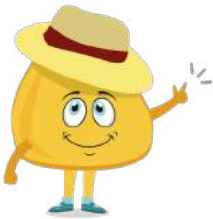
⁴ Social practices are covered in depth in Chapter 3



2.3 Analysis of aggressors and their allies

Analysis of the aggressor network, including identification of the opposing stakeholders/aggressors, their structure, their ideology, their economic interest and position towards racism is fundamental to completing threat analysis. This lays the groundwork for finding ways to take action on specific points (targets), which will reduce the possibility of a threat being carried out.

It is also important to conduct a detailed analysis of the opposing stakeholders, since this allows for a more reasoned (although never definite) assessment as to whether a threat may turn into a real attack. This analysis is used to assess the opposing stakeholders' capacity for action. With these objectives in mind, reflection is conducted within the collective on the various characteristics of each aggressor.



2.4 Understanding the context

Finally, threat analysis is essentially an exercise in context analysis.

Understanding of the specific context in which threats develop and of the aggressor network responsible allows for analysis to be conducted at the local, national and international levels.

Building a thorough analysis of the context from the micro level (what happens in the family, attacks in the territory, security incidents) to the macro level (national and international stakeholders that form part of the aggressor network, analysis of the capitalist system, etc.) provides a comprehensive overview of the situation.

This helps to understand how a problem shared with other territories, each with their own particular characteristics, derives from a system of global injustices that the collective subject is caught up in. It likewise shines a light on the visible, invisible and hidden power of stakeholders in the current context and the implications of the power structures present in the territory.



2.4.1 Specific application of the risk analysis

This section will cover the use of risk theory as a tool for understanding risk management in a specific space and time. Analysis of the risk to HRDs consists of using a methodology that facilitates analysis of a specific threat situation and decision-making regarding actions for prevention and immediate response in a given scenario. The intention is to reduce the risk to a collective or organisation, or to participants of a specific event, by creating a contingency plan for the specific threat.



According to PI's understanding, this methodology is most effective when using risk analysis for a specific place or activity, and a specific space and time.

Risk analysis is conducted using the following formula:

(As shown below, the risk is equal to the threats multiplied by the vulnerabilities, divided by the capacities)

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Threats} \times \text{Vulnerabilities}}{\text{Capacities}}$$

Having covered the fundamental principles of threat risk analysis above, there are two other factors to consider as part of analysis: vulnerability and capacity.

Vulnerability: This is the extent to which a person or group is sensitive to loss, damage or suffering as the victim of an attack. It varies from person to person, and from group to group, but may also vary over time for the same person or group. Vulnerability is always relative, because all people and all groups are vulnerable in some way.

However, everyone has their own level and type of vulnerability, depending on their circumstances.⁵ As such, it is more effective to carry out analysis in a particular space and time when circumstances are more stable.

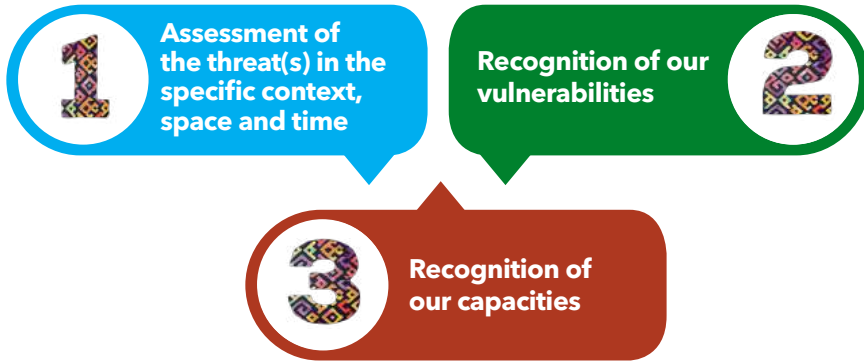
⁵ Ibid. Pg. 31





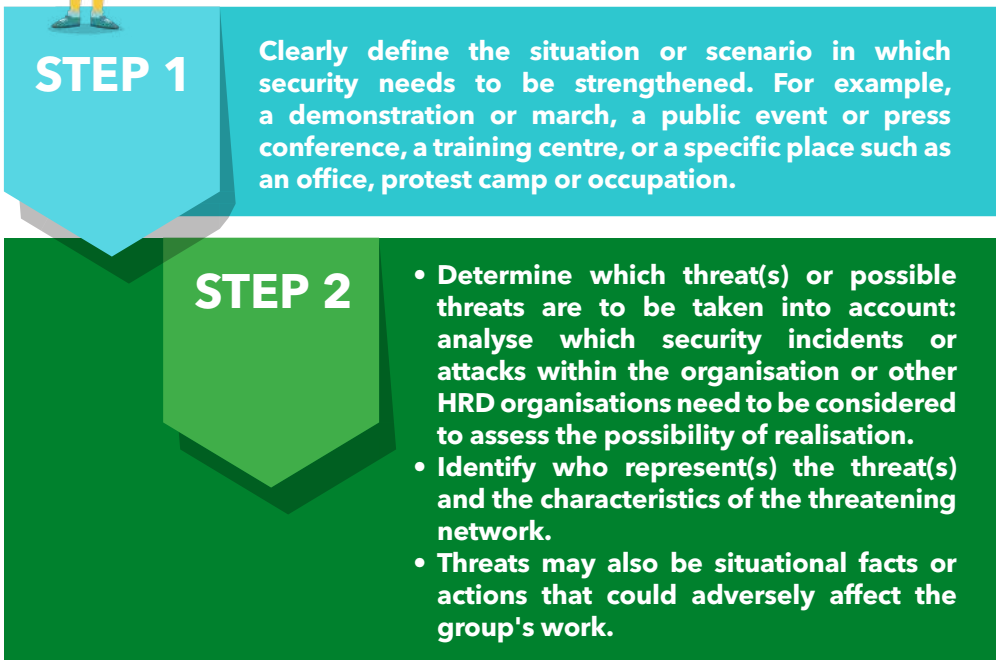
Capacity: This refers to the strengths and resources of a group or person that enable them to achieve a reasonable level of security⁶

Analysis can be developed using the following framework:



2.4.2 How is the risk formula applied?

It is recommended to work as a group, in order to obtain a variety of perspectives and information.



⁵ Ibid. Pg. 31

STEP 3

Identify vulnerabilities: list all of the organisation's circumstances that could be favourable to an attack, in the event of threat realisation.

STEP 4

Identify capacities: as indicated above, these are all of the organisation's circumstances that can hinder or mitigate the damage caused by a threat.

STEP 5

Put together a contingency plan: using the information worked on in the previous step in conjunction with the whole group, propose and agree on security measures collectively. Start with the threat(s), how to confront it/them and how to deter an attack. Next, look at measures to correct vulnerabilities and strengthen capacities.

For the contingency plan to be viable and effective, it is important to consider the following elements:

- It should be realistic and realisable.
- It should be adapted to the needs at that time.
- The security measures should concern the whole organisation and its constituent HRDs.
- Specific responsibilities should be assigned to develop the contingency plan.
- The contingency plan should seek to maximise the emotional strength of those confronting the threat(s) and must anticipate any possible psychosocial damage.
- The measures should integrate the gender perspective.
- The availability of resources for the measures should be checked as required.





2.5 Conclusions

To conclude, it has been demonstrated that threat analysis is a highly valuable tool for compiling, sharing and analysing information within an organisation, and for building a common knowledge base among its members.

. PI Meso has seen how these methodologies can create safe spaces of trust in which participants feel comfortable sharing their fears and concerns caused by the threats to which they are exposed.

While it may not be the main objective, PI Meso views it as a positive that HRDs can express their emotions and obtain group psychosocial support at the same time, because recognition, management and transformation of the emotional sphere is also part of collective protection (as will be seen in Chapter 5).

However, this analysis has been seen to be limited in terms of risk forecasting in everyday life.

Threats are complex, ecological, systemic and depend on multiple factors.

They are not based on a linear cause-and-effect relationship, which means they cannot be accurately predicted. This means that security measures for group/collective processes need to be built based on a more complex concept than that of vulnerability or capacity, adapted to complex, relational and multidimensional dynamics.

This consideration does not mean to invalidate these methodological tools, but to evidence their limitations to avoid creating unrealistic expectations in the supported community organisations.

Observation and reflections regarding these limitations have been indispensable for PI's learning and transformation processes, as a prompt to keep contemplating and creating new conceptual and methodological tools with supported organisations.



SECOND PRACTICE



METHODOLOGIES FOR THREAT ANALYSIS

MAP OF SECURITY INCIDENTS

Objective: To identify patterns, specific threats, places and distribution over time.

Description: In groups or individually, participants identify security incidents within a specific time period, and write the details of each incident on an A5-sized card: date, place, aggressor and community attacked. The card is divided into four for each of these different details, noting a brief explanation of the facts in the centre. Gender-based incidents are identified in purple and high-impact incidents in red.

These cards representing each incident are arranged along the wall in a timeline during the plenary presentation. The participants reflect collectively on the peak times for threats, and the quantity of gender-based and high-impact incidents. The patterns of attack are subsequently analysed, identifying each pattern with a different coloured sticker.

Taking into account each incident, statistics are calculated by pattern and by aggressor. Finally, this leaves a comprehensive overview of the security incidents in the territory, the type of threat being confronted, who the aggressors/perpetrators of the incidents are, and the places and times with the greatest number of incidents.





NETWORK OF AGGRESSORS AND THEIR ALLIES

Xabier Zabala, *PI Guatemala (2013)*.

Objective: To analyse which stakeholders are behind attacks and/or threats and which play a supporting role.

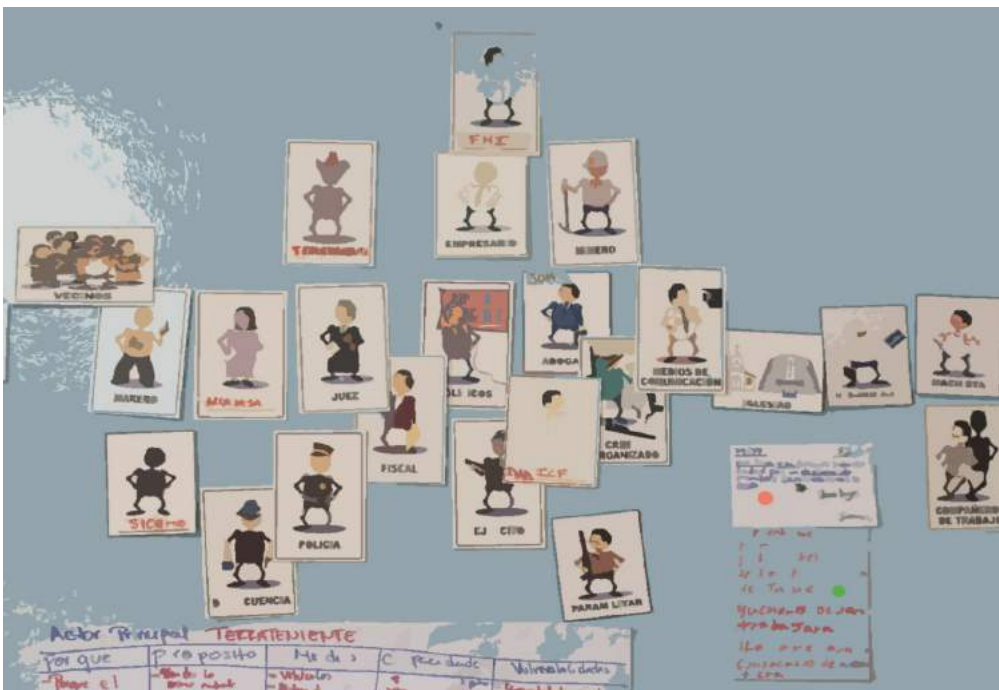
Description: Using the incident map, the group deduces who the aggressors behind the incidents are. With the help of icons (schematic drawings of possible stakeholders), they identify all of the aggressors acting in the territory, to form a baseline.

The main stakeholder is distinguished (whoever benefits from the threat and aggression against the defending collective), and the icon representing the main stakeholder is placed at the top, separating them from the icons on the baseline.

The group continues identifying other stakeholders that participate in the attacks/threats, connecting the main stakeholder with the baseline of aggressors.

The end result is an iconic representation of the aggressor network. Names specific to the case in question can be added to the icons.

This makes it possible to see the organised network behind a threat, including those responsible for security incidents and who they are connected and allied with.



ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN STAKEHOLDER

Objective: To conduct in-depth analysis of the main opposing stakeholder/aggressor.

To perform the analysis of the main stakeholder, the following template is proposed for discussion:



Stakeholder	Why?	Purpose	Resources	Capacities	Weaknesses
The main stakeholder in the aggressor network	Why is the main stakeholder attacking us? What is their motivation for attacking us?	What are they looking to achieve by attacking us? What do they hope will change as a result of their attack?	What resources does the main stakeholder have to carry out their attack?	What support may the main stakeholder gain to either execute the attack or obtain impunity?	What weaknesses does the aggressor have that affect its ability to attack? What obstacles or consequences may there be if they decide to attack?





"THE SEAT OF POWER"

Xabier Zabala, *PI Guatemala* (2013).

Objective: To experience the difficulty of defending rights faced with an unshakable power that has diverse resources and distracting discourses. To prove that collective action is indispensable to turn a situation around and confront a threat.

Time: 20-30 min.

Equipment: A chair without arms.

The facilitator places a chair in the centre of the room and asks participants to form a wide circle around the chair. The facilitator explains to the group that this is the "seat of power" in which decisions are taken, and so the objective is to sit in it. The facilitator sits in the chair and assumes the role of power. They explain the two rules to the group:

- ❖ They cannot use violence to take the "seat of power".
- ❖ Participants may gather together and discuss strategies, but they can only try one at a time; they may not approach as a group to try to take the "seat of power".

As participants proceed with trying to remove the facilitator from the seat, the facilitator will resist in every way, never leaving the seat. The facilitator may take part in a game (for example, to dance) but must not let go of the seat.

It is very difficult for one person alone to remove the facilitator from the seat, and the group will realise the need for collective action. The group will probably reach the conclusion that they cannot take the seat from the facilitator on their own, and opt to break the rules, acting collectively.

Between several people, the facilitator can usually be lifted and removed from the seat without the need for violence.

During the post-game reflection, participants will recognise that rules are often imposed by the system, and there is a need to act collectively to overcome more difficult problems.



POWER ANALYSIS

Contribution from JASS Mesoamerica on the gender perspective.

Objective: To deepen our understanding of power dynamics and relationships.

Description: Different spheres of power will be analysed:

- ❖ **Visible power:** Spaces, procedures and mechanisms for making decisions, laws, policies, regulations, budgets, and the three branches of separation of state powers.
- ❖ **Hidden power:** Interests and forces with influence behind the scenes. Companies, organised crime, etc.
- ❖ **Invisible power:** Cultural norms and patterns.

The categories of Visible, Hidden and Invisible Power are shared. The importance of these in seeing beyond the obvious must be explained, also because different protection strategies are used depending on where the threat emanates from (visible, invisible or hidden stakeholders). The icons are taken from the construction of the aggressor network and reclassified according to whether they represent visible, invisible or hidden power. During the plenary meeting, opinions are collected about where each aggressor icon has been placed, adding any aggressors that are missing. For this new classification, it is important to generate reflection on the function of each of the powers based on people's own experiences.



Chapter

3

Protection networks and social practices

3.1 The community, the collective subject and the community organisation



Firstly, it is important to make a distinction between the concepts of **community** and the **collective subject**.

The community is a sociohistorical construct expressed in the existence of customs, norms, guidelines, projects, social practices and common interests¹.

Specifically, PI Meso defines community as “networks organised by kinship and/or neighbourhood relationships, which share a meaningful social and territorial space with respect to culturally-defined ‘world realities’ (...)”².

What differentiates the community from the collective subject is that the latter is seen and defined as such, and, “recognising its affiliation with a group and a territory, develops a collective conscience about its role in order to integrally transform it” (Portilla Rodríguez, 2008, p. 4); moreover, the collective subject acts “within a society with a view to defending the interests of the individuals it represents, to respond to needs identified as priorities”³.



In this document, the **collective subject** specifically refers to groups of **activists and HRDs in rural areas** who:

- i) share characteristics of identity;
- ii) share a socio-territorial space;
- iii) act towards a common objective through their work for the defence and promotion of individual and collective human rights; and
- iii) consciously develop defences and work together to create networks and ties of solidarity.

¹ Bello Albarracín, M. N. 2001. Identidad, Dignidad y Desplazamiento Forzado. Una lectura psicosocial. In: Desplazamiento forzado en Colombia: Conflicto, Paz y Desarrollo. Colombia: Ed. Kimpres Ltda, pp. 299-318.

² Contreras, R. 2000. Empoderamiento Campesino y Desarrollo Local. Revista Austral de Ciencias Sociales. 4, pp. 55-68. Quote taken from p. 57.

³ http://cursos.fadu.uba.ar/cursos/004/Actoressociales_.doc

Within this framework, it is useful to mention that the collective as a subject may adopt various **forms of organisation and expression**. One such example is the establishment of **community organisations**, with lesser or greater levels of formality⁴.

A community organisation is a space for collective action towards one or more common objectives (Contreras, 2000, p. 59). PI Meso defines collective action as:



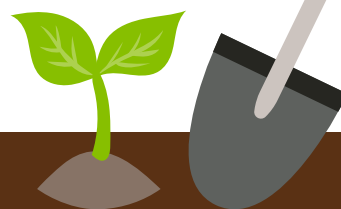
“the product of intentional guidelines developed within a scope of opportunities and restrictions. ... [It] is the product of a system of action made up of three vectors: a) the goals of the action, b) the means used, and c) the environment in which the action takes place.”⁵

In this publication, explicit reference is made to community organisations whose objective is to defend rights of territory and life, with a focus on common and collective rights.

It is important to consider that **consensus** regarding collective action for territorial defence against extractive megaprojects or any other kind of large-scale threat does not always have the full support of the community.

At times, the defence of collective rights takes place within a heavily polarised climate due to the actions of external stakeholders. In their attempt to obtain exclusive use of the territory, these stakeholders employ a number of strategies to co-opt the community population. A

community organisation is a vital resource for strengthening the collective subject’s internal protection and security capacities, which are developed alongside the capacities to defend their rights and raise the visibility of their struggle in society.



PI Meso has learnt an important lesson from experience, as confirmed in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras:

“the community organisation is the foundation for strengthening collective protection practices and actions and this protection is also indispensable to achieving the security and permanence of the community organisation”⁶.

⁴ In this publication, references are made to community organisations in general, regardless of whether they are formal or informal, and this concept is used as a synonym for the collective HRD subject.

⁵ Chihu Amparán, A. & López Gallegos, A. 2007. La construcción de la identidad colectiva en Alberto Melucci. POLIS. 3(1), pp. 125-159, available at <http://148.206.53.230/revistasuam/polis/include/getdoc.php?rev=polis05&id=369&article=368&mode=pdf>

⁶ Aj Noj Guatemala internal document, PAR 2011





3.2 Collective protection of HRDs in rural areas

Collective protection arises as a need when faced with a threat and it is the concept that forms the basis for developing the collective HRD subject's strength to protect others and itself.

Collective protection processes are complex and diverse, since they are related to the specific characteristics of the community organisation and of the communities who incorporate them. The concept also includes the protection of collectives, which should be offered by duty-bearing authorities.

Collective protection is defined as follows:



A set of social practices adapted to a context of threats and activated through social networks inside and outside the territory, based on ties and bonds that inspire solidarity.



This definition contemplates the social, relational, territorial and emotional aspects of protection processes.

Collective protection is completely unrelated to small, individualised actions for protection or security; it is made up of learnt, socialised processes that are activated when confronted with collective threats in the action space (PDCOL p.41).

As such, collective protection has a spatial, territorial dimension, since the collective subject also needs security in the spaces in which it lives and acts.





Collective protection should be understood as a relational, cultural and contextual strategy - a process that should be considered and built based on the world vision, identity, social relationships, practices and territory of the collective subject.

The concepts of protection and security are related to collective, subjective processes of appropriation and construction because their meanings vary with the cultural context (beliefs, values, myths, rites); are determined by the experiences, social practices, and individual and collective resources of each collective subject; and are also related to gender-specific characteristics.⁷

These meanings will be determined when strengthening collective protection processes and, from experience, PI Meso considers it necessary to explicitly define these for each collective subject.



To be effective, protection must be dealt with at the collective level: from the organisation, community or territory.⁸

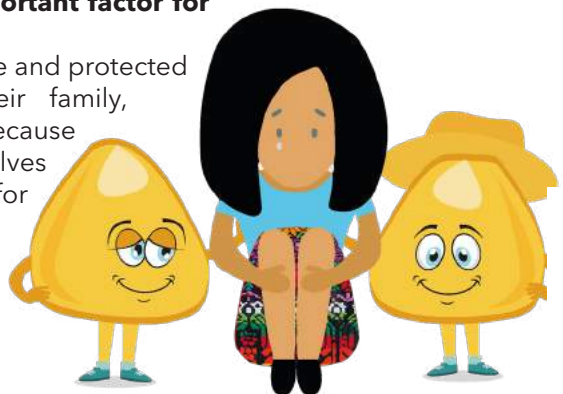
In workshops with various community organisations, PI Meso has asked participants to consider the following questions:

What does security mean to me ?
When do I feel most safe

The answers have varied greatly, but a key takeaway is that **social relationships are an important factor for protection.**

People state that they feel more secure and protected when they are supported by their family, organisation and/or community, because these social relationships are in themselves a resource for their protection, as well for emotional support.

It can therefore be said that the collective subject's protection will always correlate with their interactions within their social setting (family, organisation, community, environment, etc.).



⁷ Bello Albarracín, M. N. & Chaparro Pacheco, R. 2011. Acción sin daño y construcción de paz. El daño desde el enfoque Psicosocial. Programa de iniciativa Universitaria para la Paz y la Convivencia. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

⁸ Eguren, E. 2008. Talk on "Desafío de la Protección Colectiva". Seminar "Protegiéndonos ante la amenazas del siglo XXI", Guatemala.



In the context of the support process, this means getting acquainted with the sociocultural context of the organisation in question and their social relationships inside and outside the territory, because social ties are key factors in reinforcing the collective protection process.

Based on reflections and experiences in the field, PI Meso works with the concept of **protection networks (PNs)**⁹, considering that this is where social practices for collective protection are borne. Social networks, both internal and external, are thus essential for strengthening collective protection.

Social relationships with various local, national and international stakeholders are key resources for community organisations in strengthening internal protection capacities.

They are also vital to breaking isolation, which breeds invisibility and impunity from the systemic rights violations that occur in many rural areas of the Mesoamerican territory.

3.3 Networks and community organisations

Protection networks (PNs) are a strategy for strengthening and implementing collective protection practices that offers a “comprehensive, articulated response to a risk”¹⁰ (PI-Udefegua, Guía Cuidándonos, 2009, p. 90). The objective of a PN is to improve the security conditions of the collective subject of human rights defenders (HRDs) in the defence of their territory, and PNs are established as a keystone of work towards collective protection. PNs are diverse, ever-changing and necessary for the defence of territory.

PNs activate the different social networks that the collective HRD subject builds inside and outside its territory. The term “social networks” is used here to mean “a defined set of actors – individuals, groups, organisations, communities, global societies, etc. – who are linked to each other through one or a set of social relationships” (Lozares, 1996, p. 108).



A discussion of social networks within the domain of collective protection involves looking at the reality of the situation from the perspective of meaningful relationships among social stakeholders, in a given context and at a given time.

Social relationships guarantee security and protection processes for HRDs and strengthen the fight against impunity for attacks. The characteristics of PNs are that, as well as developing the links, bonds and communication that are implicit in social networks, they activate a response of solidarity towards the most vulnerable people or groups.

¹⁰ The protection network (PN) strategy will be discussed in Chapter 4.



Solidarity is a fundamental component of a collective threat response.

As emerges from the narratives of HRDs, “solidarity is a necessary form of union and support in the defence of territory; it is a principle and value; it is the capacity to develop harmony between human beings inside and outside a disputed territory”.¹¹

Solidarity is contextual: it is generated and developed according to a network's characteristics and among stakeholders in this network. Responses are modulated according to the process and needs of the conflict in the territory, and take multiple forms (physical presence in the territory, political advocacy, raising the visibility of resistance and of human rights violations in the media, legal assistance, emotional or psychosocial support, etc.).

Over years of work in the field and the participatory action research (PAR) carried out between 2013 and 2015, PI Meso has seen how social relationships have played a vital role for the HRDs it works with in rural Guatemala.

As highlighted in Chapter 1, HRDs have stressed the importance of the relational dimension to their own sense of security. These relationships can also break the isolation that breeds invisibility and impunity from systemic rights violations in rural areas.

Network theory supports this narrative, seeing social networks as “social capital that actors can use to pursue their own ends or interests” (Coleman, 1988 and Granovetter, 1985, cited in Lozares, 1996).

Effectively, PI Meso has observed how community organisations who have been able to build strong internal networks of solidarity in their own territories have shown a greater capacity to confront threats.

Where they have also succeeded in developing relational ties with national and international stakeholders outside the territory, they have gained shows of solidarity in emergency



¹¹PI. 2015. La Puya Un ejemplo de defensa del territorio. [Online video].

situations, the presence of observers, public denunciations (videos, photos and statements), political denunciations (lobbying of different national and international authorities and institutions) and legal assistance in criminalisation cases.

PNs therefore create agency - power to act - since access to resources and knowledge (social capital) is extended beyond the existing social practices of each collective subject.

In other words, a PN is made up of the community organisation and multiple local, national and international stakeholders in constant interaction. They are united in the same objective: to increase the security of HRDs by improving their collective protection and preserving their Right to Defend Human Rights (RDHR).

PI distinguishes between the internal network, which corresponds to the relationships within the collective HRD subject and with its territory; and the external network, which refers to the relationships that the collective HRD subject builds with other community organisations, with sister and support organisations, authorities, institutions and other stakeholders outside the territory with the potential to positively impact on its protection ¹³ (Protection Desk Colombia, 2013).

In line with this viewpoint, PI Meso puts forth a methodology for building a PN. The experiences of community organisations were combined with theories and working methods to provide a methodological framework for application in the collective protection of HRDs in rural areas.



There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all PN. The network acts based on the knowledge and ways of doing things that are specific to each community organisation. PNs are activated from and for the defence of territory.

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The aim of this chapter is to provide a list of the conceptual tools and the proposal put forth by PI for building this strategy.

¹³ PDCOL(2013) La protección colectiva de los defensores del derecho a la tierra y el territorio en Colombia: Desarrollos conceptuales y desafíos metodológicos. Pensamiento y Acción Social y PI.

3.4 Overview of how PNs function

From its experience in the field, PI Meso has observed that a collective HRD subject defending territory and life needs three pre-existing fundamental elements in its internal structure to adopt the collective protection strategy of PNs: a certain level of **community organisation information flows**, through networks, and a **sense of solidarity** created by these networks.



1

A **community** organisation is derived from these primary actions; as seen in Chapter 1, it is a collective structure in which a set of activities and social practices are oriented towards a common objective. In this sense, the community organisation is a fundamental resource for developing processes to strengthen collective protection strategies. Without a minimal level of internal organisation of the collective HRD subject, it is impossible to facilitate these processes.

2

Information is shared by the collective HRD subject with its own territory and with the national and international support organisations that form part of its network. This basically consists of information on the context, social protection practices, attack patterns and aggressors. The flow and democratisation of information is one of the central elements of the PN strategy. This is covered in more depth in Chapter 5, on communication for threat confrontation.

3

Finally, **solidarity** (explained above) is the sentiment that is activated from social networks, and from social bonds, in response to the need to protect the collective HRD subject from an imminent or executed threat.

PNs are structured around a set of social practices developed within a community organisation and in relation with external stakeholders that influence the protection processes.

So, by making social practices the focus of analysis, it is possible to understand the structure of PNs and which social practices need to be developed (as capacities that strengthen the PN and by association the protection of the collective subject). For this reason, PI works on the basis of practice theory, which is explained below.



3.5 Practice theory in processes for the collective protection of HRDs in rural areas

During 2015, PI introduced practice theory as a new conceptual framework for facilitating diagnostics and processes to transform the collective protection capacities of the community organisations it supports. The aim was to increase the agency and social capital of PNs. This approach does not replace the conceptual frameworks previously adopted by PI, but integrates with them, bringing another change to the way protection is viewed.

Practice theory is a set of theoretical approaches that consider social practices as a central focus for social analysis (Bueger, p. 383).

Practices are defined in different ways: “as routine bodily activities made possible by the active contribution of an array of material resources” (Nicolini, 2012, p. 4), or “as a form of tradition reproduced in time through a process of active engagement and participation sustained by a specific community”¹⁴ (ibid., p. 15)”. depending on the theory adopted.

Nicolini maintains that the various approaches coincide in their understanding of a practice as a set of different elements such as infrastructures, tools, material things, symbols, discourses and singular actions that together have a specific meaning and objective (ibid., p. 10). Other characteristics of practices are that they are routine, collective, reproductive of the social order, interrelated and incorporate identities, communicative codes, collective representations, the environment, historical processes, our bodies, and individual and collective actions.

¹⁴ Nicolini, D. (2012): *Practice Theory, Work and Organization. An Introduction*. Oxford: University Press



PI Insight: The practices of a community take on a life of their own; they are part of the complex framework that delivers protection, but the effects of some practices could be considered as counter to protection.

“Gossip” is a recurring social practice in many societies, and one that generates vulnerability in many social leaders (particularly female leaders) when used to discredit and stigmatise their work in defence of human rights.



Applying this theoretical view of practices to protection processes means first identifying the everyday practices of the collective HRD subject. These practices are then analysed to see which may be significant, and how they may be adapted or strengthened by the collective subject to improve their collective protection. PI Meso proposes a change to the way that security is understood, which could be deemed a “practice-oriented shift” in the protection of community organisations, based around its members and its territory.

According to Nicolini (2012), the different approaches within practice theory have the following characteristics in common:

- ❖ practices are physical, material and discursive actions that acquire and create meaning for a collective at a given point in time;
- ❖ practices are contingent, mediated by material and discursive conditions, and understood within a historical context and a given space and time: they emerge, endure, evolve and disappear;
- ❖ practices are carried out by social actors (people) within systems of relationships on which they depend and to which they contribute;
- ❖ practices are interconnected and together make up a set, a structure and a network; and
- ❖ the body plays a role in the process of social transformation.



3.6 Viability of social practices

The persistence of a practice depends, in part, on the extent to which it can be sustained by the whole group of practitioners (people in the community), who through their actions maintain, reproduce and even transform the practice.



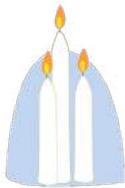
To work on a practice, it is important to pay attention to how practices gain practitioners and how they lose them.

To do this, it must be understood that compromise and motivation are not preconditions for carrying out a practice, but rather the result based on its viability and meaning within a specific collective HRD subject in a given territory.

In fact, implementing protection practices also depends on the prior availability of a number of essential components:



Materials, tools or infrastructures, e.g. indigenous batons, escape routes, internet access, megaphones, radios, mobile phones, maps or plans, cameras, etc.



Symbolic meanings and cultural forms, including experiences using the practice and their social significance e.g. initiation rite to the indigenous guard and group bonding rituals, declaration of peace communities or humanitarian zones, commitment to those who died defending the community, religious commitment, commitment to those who "support us", development of own identity, invocations, energy of the day, etc.



Practical knowledge and specific skills, e.g. knowing one's way around a territory, knowing how to act when confronted by an armed person or group, being able to hide, being able to leave quickly or find another route, being able to produce a report and send it via the internet, being able to negotiate with authorities, etc.

These constitutive elements of practices are not distributed uniformly among the members of a community organisation. The capacities of practitioners, at an individual and collective level, can determine the distribution of authority among people in a community organisation, the level of participation and, especially, the viability of a practice.

This is one way in which social inequalities and structural determinants influence practices. Structural constraints that influence protection practices are thus related to the unequal distribution of the materials, meanings and skills required for each practice.

In this sense, applying practice theory to protection means changing the focus of interventions and analysis: the focus is no longer on the person or the group, as the sum of the individuals, but rather on the practices of communities, and analysis of their protection capacity and adaptation to the needs of collective protection.



Placing the focus for analysis and change on social practices involves concentrating on their constituent elements, as well as on how, where, when and why certain practices are carried out and not others.

The improvement of protection comes from within the collective itself, borne out of its own social structure and cosmovision. This makes it possible to address the structural constraints of protection practices, including the mechanics involved and their results.

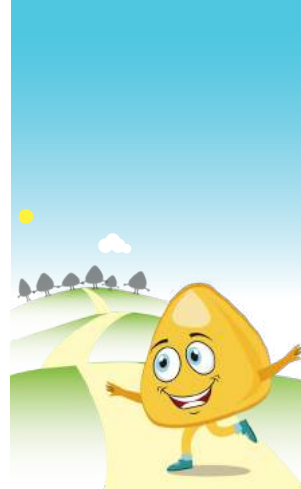
A practice-theory-based approach seeks to understand and influence how social practices

delivering protection and control of territory come about, endure or disappear. As such, this approach has methodological implications for working in the field with collective HRD subjects in rural areas, because it opens up new room for change in the process of supporting their protection.





WHAT DOES PI MESO RECOMMEND?



3.7 Methodological implications of practice theory

Using practice theory as a basis, PI began working on protection practices for the specific context of community organisations, as a political subject. Focusing on the most commonplace day-to-day elements ensures that these practices are developed without being imposed and/or removed from everyday realities.



PI supports community processes that already exist, and seeks to promote conditions for improving and creating protection practices within the set of existing social practices.

To this end, PI suggests the following steps to help strengthen protection practices:

1

First, define the social practices that are effective for protection in the specific context of each community organisation. The first step in the strengthening process is to recognise these practices and to understand their meaning in the organisation.

2

Next, identify the community organisation's practices to defend their territory and group them into different categories according to the effect they have on collective protection (i.e. identify and categorise the actions taken specifically for collective protection). Each category is understood as a related set of practices and expresses the capacity of the collective HRD subject to influence a specific level of collective protection. Each practice category has a specific protection objective, e.g. related to the capacity to protect the physical space, to organisational capacities or to participation. Each organisation will have its own practices according to the configuration of the territory, its material resources, skills, traditions, and historical and spiritual processes. For that reason, the categories PI proposes here should be understood as open systems.

This collective analysis helps those concerned to reflect and understand how these practices are developed and implemented, and how they relate to other practices in time and space. This is important for understanding the patterns of distribution and endurance of these practices, especially for the purpose of suggesting interventions to extend or improve them in order to achieve collective protection objectives.

<i>Nuestras prácticas de protección</i>	
<i>3 campanadas: Alerta</i>	✓
<i>1 campanada: Reunión comunitaria</i>	✓
<i>Celulares encriptados</i>	✓
<i>Contactos de medios de comunicación</i>	✓
<i>Ceremonias Mayas en día Kame</i>	✓
<i>Partido de fútbol comunitario</i>	✓



A series of categories are proposed to help identify practices, as follows:

- ❖ **Organisational practices:** capacity for agreement or consensus, emergency response, preventive action, etc.
- ❖ **Participation practices:** involving communities or the population in the territory, women, young people.
- ❖ **Practices in the management of physical space and its components:** home/workplace, public events, protection of digital information, etc.
- ❖ **Advocacy and lobbying practices:** communication - reporting or denouncing; lobbying - influencing (duty-bearing) authorities, etc.
- ❖ **Legal practices:** knowledge of the national and international laws that govern the collective HRD's specific rights, denouncing, defending itself in legal cases, etc.
- ❖ **Psychological and spiritual practices:** fear management, stress management, energy management.
- ❖ **Other**





Finally, discuss and agree on the categories of collective protection to be enhanced through the strengthening of practices. Completing this categorisation process enables the community organisation, with the external support of a facilitator, to reflect on its own practices and what it can achieve through them.

The Mesoamerica team finds focus groups a useful tool in this respect. At the end of the analysis and discussion, the participants choose 2-4 categories of practices that they consider as priority for strengthening the collective protection process.

Practices are not always conscious actions resulting from analysis and rational interpretations; they may be semi-automatic actions that exist as part of the social and cultural traditions of a specific community.

A community organisation will often not be capable of describing its protection practices or their scope. For this reason, in addition to the reflective practice of analysis with the collective subject, PI Meso suggests developing a methodology of participatory observation. The objective is to provide the field team with an observation tool that detects automatic, unconscious practices used by the organisation at specific times.

PROTECCIÓN INTERNACIONAL Mesoamérica

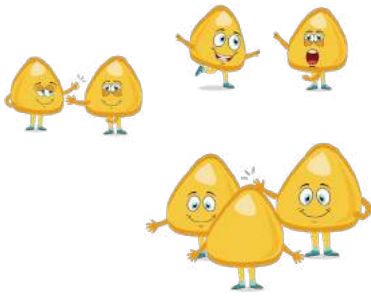
Instrumento de observación participativa

Objetivo	
Describe las posibles amenazas de la comunidad	
Describe las vulnerabilidades potenciales en la comunidad	
Se reconoce liderazgo en DDH de la comunidad	
Contacto con otras redes de protección	

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3.8 Organisation of PNs

Social practices are also observed within the configuration of PNs, which are built around the collective protection of territory and the spontaneous relationships formed inside and outside the community organisation. PNs should be

strengthened by simple actions that are adapted and inserted within the pre-existing practices of the community organisation and the community itself.

In facilitating processes to strengthen PNs, PI Meso has distinguished specific group processes that need to be understood, and these vary depending on the starting point of the work with the community organisation.

The **operative group** works to improve protection and security by using diagnostics, strengthening the process of internal organisation (internal network) and external organisation (external network), training, etc.

Group support processes involve taking psychosocial action and strengthening the group, as well as by extension the community organisation. **Exchange groups** foster the meeting of different community and/or support organisations to share experiences and knowledge.



Strengthening PNs involves increasing the social capital and agency within the territory in response to threats from the aggressor network.

Building and strengthening social relationships with other local, national and international organisations, networks and institutions is essential in forging alliances and coordinating work towards collective protection. The capacity to build social relationships is important because, as explained, the defence of territory and protection of human rights takes place across different action spaces at the territorial, local, national and global levels.



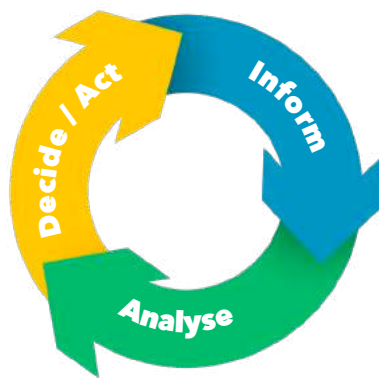
3.9 Preventive action of PNs



By preventative action, PI Guatemala refers to all actions and practices designed to prevent threats from being realised. Such actions to counter or weaken threats are established based on the prior analysis of information, the identification of any social protection capacities and practices that already exist within the community organisation, and the determination of attack patterns. Preventative action, using the methodology of PNs, is explored in various chapters of this manual.

Work in PNs is based on three interrelated action steps that form part of a circular process, which PI calls **IADA** (Inform, Analyse, Decide and Act):

I nform
A nalyse
D ecide
A ct



Information (listening, seeing, reporting, being attentive): Members of the community organisation implement different initiatives to ensure there is comprehensive and verified information about what is happening inside and outside the territory.

This information is shared among all of the stakeholders that make up the PN, from the community organisation to local, national and international supporting stakeholders.

Also, in this phase, the collective HRD subject produces information on any incidents in the territory or threats to human rights in order to communicate this to multiple stakeholders in different spaces.





Analysis (understanding, awareness): The community organisation meets periodically to analyse the information gathered and the threats to the organisation and its members. Sharing the analysis among the different stakeholders within the PN helps to improve the understanding of the threat and risk, from the local right through to the international level. For example, assessing possible increases in risk allows for coordinated actions to be implemented from different spaces, in order to most effectively protect defenders of territory.



Decision-making/Actions (looking after ourselves, protecting ourselves): Representatives of the community organisation implement strategies with measures and activities to strengthen practices linked to protection.

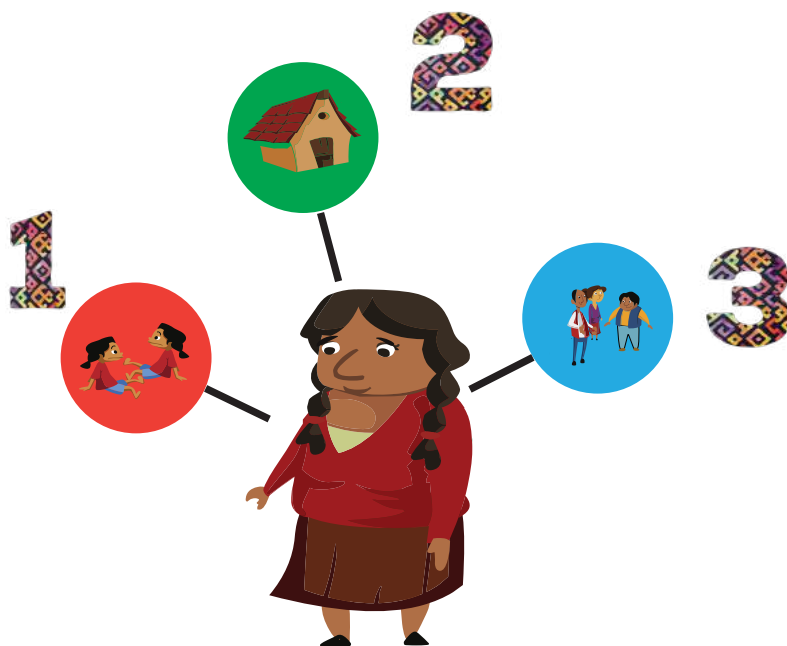
They also communicate the agreed collective protection strategies to all members of the community organisation to ensure everyone knows what the danger is and how to act. Additionally, the community organisation has a strategy for communication with external stakeholders to notify them of struggles to counter stigmatisation and criminalisation processes initiated against them, to report on human rights violations they are suffering and alert to emergency situations.



PI believes that internal and external networks are equally vital resources for collective protection, because social relations with multiple stakeholders operate at different levels and in different spaces.

PI's proposal is to implement the three phases of IADA in the different action spaces where the collective HRD subject and its members find themselves: in their personal space, in their territory (internal network) and in external spaces (external network).





1

Action at the personal level

This refers to each individual HRD's personal action space, comprising their family, household and neighbours, as well as their own emotional well-being. In this space each defender takes care of their personal security area and is permanently alert to what is happening around them. They know and have planned protection or emergency actions for themselves and their families.

2

Action at the community level in the territory

This refers to the community organisation's action space in its territory – the space belonging to the internal PN, which has the specific responsibility of protecting every member of the community organisation in the collective and in the territory.

3

Action at the local, national and international level

This refers to the action space outside the territory, at the local, national and international level. It is in this space that the collective HRD subject develops social relationships that promote solidarity and protection derived from stakeholders outside of its territory; it is here that the interaction between internal network and external network occurs. At this level, external stakeholders contribute to the protection of the collective HRD, its members and its territory.

These three levels of action must be understood as three systems of social relations that are independently responsible for individual and collective protection and yet, at the same time, need to be interconnected in order to be effective. The stakeholders at each level are interrelated and act from their own location and position of power towards the same objective of improving the security conditions of the collective HRD subject.



3.10 The emergency response in PNs

The **emergency response** (or immediate alert) is a set of coordinated actions to counter a situation of imminent threat to HRDs and the collective HRD subject. The actions are developed among different networks that interact with the PN according to their different roles, functions, powers and action spaces.

The response is activated from within the territory, from the members of the community organisation to the internal network and then on to external, supporting stakeholders, with the aim of neutralising the imminent threat and/or reducing the negative consequences for HRDs.



As part of its support, PI Meso makes a point of stressing the importance of this alert in the territory, thus helping it to strengthen and organise itself.

- ❖ **Who raises the alert:** It is important to have designated persons with this responsibility so as not to overload communications at the time of emergency.
- ❖ **What is the alert signal:** A variety of instruments can be used to communicate alert-related information to communities in the territory: mobile phones, children or young people as messengers, visual signals such as flags or audio signals such as bells, horns, important messages on community radio stations, etc.
- ❖ **How can each member of the collective react:** Also assigning specific tasks to other people in the organisation can help to develop a more coordinated response, avoiding the duplication of actions and guaranteeing all necessary actions.
- ❖ **Establishing some security regulations in cases of emergency:** These have to be simple, few in number and agreed upon.

It has been observed from experience that these courses of action need to be clear, simple and contextualised, building on typical social practices, to ensure they are applied during emergencies. It is important to consider the emotional dimension for HRDs in emergency situations. Fear and stress can create confusion, so it is much simpler to implement protection actions that are built around their everyday tasks.



Establishing specific, collective courses of action for emergencies contributes to the effectiveness of response and of protection. However, successfully neutralising a threat and/or reducing the negative consequences for HRDs will depend on many factors, including the balance of power between the community organisation and the aggressors.

For PI Meso, an emergency action can be considered effective when the collective HRD subject manages to limit damage for its members and maintain the capacity to continue its fight- even if physical, psychological, social or territorial consequences have been suffered, as can occur with evacuation.

Other theories coincide with this perspective, such as the concept of resilience of an ecological system, which is said to be defined by three characteristics : the capacity of a system to withstand disturbance while maintaining its basic functions, the ability to self-organise, and the ability to learn and adapt to disruptive events¹⁵ (Luthe, Wyss & Schuckert, 2012).

In this respect, it is appropriate to assess the collective's response after the fact, in order to evaluate its capacities and vulnerabilities during an emergency, how collective action was coordinated and applied in the PN, and the need for improvements by different stakeholders in the PN.



¹⁵ Luthe, T. , WYSS, R. & SCHUCKERT, M. (2012). Network governance and regional resilience to climate change: empirical evidence from mountain tourism communities.. *Regional Environmental Change*. 12. 10.1007/s10113-012-0294-5.



THIRD PRACTICE

METHODOLOGY FOR STRENGTHENING PNS

REFLECTION ON THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF COLLECTIVE PROTECTION

Xabier Zabala, PI Guatemala (2010)

Objective: To analyse collective action for protection by exploring its fundamental components.

Description: The short video “Penguins, ants and crabs” (available online) is played. The video shows different groups of small animals working as a team to confront a threat. After the video, questions are asked to generate reflection, e.g. “what did you see in the video?” or “which actions played a crucial role in these short scenes?” Ideas are brainstormed from the answers and written down on a flipchart. This facilitation exercise will strengthen actions relating to information and solidarity. To conclude, a connection is made between the results of the brainstorming and collective protection.



ROLE PLAY: HOW WE ACT AS A NETWORK

Xabier Zabala, PI Guatemala (2009)

Objective: To introduce the difficulty of implementing collective protection strategies within a network, by acting it out in a sociodrama.

Description: The idea is to use a sociodrama to recreate an attack situation in a territory where the community organisation has adopted the strategy of collective protection.

The facilitator asks the group to construct a representation of a community with security problems, and they must organise themselves to collectively confront any problem that may arise. They are assigned a territory in a clearly-defined space.

Two people are asked to volunteer to play the roles of police officer and hitman. One or two other participants are to observe the role play and take notes on how it develops.

The rest are the community, responsible for organising themselves for any eventuality, but once the role play has started they cannot talk among themselves.

While they go away to organise themselves, unbeknown to them, the facilitator chooses one person to be their ears (spy). The facilitator instructs this person to give information on the community's protection strategy and support the hitman and police officer without being detected.

The police officer and hitman are given orders to take action against the community. This might involve kidnapping someone, or they themselves can choose an action that is appropriate for the specific context and the needs of the group.

The role play is developed until a moment of block is reached, when no new actions are given.

On ending the role play, the participants return to the plenary meeting.



Plenary meeting:

The floor is given in the following order:

- ❖ **The victim:** How did you feel? Were you scared? Did you feel supported by the community?
- ❖ **The hitman:** How did you feel? Were you scared? Did your strategy work? What were the most difficult moments in achieving your objective? Why did you (not) achieve your objective?
- ❖ **The police officer:** How did you feel? Were you scared? Did your strategy work? What were the most difficult moments in achieving your objective? Why did you (not) achieve your objective? Did you have information on the community's strategy?
- ❖ **The community:** How did you feel? Were you scared? Did your strategy work? What were the most difficult moments in achieving your objective? Why did you (not) achieve your objective? Did you know that they had an informant (spy)?
- ❖ **The ears (spy):** How did you feel? Were you scared? Was your work easy? What were the most difficult moments in achieving your objective? Why did you (not) achieve your objective?
- ❖ **Observer(s):** What were the key moments in the role play? What seemed most important to you in terms of what did or didn't work in the different strategies?

This facilitation exercise can complement the reflection exercise and covers everything emerging from the collective discussion, to reinforce the importance of acting as a network.



INTRODUCTION TO PROTECTION NETWORKS

Xabier Zabala, PI Guatemala (2010)

Objective: To explain networking as a mechanism for collective protection, using graphical media.

Description: Working from a blank outline drawing of a community and its interactions (photo), the concept of a protection network is explained and sticky notes are added to indicate the main concepts of the protection network.

Flows of information and solidarity through the network are represented.

A distinction is made between flows contained within the internal network (which acts within the territory) and those involving the external network (which acts outside the territory), i.e. interactions between the internal network and external support networks, duty-bearing authorities and key stakeholders are signalled.



THE LITTLE PIGS AND THE WOLF

Xabier Zabala, PI Guatemala (2017)

Objective: To test participants' spontaneous reaction when faced with an imminent threat.

Description: One person is asked to volunteer to play the role of the wolf, and the rest are to be the little pigs.

The group positions themselves at one side of a large play area, preferably outdoors. They are instructed that they have to try to reach the other side without being trapped. }

The wolf, stood on a line in the middle, is instructed to trap the little pigs. After the first go, the little pigs that are trapped turn into wolves.

The group is once again instructed to get to the other side, but there are more wolves this time and the threat to the little pigs has multiplied.

. The game continues until all of the little pigs have been trapped or the threat from the wolf, or wolves, has been defeated. At the end of the game, the participants reflect on how in situations of imminent threat severe stress is generated, people tend towards an individual response of "every person for themselves" and it is very difficult to think of and coordinate a collective response.



POSTER WITH AN ILLUSTRATION OF SOCIAL PRACTICES

Adaptación de PI Guatemala 2019

Objective: To popularise the definition of the term “social practice” and reflect on its influence when confronted with a threat.

Description: Using a poster depicting the territory (featuring a hill with a boulder, river, forest, and the community doing various activities), the threat and potential aggressors are identified.

PI's interpretation: The boulder is the risk; the people next to the boulder (or the storm clouds) are the threat; the community's activities represent social practices.

The idea is to identify both practices that expose the community to risk (such as the woman and her house next to the river) and social practices that protect the community from the falling boulder.

Next, the social practices in the illustration are marked out. The illustration is used to facilitate reflection on practices for protection, practices that create vulnerability to risk and other practices that vary according to the circumstances.

What activities do we carry out that have become family, collective or community practices ?

Which actions seen in the sociodrama role play reflect the practices of our communities or collectives ?



ACTION PLAN FOR STRENGTHENING COLLECTIVE PROTECTION

Objective: To establish agreed actions aimed at strengthening protection practices, and collectively construct an action plan.

Description: The group creates a priority list of practice categories that need to be strengthened to improve collective protection.

- ❖ **Organisational practices:** capacity for agreement or consensus, emergency response, preventive action, etc.
- ❖ **Participation practices:** involving communities or the population in the territory, women, young people.
- ❖ **Practices in the management of physical space and its components:** home/ workplace, public events, protection of digital information, etc.
- ❖ **Advocacy and lobbying practices:** communication - reporting or denouncing; lobbying - influencing (duty-bearing) authorities, etc.
- ❖ **Legal practices:** knowledge of the national and international laws that govern the collective HRD's specific rights, denouncing, defending itself in legal cases, etc.
- ❖ **Psychological and spiritual practices:** fear management, stress management, energy management.
- ❖ **Other**

The categories selected can be divided among working groups. Members can choose to participate in the group where they feel they can best contribute. For each category, reflection-prompting questions are asked with a view to the group contributing, discussing and coming to agreement:

What we would like to do in the short term:



What can we do?
How can we do it?
Who will do it?
When will it be done?
What do we hope/**want to achieve** through these activities, or what will have changed after these activities?

What is the **ideal change** we would like to see within this category?
For each practice, the expected change and ideal change are written on different coloured cards in a way that answers the question: **who will do what?**

It is explained that the objective of this action plan is to allow evaluation of the following:



Whether the planned activities have been carried out.



Whether these activities realised the expected change.

If not, why not? What other activities would be necessary to realise the expected change?

If the expected change has been realised, what further activities would be necessary to pursue the ideal change?



...

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4

Disputed territorial control



4.1 What is territory?

For many community organisations, territory is synonymous with struggle, resistance and defence of life.

For HRD organisations, territory is an asset that must be collectively protected and preserved against dispossession, exploitation and contamination by national and international stakeholders that want to appropriate its natural resources for private profit.

Specifically, what is meant by territory in this publication?

The use and meaning of the term **territory** is complex and varies according to who the subject is and the science that defines it.

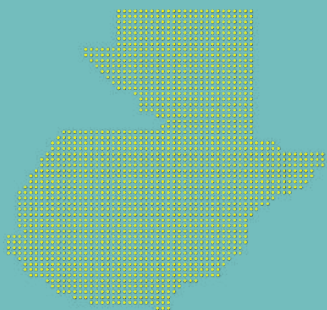
PI Meso does not seek to provide a single, linear definition here, but rather to define this concept from the perspective of indigenous farming communities in rural areas, by highlighting the importance and complexity of the territorial dimension for protection.

Territory is the object of defence of the collective subject's rights, specifically those derived from its relationship with the space it occupies. At the same time, however, it is this inseparable link between the subject and their territory that fosters their collective identity¹ and common action.

•••

••••

¹ The sociological discussion about whether territory is a necessary condition for defining the collective subject is not addressed in this publication, since only collective subjects that build their identity around territory are referred to here.



Territory is much more than an expanse of land. It is “a delimited space endowed with significance” (Delaney, 2005, p. 16)² where the geographical space (land/nature), the individual (person) and the collective (community) interact³ (Godelier, 1989).

From this viewpoint, therefore, territory is a social construct; a space that is “socially constructed, i.e. historically, economically, socially, culturally and politically” (Velásquez, 2012, p. 7).

This is why, in discussing territory, multiple aspects must be taken into consideration: territory is a **multidimensional concept** whose geographical and ecological, economic, social, cultural, spiritual and political dimensions are invisible, complementary and in constant interaction with one another. These dimensions are divided as follows:



² Delaney, D. 2005. Territory: a short introduction. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing

³ ProtectionInternational-UDEFEGUA. 2009. Cuidándonos: Guía para la protección de defensores y defensoras de derechos humanos en áreas rurales, p. 12. Available from: <https://protectioninternational.org/es/manuales-de-proteccion/cuidandonos-guia-de-proteccion-para-defensoras-y-defensores-de-derechos>



i) Social dimension

This refers to “the relationships that are established and the actions that are carried out by social groups in general in the process of organising, appropriating and constructing territory” (Velásquez, 2012, p. 35). Territory is the result of multiple relationships and dynamics developed at different levels: local, national and international. Social relationships are a fundamental component for territorial defence, as well as for the construction and strengthening of collective protection strategies. This approach will be detailed further in Chapter 3 on protection networks.



ii) Spiritual and cultural dimension:

Territory is also “collective patrimony and a defining component of identity”⁵ (Echeverri, 2004, p. 261); it is part of the collective being, inseparable from the collective self. In the Mayan cosmovision, as in other original peoples’ cosmovisions, there is the concept of Mother Earth (Pachamama), which is the perception of territory as “a living body that feeds itself, reproduces and builds relationships with other bodies” (Echeverri, 2004, p. 263). In this cosmovision, human beings are part of a whole, in a symbiotic relationship with the earth, which is a sacred body, the cosmos and the underworld⁷ (López, 1990, p. 79).



iii) Economic dimension:

This refers “to the economic characteristics, dynamics and processes (at different relational scales) that act as determining or structural territorial elements” (Velásquez, 2012, p. 49). Specifically, it relates to the forms and structures of property, means of production and resources, form of tenure, control and use of land, orientation of production, distribution of wealth, etc. This is the dimension in which national and international companies that view territory as a source of accumulation of resources and wealth play (or want to play) a role. The economic configuration of the territory then comes under dispute, from the local to the global level, and this has repercussions for all other dimensions, since they are all interconnected.

⁵ Sosa Velasques, M (2012) *¿Cómo entender el territorio?* Editorial Cara Parens de la Universidad Rafael Landívar Guatemala.

⁶ Echeverri, J (2004) *Territorio como cuerpo y territorio como naturaleza: ¿Diálogo intercultural?* IMANJ, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Sede Leticia.

⁷ López, A (1990). *Los mitos del tlacuache*. México: Alianza Editorial Mexicana.

iv) Political dimension:

This refers to “the exercise of power, which translates into ongoing, complex processes and dynamics of struggle for possession and control of the territory, which in turn results in territorial appropriation, construction and transformation. It also alludes to a scenario in which relationships of domination and of exercise of power (...) consider and project onto the territory according to their specific interests, which defines its evolution or transformation as a social construct.” (Velásquez, 2012, p. 71) (Palma, 1993, p. 14) . Given that the powers over a specific territory are constructed and transformed from positions of representation and different levels of legality and legitimacy, using advocacy to influence the power network acting in the territory is a focus for support work.



PI Meso's conclusion is that, to address the concept of territory, it is necessary to learn about and analyse all of its dimensions, since as a whole these determine its representation, control, administration of resources and use by the individual and collective subjects. In this sense, the territory is the stage, content and object of social, cultural, economic and political processes, which are developed on multiple levels: community, local, national and global.

Understanding its complexity is important to support collective subjects in the defence of territory and life and, above all, to facilitate collective protection processes that can influence different territorial dimensions.

A collective HRD subject's action space often corresponds to the **disputed territory, which is why it is of utmost importance to consider the **territorial element in collective protection strategies.****



⁸ Palma Murga, G (coord.) (1993). *La administración político-territorial en Guatemala: una aproximación histórica*. Guatemala: Escuela de Historia, USAC.

Disputed territorial control

Today Mesoamerica is facing a process of expansion of extractive (mega)projects and agro-export activities, accompanied by the accelerated implementation of infrastructure plans. All of this is imposing an accelerated process of transformation of regional and local territories.

This process exacerbates the historic problems of farmers and indigenous peoples, such as inequality of land tenure, displacement, and access to water sources, forest and other natural assets.

In parallel, social movements formed by territorial stakeholders are generating processes of resistance and territorial sovereignty guided by territorial conceptions such as belonging and identity, and other processes relating to human rights and development.



In the Mesoamerican context, the possession, appropriation, configuration, titling and use of a geographically delimited territory, as well as the related rights, are continually disputed between two or more stakeholders with divergent conceptions, interests and actions.

The action space of community organisations defending rights of territory and life is closely linked to the **disputed territory**.

It is precisely at this territorial level that threats and multiple attacks are expressed and occur against the collective human rights defender (HRD) who stands in opposition of the exclusive use and the exploitation of its territory. For these reasons, the territorial element is a key part of the process of building collective protection strategies.

This chapter briefly covers the concept of territorial control as a collective protection strategy that addresses the territorial dimension of protection. Territorial control also forms part of the protection network (PN) strategy set out in Chapter 3.

In addition, a tool built by PI is put forward for the collective analysis of the territorial control capacities of each of the stakeholders disputing a territory, within a specific and delimited time period.



4.2 Definition of territorial control

In the first chapter, territory is defined as a complex social construct that is, at the same time, a configured object as well as an object of representation, appropriation, organisation, reproduction and transformation.

In cases of disputed territory, it becomes a setting and object of conflict and struggle in which different stakeholders, with conflicting interests, act for its total or partial control and appropriation.

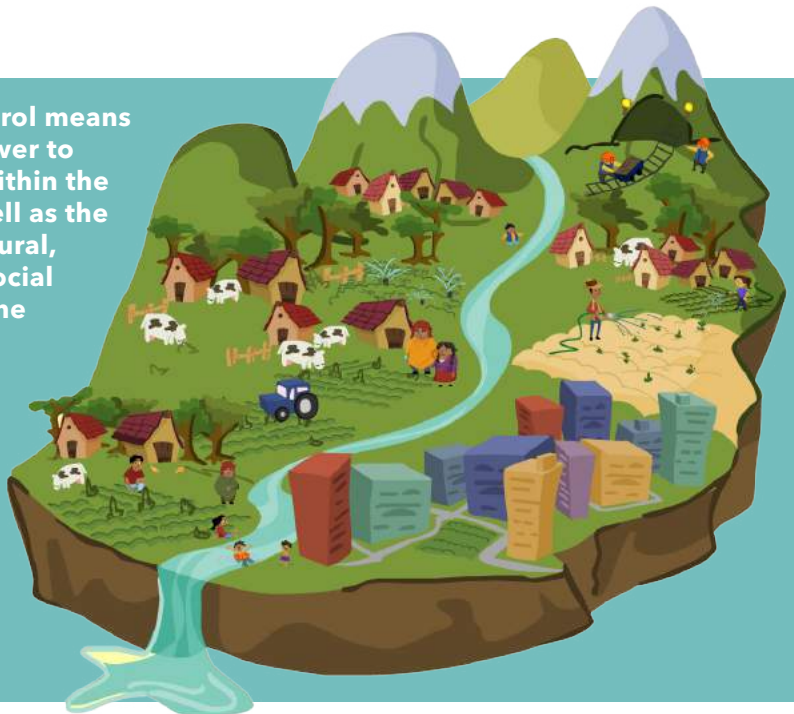
As previously explained, territory is a multidimensional concept in which the social, cultural, economic, legal and political dimensions are inseparable and interconnected.

As such, the capacity for territorial control will also depend on how the different stakeholders understand and, consequently, act within these dimensions.

From this perspective, control of territory refers to the capacities of each of the disputing stakeholders to remain in and impact on it, configure it to their benefit, and manage and regulate its use.



Territorial control means having the power to regulate life within the territory, as well as the economic, cultural, political and social practices⁹, of the peoples and communities who inhabit it.



⁹ The subject of practices is covered in chapter 3.

For indigenous and/or community organisations disputing control of a territory, it is also related to capacities to defend their processes of collective meaning, self-determination and autonomy.

Furthermore, there is a link between the practices and capacities related to territorial control and those corresponding to collective protection strategies. For example, territorial control is reciprocally correlated with the information a stakeholder has at its disposal, which is fundamental for collective protection.

Having detailed information from different points in the territory and knowledge about what is going on is linked to the capacity to tour it.

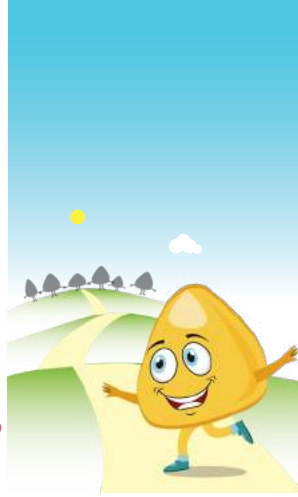
With all of this in mind, PI Meso understands territorial control as part of an overall collective protection strategy. It is one of the complex of practices that community organisations in rural areas adopt with the objective of defending their territory as part of a human rights strategy, under conditions of relative security, autonomy and social justice.



Territorial control is connected to multiple stakeholders, dimensions, levels, practices and attack patterns, and is continuously transformative and influential on the balance of power.



WHAT DOES PI MESO RECOMMEND?



4.3 Analysis of the dispute for territorial control

With the intention of providing a means of analysing this dispute for territorial control, PI has created a tool that facilitates analysis of the relational dimension of territorial control and helps to reveal the balance of power between stakeholders with diverging and conflicting interests regarding a particular territory.

This tool facilitates spaces for collective analysis within the community organisation. After a process of group discussion, new strategies for action and collective protection can be found.

PI calls the result of this work a *tool for analysis of the dispute for territorial control*¹⁰. This tool clearly sets out the control capacities and practices of the main stakeholders in a disputed territory: the community organisation, the collective HRD subject and its opposing stakeholder (selected according to each specific case). The practices and capacities related to territorial control have been divided into six parameters or categories of analysis, which are detailed in the following section.

This instrument should be understood as a basis for categorisation, or a guide, to facilitate collective analysis of the capacities for territorial control of community organisations and the opposing stakeholder.



Assessing the capacities of the main disputing stakeholders allows for better understanding of the collective protection opportunities, knowledge of the opposing stakeholder and a more informed decision to be made about where to strengthen daily practices to increase territorial control.

The methodology adopted for discussion and collective analysis is via a focus group for debate. This is developed based on the six parameters of the tool for analysis of the dispute. Work has also been done by forming groups to analyse the whole questionnaire or part of it. Looking at the work of each group at the plenary helps to open up debate on how categories have been assessed and how to build a consensus.

¹⁰ The tool was developed during the meeting in Guatemala in August 2013, between the Guatemala Project, UDEFEGUA, the local opposing stakeholder at that time, the Colombia Project, PRTU, and other external collaborators. It was then modified and expanded during the April 2014 meeting in Bogotá, with input from the Guatemala and Colombia projects, and PRTU. It was implemented in 2014 within the framework of Participatory Action Research (PAR) in both Countries. See Chapter 5.




4.3.1 The six parameters of territorial control

The six parameters proposed in this manual are created based on fieldwork with community organisations who defend their land and territory, including the collective reflections of participants in PI's various projects in Central and South America, and by people linked to the organisation. Analysis of the capacities and social practices of each collective HRD subject and opposing stakeholder using these six proposed factors helps to develop more in-depth knowledge of the existing territorial control capacities.

PI is specifically interested in analysing the balance of power between the community organisation and the opposing stakeholder. This instrument also helps to uncover the vulnerable points where the collective HRD subject needs to strengthen its organisational capacities and improve and recreate its practices - the objective being to transform the power relationships in the disputed territory. Each parameter has an infinite number of possible internal practices, and these depend on multiple factors related to the characteristics of the community organisation, territory, threat and aggressors, among others.

For example, parameter 1 includes the practice category called "Mobilising - walking the territory". This practice implies that the community organisation is capable of physically touring the territory, either completely or with limits imposed by the security conditions or for other reasons. The idea is to discuss whether the collective HRD subject possesses this practice, how it is conducted and under what conditions. Additionally, those who tour the territory are seen by other stakeholders, which can demonstrate their capacity to tour this route continuously. The capacity and practice of "walking a territory" generates control of the territory and, at the same time, is an indicator of control. In other words, there is a reciprocal relationship between social practices aimed at controlling the territory and the actual control of the territory.

The six parameters are summarised here, along with the proposed categories of practice that each may contain. These may be understood flexibly, according to each specific context, and adapted according to the characteristics of the community organisation conducting the analysis.

 **Physical and everyday appropriation of territory**
Physical and everyday appropriation is used here to mean the regular or routine practices developed by communities in their territory. These may be community social practices relating to the following categories:

- Being in, occupying, or remaining in a territory;
- Knowing it and signposting it;
- Using the territory and deriving livelihoods from it;



Nobilising - walking the territory;

Establishing internal usage regulations (e.g. types of crops, aid allocations, cohabitation regulations, alcohol consumption, etc.); and

Maintaining a respectful relationship with nature and the physical environment



Actions for resistance and defence of the territory

This parameter deals with direct actions carried out, in most cases, by collectives formed by the community on its own or with other communities, either in defence of the territory or for its protection and control. These are community social practices belonging to the following categories:

Mass, urgent and coordinated mobilisation;

Development of non-violent confrontation strategies (e.g. protest occupations in front of entrances to mining projects, marches, etc.);

Capacity to influence public policies on use of territory at the local, regional and national levels, and to create of local or national regulations;

Capacity to enforce existing national or local regulations for territorial protection, e.g. preliminary consultations, implementing areas of farming reserves, protection of forest or water sources; and

Control and setting of conditions for the entry and mobilisation of opposing stakeholders.



Organisation

This relates to the organisational process implemented by the collective subject to maintain and consolidate its resistance and territorial defence. The categories are as follows:

Capacity to collectively organise itself and get as many members of the community as possible involved (it has an organisational structure, holds periodic meetings, conducts assemblies, plans its actions for resistance and defence);

Capacity to deal with internal conflicts;

Capacity to manage risk and community despondency;

Participation of women in the process of resistance and territorial defence;



Participation of young people in the process of resistance and territorial defence;

Clarity and consensus on applying a non-violent strategy in processes of resistance and territorial defence; and

Capacity to take a stance on the development of its territory, fulfil agreements and generate consensus (e.g. having defined development proposals, position on the agro-industrial/mining-energy issue).



Information

This concerns the flow, management and use of information for resistance and territorial defence. PI proposes the following categories:

Capacity for being aware of and recording situations in the territory, and knowing what is happening in it;

Knowledge of the plans, intentions or movements of its opposing stakeholders;

Capacity to prevent the opposing stakeholder from gaining knowledge of the community's plans or strategies; and

Capacity for information-sharing and use of information internally (decision-making) and externally (raising visibility).



Alliances and external networks

This is understood as the community's capacity to build ties and networks with other stakeholders (communities, non-governmental organisations, churches, societies, international organisations) as a means of support or solidarity in its process of territorial resistance and defence. The proposed categories are listed below:

Capacity to raise awareness, convene and build alliances and solidarity within its community, in nearby communities or with other stakeholders that also live in the same territory;

Capacity to share development proposals with the community, district, town or village population; and

Capacity to engage in a network of alliances outside the territory, at the regional, national and international levels.



Knowledge of, use of and response from legal and administrative mechanisms

This refers to practices that the community has for adopting national and/or international legal mechanisms to support their process of resistance and territorial defence, and to legally denounce the human rights violations carried out by opposing stakeholders. The proposed categories are listed below:

Capacity to use legal and administrative means to defend the territory and obtain proper, timely application of justice;

Capacity to denounce attacks by the opposing stakeholder through the legal system and to the public in general;

Capacity to hold opposing stakeholders to account¹¹ for corruption and poor management on the part of opposing stakeholders, through use of state apparatus; and

Capacity to transfer information to regional human rights organisations and organisations in the United Nations system.



4.3.2 Analysis of results regarding territorial disputes

Each practice category can be given a numerical value corresponding to a qualitative value, as follows: nothing (0), close to nothing (1), low (2), average (3), high (4) and very high (5). These values provide a quantitative assessment of the capacity of each stakeholder, for each practice.

The values are decided among the participants representing the community organisation, following a process of consensus during the group focus meeting.

Once all necessary information has been compiled in the focus groups on territorial control, two forms of analysis are proposed. First, the facilitator performs quantitative analysis, as a result of the compilation from the tool.

The results are expressed graphically for better visualisation and analysis. A graph similar to the one below is obtained, demonstrating the greater or lesser capacities of the two stakeholders analysed in each category, and the distribution of the balance of power between them.



¹¹ If someone is called, held, or brought to account for something they have done wrong, they are made to explain why they did it, and are often criticized or punished for it." (Collins COBUILD Advanced English Dictionary)



Next, the facilitator carries out qualitative analysis on the discourses, viewpoints and experiences that emerged from the group discussion process, integrating this information with observations from the integral process of support of the organisation.

The objective is to obtain the most detailed knowledge as possible about the balance of power in the control of the territory, the HRD collective subject that participated in the focus group and its opposing stakeholder.





FOURTH PRACTICE

METHODOLOGY FOR TERRITORIAL CONTROL

MARCH OF POWER

Aporte de JASS a la perspectiva de género.

Objective: To identify the power relationships within the community in terms of protection and security.

Description: The facilitator asks the group to line up, in a space where they can freely take steps forward. Start and end points for the march are marked out. Participants are given instructions to take a step if the answer is affirmative or remain in the same spot if it is negative.

The following are several example questions or claims, and the facilitator can create others based on their experience working with the group and the gender inequalities:

- ❖ I don't have to ask permission from someone to leave my home for any activity.
- ❖ I have access to spaces for relaxation and recreation in my home.
- ❖ I can walk peacefully alone through the streets at night.
- ❖ I have the freedom to decide whether I attend a community meeting.
- ❖ I participate in my organisation under conditions of equality.
- ❖ I have decision-making powers in my organisation.

The facilitator observes how one part of the group moves forward and the other remains behind as questions are asked.

After the questions, the facilitator generates reflection within the group by inviting them to give their opinion about who advanced the most/ least, and asking how they feel about this.

The facilitator concludes by establishing an analysis linking the power relationships with privileges and security for men and women.



GAMES OF ASSERTION

Objective: To create a sensation of empowerment through assertion.

Description: The participants are divided into two diverse groups (in terms of gender, age, etc.) and form two parallel lines, with one row facing the other, separated by a few metres. One of the rows is asked to stride heavily forward (making noise with their feet on the floor) until they reach the row in front, and when they are right in front of each other they crouch down and yell out in unison.



ENVIRONMENT OBSERVATION EXERCISE

Xabier Zabala, PI Guatemala (2019)

Objective: To practise and analyse our capacity for observation of the environment.

Description: Two volunteers are requested from the group.

If the group is large enough, one or two people may be appointed to observe the game. Either on a large stage or, preferably, in the open air, the rest of the group is instructed to simulate a normal day in the community or territory.

Different people are to represent everyday roles, such as street sellers or workers such as street cleaners or police officers, with others out walking, etc. The two volunteers are invited to come out and observe everything that is being acted out in the environment. When they have finished their rounds, the scene is brought to an end and a new version is prepared with some changes to the roles represented: the new role of surveillance officer is introduced, who takes photos and notes down information about the volunteers (without them realising). The scene is resumed and the volunteers are instructed to point out the changes.

An analysis is carried out in the plenary meeting. The group listens to the volunteers' observations and replies as to whether this was indeed the case, discussing the roles played and the changes made to these. Finally, the surveillance officer is requested to reveal the information collected about the volunteers, and the volunteers are asked whether they suspected or saw any indication that they were being watched.

The observers also share what they saw during the game.



THE ZOMBIE

Objective: To test out an action for territorial defence and the impact that stress and nervousness has on group coordination.

Description: A number of seats are placed in the room (as many as the number of participants, with one to spare), spread out separately and randomly across the whole space.

All of the group takes a seat, leaving one seat spare. The facilitator explains that they will be a zombie, who will walk at a consistent pace (without running) towards the empty seat with the intention of sitting in it.

The group's objective will be to prevent them from sitting down, but they cannot touch the zombie, and if anyone rises from their seat they cannot sit back down. It is usual to observe scenes of nervousness, cries from the group and loss of the seat. They are given various attempts to prevent the zombie from sitting down.

During the plenary session once the game is over, the group reflects on the defence of the seat and whether the zombie achieved their objective, as well as the difficulty of coordination under stress.



ACTION PLAN FOR STRENGTHENING TERRITORIAL CONTROL

Objective: To establish agreed actions aimed at strengthening territorial control practices, and to collectively construct an action plan.

Description: Based on the graph reflecting the disputed territorial control, priority is given to the issues that need to be addressed to improve the balance of power with the opposing stakeholder. The issues selected can be divided among working groups. Members can choose to participate in the group where they feel they can best contribute.

The same approach is taken as for the strengthening of practices.

What we would like to do in the short term:



What can we do?
How can we do it?
Who will do it?
When will it be done?
What do we hope/**want to achieve** through these activities, or what will have

changed after these activities?
What is the **ideal change** we would like to see within this category? For each practice, the expected changes and ideal changes

are written on different coloured cards in a way that answers the question: **who will do what?**

It is explained that the objective of this action plan is to allow evaluation of the following:



Whether the planned activities have been carried out.



Whether these activities realised the expected change.

If not, why not? What other activities would be necessary to realise the expected change?

If the expected change has been realised, what further activities would be necessary to pursue the ideal change?



Chapter



Communication for threat confrontation

5.1 Communication as a practice for confronting threats

Previous chapters have dealt with the importance of analysing and understanding a threat, to attempt to reduce its impact and also work on collective protection via protection networks (PNs).

The impacts of threats on collective human rights defender (HRD) subjects have severe physical, psychological, moral and economic implications, at both the collective and individual levels. In order to lessen these negative consequences, actions to confront the threat are developed.

Confronting the threat within and from the territory is necessary for collective protection and to reduce the probability of its execution. One social practice used in this respect is communication. This is an important condition for the proper functioning of PNs.



In an era where information is power, communication has become a necessary tool to achieve social objectives - in this case protection in the defence of human rights.

This chapter will explain the fundamental role communication plays both for the aggressor network (as a means of defamation or stigmatisation of HRDs) and for PNs (as a threat-confronting practice).

The media in the aggressor network are fundamental to the process of excluding or stigmatising HRDs. The national media in Mesoamerica have created a discourse infantilising the indigenous struggle, and resort to aggressive and violent language to delegitimise territorial defence from a racist cultural perspective.

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Misogynous or homophobic messages are also directed at defenders to delegitimise the LGBTI struggle, ignoring situations violating the Right to Defend Human Rights (RDHR) in order to spread misinformation.

This steers public opinion in favour of the aggressor network. Knowledge of who controls or finances a country's most popular media can give indications as to why there may be a desire to portray a stigmatising image of HRD community organisations, and as a result create a discourse that threatens territories.

To confront this situation, the communitarian management of communication creates a sense of ownership of its own development agenda in which members of the community play a leading role: they express themselves publicly, debate topics, engage in dialogue, and promote the culture, history and language of the community.

Developing media for communication "within and from" the territory, however small-scale this may be, is an important contribution to the pluralism of media and a basic strategy for threat confrontation, by providing a flow of information from the collective subject. Private and commercial media, alongside community media, are a necessary condition for the public to have access to different facts, debates and viewpoints¹.



5.2 Information and communication practices

From the perspective of HRD protection, communication practices in territories comprise three fundamental actions:

Breaking the isolation linked to the threat situation that the HRDs are experiencing,

Ddeterring those who constitute part of the threat, and

Persuading the population of the territory and duty-bearing authorities with regard to the Right to Defend Human Rights (RDHR) and the need for non-violent conflict resolution.

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¹ UNESCO (2019) "Medios Públicos y Comunitarios" Artículo en la web: <http://unesco Guatemala.org/comunicacion-e-informacion/desarrollo-de-los-medios/medios-publicos-y-comunitarios/>



5.3 Deterrence

Deterrence relates to situations of conflict, i.e. situations in which the parties involved have antagonistic interests. Deterrence theory is the idea that a strategy exists to prevent a rival initiating a given action.

Deterrence comes in when the direction of the communication changes; the new intention is to influence the opposing stakeholder, to prevent harmful practices that affect the defence of rights.

Deterrence is an action designed to avoid another action considered damaging or dangerous to the HRD's integrity, or even to get someone to desist from something or to modify their opinion.

Deterrence of those who threaten or attack collective HRDs seeks to create tolerance of the latter's legitimate activity and recognise that resort to violence has consequences, aggravates conflicts and is the worst path to take.



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5.4 Persuasion

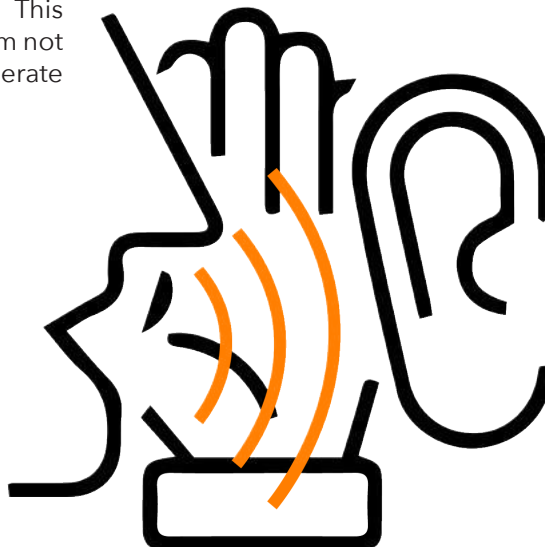
The reality of social marketing in communicative scenarios is heterogeneous in nature. The fundamental basis of social marketing is persuasion.

The verb “to persuade” is derived from the Latin *per* and *suadere*, with *suadere* meaning ‘to advise’. It can therefore mean a way of obtaining something from someone by giving reasons in order to convince them.

The need for persuasion lies in individuals, communities and nations often having different interests, customs and viewpoints, and so persuasion seeks to guide these in a particular direction. For example, this may be towards the acceptance of the defence of human rights as a positive action for the development and construction of democracy.

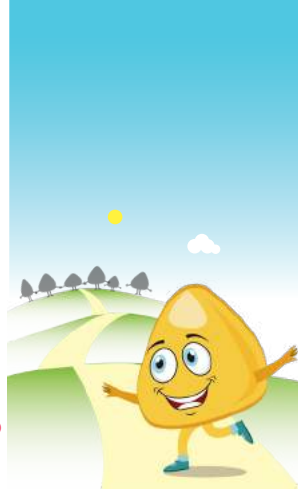
Example: Convincing someone that human rights represent a major global agreement for peaceful coexistence, that the defence of these rights contributes to the institutionalism of the country and legitimises the social and democratic purposes of the legal system. With this content, the recipient of the message increases their level of acceptance and the action space of HRDs is protected.

Many duty-bearing authorities do not completely fulfil their role. Persuasion by targeting information towards these stakeholders may promote a greater sense of responsibility among State officials to be more committed to HRDs. This includes convincing them not to participate in or tolerate attacks on HRDs.





WHAT DOES PI MESO RECOMMEND?



5.5 Communicating within and from the territory

PI understands communication to be the backbone of connection and cohesion within PNs.

Communication is also necessary to break isolation, to deter the aggressor network so that they tolerate HRD activity, and to persuade to achieve acceptance of HRD collectives' key part in building democracy.

This scope implies having an awareness of the media available in the territory to communicate, and understanding methods of deterrence/persuasion as fundamental to threat confrontation.

The vehicle for doing so is via a community communication campaign, as a strategy to strengthen the internal and external networks and a means for denouncing any problems related to human rights violations.

Making the population aware of the importance of the defence of rights and achieving legitimisation in the eyes of the recipient of the Right to Defend Human Rights (RDHR) forms the basis of this community communication campaign.





5.6 Breaking isolation

Isolation in territories in conflict, or lack of awareness or distorted information on what is happening to the society has psychosocial impacts: it perpetuates violence, is a factor for revictimisation and negation of the right to know the truth about what is occurring, and increases HRDs' vulnerability.

Threats and attacks flourish within a climate of impunity, fear and self-censorship that weakens freedom of expression.

Communication is a tool for breaking isolation and informing the outside world of what is going on in the territory, for influencing public knowledge of the facts, and for persuading **external key stakeholders** interested in the defence of human rights and the territory.

It can also influence **duty-bearing authorities** about the role they have to protect HRDs, using effective mechanisms from a human rights perspective, in their capacity as obligated subjects.

There are many State, non-State, national and international stakeholders that focus on protecting HRDs, and this support in the defence of HRDs is welcomed. There are many organisations, institutions and people looking for a way to support and assist in these processes. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this whole structure is called the "external network".

It is necessary to keep the "external network" of national and international key stakeholders in the protection and assistance of HRDs informed, in order to deepen ties with them, and obtain their support and aid. In acquiring an understanding of the environment and context of the situation, these stakeholders could also persuade or deter duty-bearing authorities.

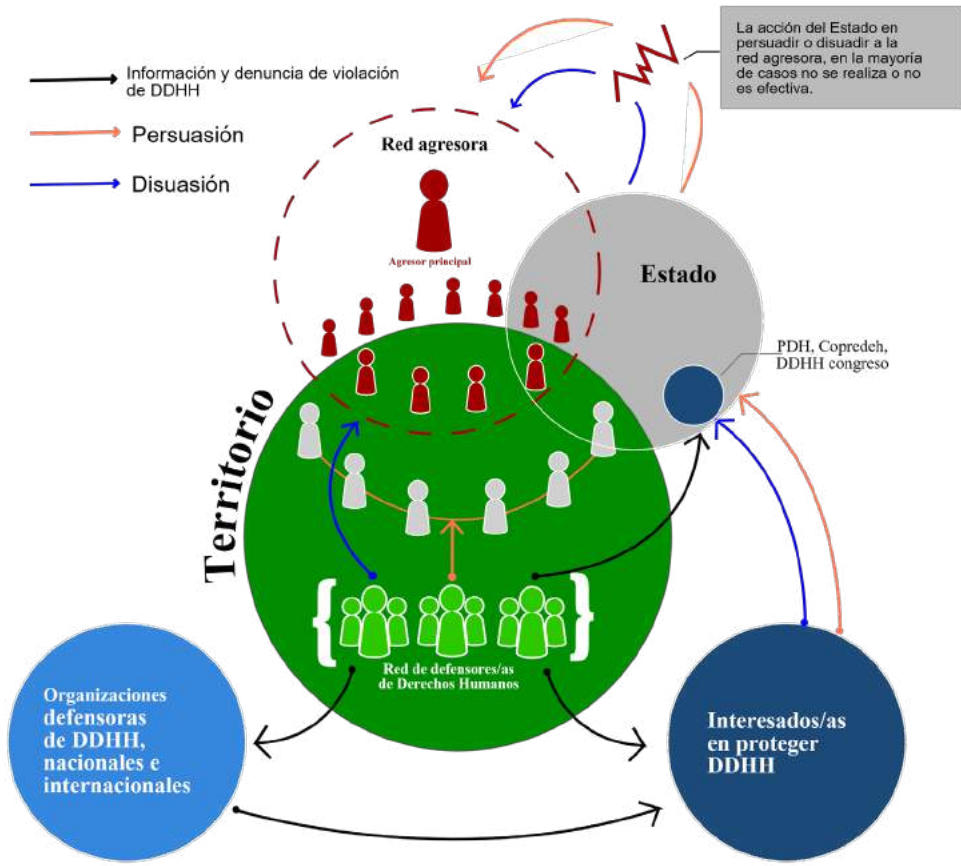


5.7 The internal and external networks

There are two spheres of action: the HRD network acting **within the territory** and **from the territory** to the external network.

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The **internal network** is the collective HRD subject and its supporters within the territory. Social marketing focuses on the territory, its community and neighbouring people who must be **“persuaded”** to recognise the work to defend rights, and the reasons for defending rights. This action of social marketing helps to build democracy and agreement in the territory.

It is necessary to demonstrate the risks and consequences that could ensue from a failure to defend human rights. The vital objective is to open up a space of respect for a diversity of opinions, where someone who thinks differently is not considered an enemy.

Deterrence, as well as persuasion, is directed towards those within the territory who are connected to the aggressor network, and as such prepared to attack HRDs.



Obtaining support from the external network as a result of this social marketing and circulation within the territory is also of interest. Recording and disseminating news of attacks suffered by the collective HRD subject to the outside world often becomes a form of **deterrence** in itself, where the aggressor realises that this action of communication may be influential in them losing their impunity.

In the **external network**, social marketing focuses on motivating duty-bearing authorities to activate processes of **deterrence and persuasion** targeting those behind a threat to avoid its execution and defuse the situation. Securing action from the external network in the territory is very important for breaking isolation.

When confronted with non-State stakeholders, deterrence and persuasion strategies should be based on the reality of the specific communities and geographical areas. In PI Meso's case, communication is designed using a clear concept of territory. This involves:

- ❖ Performing constant analysis of the powers surrounding the local context, and mapping the different stakeholders and interests - both visible (formal/State) and invisible - and how these relate to each other;
- ❖ Identifying strategies to deal with specific contexts (which must be developed and implemented on a case-by-case basis); and considering patterns at the regional and global levels, as well as lessons learnt from other strategies.



Breaking isolation and informing on the situation in a territory is a protection strategy.

Deterrence theory could be applied in the following way:

What messages are shared and in what time frame?
How could these allied stakeholders deter opposing State and non-State stakeholders that should react in their capacity as duty-bearing authorities?



However, the question of whether the media should be involved in communicating and disseminating messages in a particular case depends on the local context, and also the level of independence of the media that would be contacted.

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In environments where it is possible and desirable to involve the press, various scenarios may be considered: a press release may be distributed widely or given exclusively to a single independent journalist, or a press conference may be called.



These scenarios will be covered briefly below, by establishing specific communicative actions that may be adapted to the everyday life of the communities in question.



5.8 Defamation and stigmatisation

This refers to the action of offending, insulting, defaming or smearing a person, denigrating their recognition as a human being by society and leading to exclusion. The damage caused by stigma is irreparable and leaves behind psychosocial marks that are hard to erase.

Stigmatisation discriminates, attacks and insults members of a particular group on the edge of society based on the perpetrator's criteria.

People who employ stigmatisation use it as a resource for improving their self-esteem by downward comparison (comparing themselves to other people who appear to be and deserve less than themselves), and thus succeed in devaluing others.





5.9 Responding to defamation campaigns

Media harassment has become a method of discrediting HRDs. The credibility of the victim of harassment is called into question if their peers or the public in general start to doubt them, leaving them isolated or crippled as a result. Another factor in the loss of credibility is when unfounded charges are filed with the legal system (quashed when rejected for lack of merit).

The most commonly used methods to discredit HRDs include false accusations in the media or in court, public declarations through local and international media, and private declarations made to key allies such as embassy officials or donors. They are accused of “guerrilla affiliation”, “communist political leanings”, “terrorism”, “treason”, “collaboration with foreign governments” or other forms of “subversion” that are “contrary to development”. Some are included in lists of “extremist organisations”, attracting State security forces’ attention towards HRDs and leading to social stigma. Discourses of hate and the reproduction of stigma against the defence of human rights weakens security and aims to reduce the impact HRDs can have, by spreading false information (gossip or rumours) among communities.

In response, some organisations work discreetly to put an end to such attempts to discredit them through private discussions with those who brought the charges.

Others act more publicly. They may meet with relevant agencies, publish articles, organise backing from other organisations and allies and seek redress through the courts, as well as mustering public support by issuing press releases or conducting press conferences (or both at the same time). Whether the group’s response is private or public will depend on the local situation; in any case, it is essential for HRDs to break the silence and block intents to discredit them.

As a mechanism of response to defamation campaigns, some HRDs seek strength in initiatives such as the creation of local coalitions, activation of a network of local organisations, or promotion of closer ties with local media and community leaders in other nearby territories. Discredit calls for regional and international solidarity, in a way that highlights the value for society of respecting and defending human rights in their entirety.

Solidarity is also a way of responding to defamation campaigns, along with

- ✦ Publishing press releases,
- ✦ Inviting observation of processes,



- ✦ Becoming involved in collective campaigns and organising public activities (speeches, conferences, awards dinners, and meetings with other local and international activists and decision-makers).

Key international organisations in the defence of human rights may also urge their own governments to speak out in favour of the collective subject, when it is being discredited.

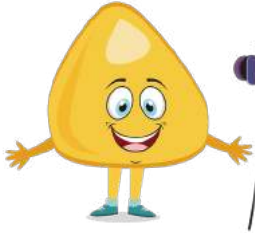


5.10 The practice of public denunciation

The radio, television and written press are important means of raising awareness of threats and intimidation.

This can be done by issuing press releases and holding press conferences. The success of disseminating a denunciation will depend on the importance of the news for the media in question (in relation to the figures or the magnitude of the event in itself). It is a question of ensuring that it is not simply covered as a current event; rather, coverage must be given of the incident and how it affects human rights. Keeping a complete, updated list of media is advisable, with addresses, phone numbers and journalists' email addresses, to enable ongoing communication.





5.11 Community communication

Communication networks are the structures that form the basis upon which community media function. They represent a space in which to define and operationalise the community media's content agenda, for both news and educational features.

The people who make up the networks are (mainly young) men and women, some of whom have no academic training but who actively participate in journalistic training allowing them to develop the necessary skills to carry out their role in an empirical and voluntary manner.

These individuals have the ability to produce news coverage, opinion interviews, audiovisual productions on topics of interest and other informative materials. These are published online and displayed at community demonstrations. Their primary source for their main topics are the communities to which they belong.

Additionally, these communicators can respond and work as a team during national situations, e.g. on special broadcasts of events of national importance (elections, emergencies due to natural phenomena, etc.).



The main policy lines for the agenda of community networks are:

- ❖ Their editorial policy is critical and propositive.
- ❖ The agenda is determined by the interest of the population.
- ❖ Their approach is informative and educational.
- ❖ They seek to raise the visibility of the demands of social sectors that are excluded from traditional media, and of the defence of their rights.
- ❖ They raise the visibility of initiatives and experiences concerned with "Good Living".
- ❖ They give priority to issues of socio-environmental vulnerability.
- ❖ They influence structural changes and social transformation through information.

5.11.1 What is a community communicator?



- ✔ They know their community and its leaders.
- ✔ They constantly monitor the media (allied and non-allied).
- ✔ They observe and interact with communities.

5.11.2 Specific actions of the community communicator

Community communicators act as correspondents for allied stakeholders by providing information on their territory, which allows for more effective, accurate and centralised communication.

They activate communication from within territories to raise awareness among communities.

They conduct advocacy actions by seeking support from allied stakeholders to enable the execution of work plans drawn up within communities.



5.11.3 The communication plan (to be developed by the community communicator)

Without a clear message on what and how to communicate, the communicator – despite the best of intentions – could themselves introduce a risk and thus leave HRDs vulnerable while attempting to raise awareness among communities of the situation in the territories.



Having a communication plan is fundamental to strengthening actions for prevention and exchange of information between territories.

The more prepared community communicators are regarding the actions to be carried out, the better: the communication plan provides a foundation for how they will raise the visibility of the message, with a more accurate version of what is happening in the communities.

A well-formulated plan will make it difficult for potential perpetrators of attacks against HRDs to initiate defamation campaigns against them, or to succeed in building a stigma to justify criminalisation, in complicity with the justice system.

In actual fact, having a communication plan may mean that perpetrators in the opposing network will attempt to silence the message shared by community communicators.

Example scenarios and risks such as these should be reflected in the community communication plan, so that a response may be formulated to any move made by an opposing stakeholder.



How is a communication plan drawn up?

Every one of us is constantly developing a plan depending on what we want to do. For example, during the day or at night before going to sleep, we know what we have to do, and we start the process of working out how and why, and what resources we have or need to carry out our plans the following day.

A communication plan has all of these same elements to it. Some of them are more complex and specific; it all depends on what the desired accomplishments are.

Antes de hacer un plan de comunicación, es importante conocer la situación actual:

Before making a communication plan, it is important to get to know the current situation:

What are we doing at the moment?

What are the community's means of communication (WhatsApp, Signal, community newspapers, community radio stations, social networks, meetings, assemblies, posters, bulletins, etc.)?

Who are the people in the community that inform us of news concerning our territory? (Do they have internet access? How do they inform themselves? How do we help them to keep up this practice?)

What are the threats?

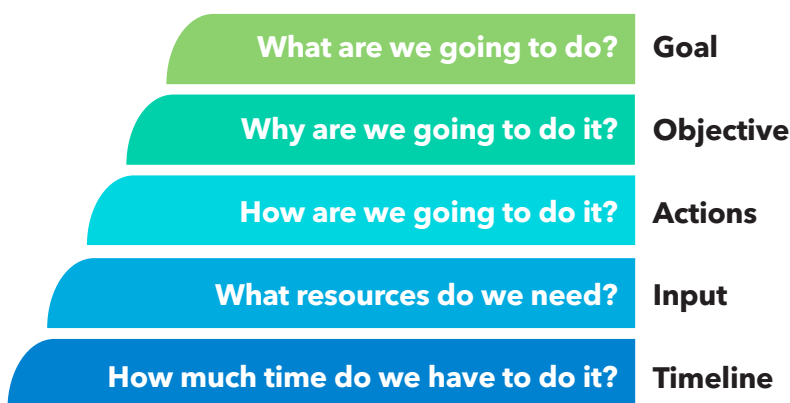
Who should participate in the communication plan?

What do we need to raise awareness of?

It is about getting to know and recognising the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.



Upon obtaining answers to these concerns, it is important to prioritise: this means having a path to follow, for the quantity of ideas to communicate, which are all important. A message needs to be clear and accurate to gain visibility, and herein lies the need to prioritise: to ensure the message is clear, direct and impactful.



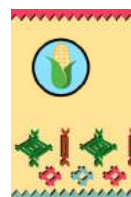
5.11.4 Implementation

Using these questions, an initial communication plan can already be drawn up setting out the goals, objectives, actions, inputs and a timeline to allocate time for each action. With this information, the messages are arranged in order of priority and it is time to implement them.

From the map of stakeholders constructed in the “threat analysis” workshops (Chapter 2), the collective subject has a clear view of the situation of allies and adversaries. In order to return to this map of stakeholders, it is necessary to be proactive in redoing and refreshing the map. The context of communication should be borne in mind, and the means of communication and the allied and opposing journalists identified. The aim is to have a communication network that makes use of digital, traditional and alternative media to report from the territory.

Advocacy actions by community communicators are important, such as coordinating with allied stakeholders, who make a significant contribution to ensuring HRDs feel constantly supported at the internal and external levels.

The plan is designed to give power to the communication from territories, to strengthen the collective HRD subject (who can draw up a medium- and long-term communication plan, and know from whom to request support) and above all to raise the visibility of the communities’ situation inside and outside their territories.





FIFTH PRACTICE

METHODOLOGY OF COMMUNICATION FOR THREAT CONFRONTATION

"FIND YOUR OTHER PAIR" EXERCISE

Objective: To use non-verbal means of communication. To generate confidence among the group and understanding of communication difficulties.

Description: Each participant is given a card containing an instruction, for example: "Will you help me?", and there will be another participant with the corresponding answer: "I want to help you."

Each person has to look for their other pair, without speaking and using only non-verbal communication and sounds. They must act out what is shown on their cards to find their other pair.



PRACTISING PERSUASION AND DETERRENCE

Clara Torroba, PI Guatemala (2019)

Objective: To understand the concepts of deterrence and persuasion, which are basic elements of social communication, through role play.

Description: The participants are asked to line up in two rows, one in front of the other.

The facilitator suggests that one of the rows is “pro-mining” and the other “anti-mining”, and the participants pair up, with one of each pair “pro-mining” and the other “anti-mining”. Cards are then given at random to one member of each pair, and the argument is started with either persuasion or deterrence according to the instruction on the card. Each card displays either “deterrence: convince the other person not to” or “persuasion: convince the other person to support me”. Participants are reminded not to use violent language or methods.

After the discussion, the concepts are taken to the plenary session. How did we feel? Did our partner convince us?



ADVOCACY

Objective: To come to collective agreements regarding community communication.

Description: The exercise is started by asking: what do we want to achieve? A brainstorm of ideas is then noted down.

Based on the three most notable answers, objectives to be achieved are set as a group, reaching a consensus.

Looking at the whole analysis of allied and non-allied stakeholders, techniques of persuasion and deterrence, and how to confront defamation, stigmatisation and criminalisation, the following question is posed: How can we achieve this? If the group is tired, collective reflection is conducted in the form of a brainstorming exercise.

If they are feeling energetic, it can be dramatised.



COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

Objective: To make commitments for the future.

Description: To help in drawing up a communication plan, questions such as the following are posed:

What do we want to do to spread awareness of our situation?

What do we need to communicate -at the local level- -at the national level- - at the international level?

What means of communication are we going to use moving forward?

Will we continue using the same means? Will we add more or get rid of some?

The need to create communication from within communities is explained, with people transmitting information from the territories both externally and internally.

The advantages of having community communicators are explained, as well as the importance for communities of having one or several people with these responsibilities.

As a result, people can be appointed to these roles at the next meeting.



Chapter

The psychosocial perspective and psychosocial support

Using the psychosocial approach as a basis for work makes it possible to understand the responses and behaviour of people who live alongside violent phenomena in territories where there is a high level of human rights violations.

In analysing territories defended by the collective subject, PI Meso takes the sociocultural, ancestral and political context into consideration.

THE HISTORY AND CONTEXT:

To have a clear understanding of the context, it is necessary to consider the effects of internal armed conflicts, which are part of a near past. Mesoamerican society suffers from continuous effects of violence, from incidents that destroy family and community ties.

The State perpetuates this situation, with policies that are favourable to the continuity of human rights violations and the plundering of natural resources.



The State has attempted to break up the community network using processes to destroy the social structure and genocides that have marked the history of the region. These actions are always linked, among other things, to the need to eliminate the "other"; the diversity of identities, and the existence of original peoples and their spiritualities are ignored.

The result is a cumulative build-up of social damage (polarisation, mistrust, latent fear, breakdown of networks, resentment, hate, etc.) called "psychosocial trauma".

WHAT DOES PSYCHOSOCIAL MEAN?

The psychosocial approach seeks to understand society by looking at the social relationships of groups and individuals. Contextualising the spaces where community insertion work is carried out is thus fundamental to understanding the reality of territories. It cannot be explained in terms of the subject, given that the theory maintains that we do not exist in a vacuum, but are rather people and individuals shaped by history.



The psychosocial perspective involves the analysis of action in relation to both group and individual processes, based on the understanding that knowledge in groups is partial, relative and limited.

PI Meso talks about **psychosocial action** to refer to action for social transformation. Efforts in this respect focus on the collective human rights defender (HRD) subject and, by association, on all aspects of the community, strengthening its capacities.

Action is taken based on analysis of the reality, on the path of history to the present day, and on the phenomena or difficulties experienced.

WHAT IS PSYCHOSOCIAL TRAUMA?

Martín-Baró conceives psychosocial trauma as "the crystallisation or materialisation in individuals of aberrant and dehumanising social relationships such as those that prevail in situations of civil war"¹ (Martín-Baró, 1990, p. 236) or such as those observed in dispossessions resulting from alleged invasion of land, exhausting processes of criminalisation, criminal prosecution, and the resulting implications for the individuals in question and their families.



¹ Martín Baró, I (1990) Psicología social de la guerra: trauma y terapia. Universidad J.S Cañas, San Salvador, EL Salvador.



In most cases, those affected are original farming peoples, with limited resources. These scenarios are characterised by conflict and constant human rights violations. To halt this cycle of violence, the effects must be addressed.

According to Martín-Baró, traumatised societies follow three relational patterns: social polarisation, institutionalised lying and violence as the sole resource for conflict transformation.

From the psychosocial perspective, understanding these processes is a key factor for the mental health of HRDs and for working with communities exposed to constant forms of abuse and oppression, caused by the presence of megaprojects in their territories.



Psychosocial trauma “expresses the crystallisation in individuals of social relationships based on violence or intergroup conflicts, in which intergroup bias, social polarisation and stereotyped beliefs are inherent”² (Markez et al., 2006).

In the case of HRDs, it is evident that these wounds have been produced socially, and so it follows that they should be addressed from this sphere. The violent effects behind the constant mechanism of harassment of HRDs affect them both individually and collectively, by impacting on their families and the collective struggles of collective subjects to defend their territory’s natural resources.

² Markez J, Moreno 7, Izarzugara I (2006) La violencia colectiva. Un problema de salud pública pendiente de su investigación Norte de Salud Mental.

COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

The discipline of community psychology emphasises the importance of the ecological perspective of exchange. It seeks to sustain the possibility of improving adaptation between people and their environment via the creation of new psychosocial possibilities, by developing personal resources through dialogue exchange with the community.



For HRDs in Mesoamerica, this begins with recognising their history, considering that they are not isolated beings, but constructed from a reality that isolates them. It is also important to recognise their capacity to build their own confrontation mechanisms through everyday group dynamics, within an environment of conflict.

Each member of the community plays an important coordinating role, due to their fundamental function in maintaining and transforming community living conditions from their own space. Work in community social psychology develops processes for analysing the community's reality, based on an understanding of processes of social construction produced by the systems of learning that are habituation, naturalisation and familiarisation.

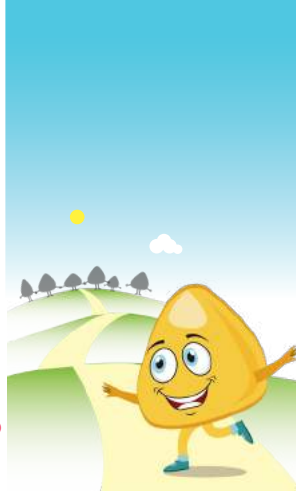
These systems of learning contribute to configuring community identity through micro-social mechanisms that sustain its structure - a structure that is marked by its history and a global neoliberal framework that is transforming the reality across countries. In these scenarios, the role of community members is to contribute to problematisation and denaturalisation²; this is highly important for creating a process of awareness.



³ Problematisation and denaturalisation: Analysing the being in the world involves a critical knowledge process in which the natural character related to certain phenomena is discarded, problematisation leads to denaturalisation that thence has an impact in creating a conscious citizen with dynamic awareness (Montero, 1984, La psicología comunitaria).



WHAT DOES PI MESO RECOMMEND?



It is necessary to identify Mesoamerican society as the point of departure because of its violent past, multiple dispossessions and continuous abuse suffered; relationships here have shifted as a result, leaving psychosocial trauma.

PI's approach from the psychosocial perspective is anchored in community social psychology, and thus recognises that groups have the resources to confront their reality.

PI's work involves strengthening the actions of resistance that collective subjects need when faced with a context that threatens the integrity of HRDs. Reflective spaces of analysis contribute to these consciousness-mobilising and liberating processes.

Rooting the work in community psychology has the ultimate aim of helping to raise HRDs' consciousness, with a collective outlook.



It is important to create processes that lay the foundations for practices of constant analysis focusing on deconstructing the issue.

For work with collective subjects, then, organised in the territories PI Meso supports, it is necessary to establish a process with entry and exit methods for communities, to avoid assistentialism and focus on the **"Do No Harm" principle**⁴.

Application of the fundamental objective of community psychology to work with HRDs is intended to develop community participation, and consists of mobilising the collective subject and networks to confront and resolve its problems. It incorporates a participatory role where the collective subject is not a guest or spectator, but an active, creative agent with a voice, vote and veto, as processes are experienced right from the effects suffered until their resolution.

⁴ This is a declaration that work is being carried out on an ethical basis, referring to how conflicts are understood, how aid is handled, how (physical/human/economic) resources are transferred and how - if work is not well-structured - power relationships and dynamics can be reinforced via institutional actions that do not help to de-escalate the conflict, but instead exacerbate it.



Conducting work from a psychosocial approach contributes to positive transformation, and to the development of processes of social and individual benefit.

PI's role is to facilitate and observe the process while constantly referring its observations back to the group and making methodological proposals that meet the group's self-identified needs.

This will promote change in the habitat or environment where the collective subject operates, in the specific relationships of HRDs with their peers, and to the resistance they are part of.

It should be considered that changes in individuals lead to changes in their groups, and vice versa (changes in these groups result in transformations in people).

This creates a dialectical relationship of mutual transformation, which contributes to a social reality with tools and mechanisms of confrontation for building new relationships and overcoming potential for conflict. This is achieved by reactivating the primary network: family and community.



Recognition of the other based on their identity, particular practices and tools is characteristic of PI's work, the aim being to integrate this into the operative group's methodology.

The first step

The initial step in the psychosocial approach is establishing a nearby space for building trust with people belonging to the collective subject, to whom PI will give its support. This will involve becoming immersed in the territory, by conducting home visits and participating in cultural or spiritual events to learn about the group's identity and its characteristics. On this basis, PI can put forth methodological proposals and ways of strengthening support mechanisms.



The different psychosocial techniques used by PI (group work, improvisational psychodrama, dramatisation of dreams, gestalt therapy) provide these vulnerable groups with better mechanisms of confrontation, to reduce the effects of the political violence⁵ created by the economic and political systems that prevail in Mesoamerica. A personal and collective response makes it possible to set up exit processes, based on the strengthening of their own capacities.



HRDs feel a sense of abandonment and stopping of their everyday activities, because the mechanism of persecution and stigmatisation is constant.

⁵ Political violence: the intentional use of force by individual stakeholders or organised groups against a group or community, with the aim of supporting certain political ends and that results in the death, or physical or psychological damage of a person (Villagrán Valenzuela, 2016, Trauma Psicosocial: Naturaleza, dimensiones y medición, p. 27)

The operative group

The operative group is at the centre of work in the territory and is made up of representatives of the collective HRD subject.

The basic principles of this type of group are:

- ❖ work focusing on protection and security;
- ❖ reciprocity;
- ❖ a shared common experience among all members;
- ❖ each member has the intention to make change and is prepared to support others so that they can do the same; and
- ❖ this change should be reflected inside and outside the spaces of exchange that foster protection networks (PNs) and in the quality of communication.

In the case of the collective subject, meeting spaces for strengthening networks become support groups, oriented towards recognising the other, promoting exchange, stimulating dialogue and expressing feelings and fears –as a way of sharing the inner self from a place of humanity.

This type of exchange brings the collective subject together to take action to defend their rights, transforms them into pathfinders for change in community dynamics, and helps them to confront adversity.



Techniques

In practice, techniques of psychodrama have been used; this is a group method that helps participants to discover their inner truth through action.

This guided dramatic action follows technical steps strategically designed to provoke emotion, analyse a problem and modify the scene.

The technique changes the negative sensation into an ability to construct and to better analyse difficulties. It becomes a collective



change that generates learning for all participants. This process can strengthen collective protection, based on group construction and understanding, fostering a change in engagement in the primary and community networks.

From the perspective of the ancestral culture of original peoples in Mesoamerica, dreams play a very significant role. Taking advantage of the psychodrama method, dreams are used as a source of information for threat analysis and to make progress on collective protection mechanisms.



The group is a determining factor for psychosocial action work; it is the meeting space for analysing and creating the actions required for both group and individual protection.

Gestalt therapy techniques have also been used, focusing more on the processes than on the content. This type of therapy places emphasis on events in the present, and the thoughts and feelings that arise in the present moment, rather than anything that has happened, might have happened, could happen or should be happening. It endeavours to heal in the present, bringing emotions into the here and now. In the analysis, a full gestalt technique is given as an example to work with.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) techniques are also used, which allow feelings to be processed as thoughts. CBT is a fusion of behavioural techniques and processes that seek scientific knowledge based on what can be observed with the knowledge that, behind our behaviour, there are diverse psychological processes that explain why we act, think and feel the way we do: "the cognitive behavioural model or approach is based on work on the cognitive aspects to produce a significant and profound modification in behaviour"⁶



⁶ <https://psicologiyamente.com/clinica/tecnicas-cognitivo-conductuales> [in Spanish]



SIXTH PRACTICE

METHODOLOGY FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL WORK

As already discussed, the psychosocial approach is a cross-cutting topic in PI Meso's practical work. For this reason, exercises in the psychosocial sphere are carried out when appropriate, as it is essential to have professional training in psychosocial techniques. The following techniques are highlighted in particular:

DREAM REPRESENTATIONS THROUGH IMPROVISATIONAL THEATRE

Objective: To use dreams to work on possible actions for strengthening the future protection strategy.

Description: An introduction is given on dreams, their meaning in the group's culture, and the group's thoughts about dreams. The group is then invited to remember a recent dream. While relaxation music is played, the participants close their eyes to recall the details of the dream.

After they have opened their eyes again and have the dream in mind (there may be people who do not remember a dream), each person writes a short summary of their dream. Next, the group is asked who would like to share their dream and act it out on the stage, as an impromptu scene.

Those who volunteered to share their dream sit on chairs in the centre and the rest of the group chooses the dream that they want to see represented by placing a hand on their chosen person. Once it is clear whose dream is most popular, the rest of the group who do not have a majority are requested (with their consent) to place their hand on the chosen person.

A stage is set up, with clothes, hats, support ropes, and objects available to represent characters.

The dreaming person sits next to the facilitator at the front of the stage. People are asked to volunteer to represent the dream. The dreaming person dictates how the scene is to be set, and directs



the volunteers representing the scene. Multiple scenes can be joined together until the representation of the dream is completed. The rest of the group pays attention to the representation.

During the representation, different situations may occur, such as catharsis, pain etc. The facilitator will have to manage these with the group.

The representation is followed by a sharing phase (in a circle around the centre), starting with the dreaming person, then the participants in the representation of the scene, then the rest of the group who acted as the audience.



THE EMPTY SEAT: FOR WORK ON LOSS AND ANGER

Objective: To release anger, say goodbyes, or have conversations that need to be said.

Description: It is usual for there to be people in the group harbouring anger or pain due to significant loss, which is often related to their particular struggle in defending human rights. If the group is cohesive, the facilitator (with the ability to direct psychodramatic techniques) can suggest this representation.

Choosing the protagonist: Anyone who has something to say to someone who is not present, or has lost someone they need to say goodbye to, is asked if they would like to volunteer to do so in the scene. Seated in a line in front of the rest of the group, each volunteer explains who they would like to talk to and why. The group is selected in the same way as for the dream representation (“dream representations through improvisational theatre”).

Once the protagonist has been chosen, two seats are placed in front of one another on the stage, and the protagonist sits in one of them. The group is asked for their collaboration in paying attention and making themselves available to get up on stage if requested.

The protagonist chooses who will be their stand-in (to support them), and who will represent the person they want to speak to. The dialogue then begins, with the facilitator encouraging participants to change roles if needed. Other people may get up on stage if additional, relevant roles appear in the conversation. The facilitator will suggest ending the scene when the issue has been explored.

The representation is followed by a sharing phase (in a circle around the centre), during which participants describe their own experiences, what resonated with them and drew their attention in the scene - without giving advice or passing judgement.



Chapter

7

Protection of women human rights defenders (HRDs)

PI Meso considers it relevant to carry out distinct work with women HRDs, due to the particularities of the threats that they suffer as women. The gender approach proposed is based on community feminism, which takes a broad look at the different forms of oppression experienced in the territory.

Community feminism contemplates decolonisation, which involves understanding racialisation, social class and gender as social constructs of oppression and domination experienced by indigenous women, due to their situation of poverty, cultural discrimination and social exclusion. It should also be understood that the Mesoamerican population has been ravaged by a reality with a tremendous burden of racism and a continuous history of dispossession, which has translated into poverty and marginalisation in this colonial-modern episteme.

As indicated by Ochi Curiel, “as a result of the colonial heritage that has been placed upon us, these categories should be considered as central to the person’s theoretical, epistemological, investigative and action proposals, or else they continue to form part of this mass of intellectuals and activists who follow established norms and continue as the colonised”. (Curiel, 2014)



This approach involves disassembling the patriarchy, prejudices, stereotypes and attitudes that the system of economic accumulation uses to build unequal gender, class and cultural relationships.

To do so, it is important to understand what this disassembly means to raise its visibility within relationships and put it into practice in the defence of human rights.

To achieve this understanding, it is necessary to consider the overlapping forms of oppression that women suffer in the territories. As well as being traditionally marginalised, these women are currently essential to the reproduction of the model of dispossession.

All of this must be considered to develop an approach that pursues gender equality and the transformation of a patriarchal-capitalist and colonial system based on the oppression of identities, dispossession and exploitation of people and natural resources.



The process of disassembly entails eliminating social, economic and political forms of oppression and injustices imposed on women in rural areas and building a social system that recognises the intrinsic power of women and men.

Within this capitalist and patriarchal system, society uses many mechanisms to maintain control over women. Biological differences (sex) are at the root, but ways of determining the roles of women and men go far beyond the distinguishing physical and biological characteristics of each sex.

Gender differences are constructed socially and instilled based on the perceptions of different societies about the physical differences, assumed tastes, preferences and capacities of women and men. It is therefore important to distinguish between gender as a social construct and sex as a biological condition. It is also vital to understand how the sex-gender discourse - with men stereotyped as the leading, strong sex and women the weak, submissive sex - is used as justification for inequalities and forms of oppression.



Gender relationships derive from the ways in which cultures assign different functions and responsibilities to women and men. This includes determining different means of access to material resources, such as land and credit, or immaterial resources, such as political power.

The implications for everyday life are numerous and can be seen, for example, in the division of domestic and extra-domestic work, in family responsibilities, in the field of education and opportunities for professional promotion, in executive bodies and in the exercise of power itself in general.



As indicated in social psychology: "Individuals develop as people by assimilating into a social order through these socialisation processes that assign them a position and allow them to obtain a social identity" (Martín-Baró, 1989). It should therefore be considered that gender identity is constructed within a territory, and the social dynamics and gender roles assumed in the territory are to be taken into account for analysis.

7.1 Threats inherent to the patriarchal system

It is vital to consider the differentiated impact of violence or conflict on men and women, as well as on indigenous, mixed-race and white women.

This must be highlighted in order to be recognised and assessed. The implications according to gender identity are influenced directly by the rest of the identities.

For example, the mixed-race or white identity focuses on the person without reference to Mother Nature, whereas this is a philosophy and life practice in the indigenous population.



According to Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, for indigenous populations: it is like the soul that rules the body, like the mind that rules the body, like the husband that rules the wife, like the father that rules the son, like the man that rules the animal; his arguments include a construction of a hierarchical, patriarchal, conquering and competitive society. These elements are still in place today.



Territorial occupation is analogous to the occupation of bodies, and thus sexual abuse became a weapon for bodily and territorial domination, used historically by colonial powers and currently by models of neo-colonial repression.

Sexual abuse, rape and the objectification of the female body are threats to which women are constantly exposed, rendering them vulnerable.

This forms the basis for reflections on how the first territory conquered by the system was the body of women, for control of society.

Practices of mass rape of women in front of their families during the armed conflict imposed domination and sought to break the soul of communities, who were occupied by the army as a means of control.

For this and other reasons, the feminist perspective proposes healing the body as the first step in breaking the silence and initiating transformation to reconstruct fractured societies.

Indigenous peoples were based around relationships of men and women as political equals, as explained by the principle of complementarity of Mayan cosmivision mentioned in the Popol Vuh. However, relationships of gender oppression and domination also occur in this cosmivision, although in a different way to those produced in Western societies.

In the reality of the territories, indigenous women who are leaders in the defence of human rights confront psychological mechanisms of persecution that undermine their lives, such as: reproaches, defamation, or sexualised insults, accusing them of being putas ("whores") or brujas ("witches"). This stigmatisation has become the biggest mechanism for paralysing the action



of women in communities and territories settled by indigenous peoples who are confronted by the presence of companies that extract and exploit natural resources.

Unequal gender structures in the territory and power interests hinder the militant political participation of women, so they are no longer considered as political equals and relegated to the home or family sphere.

Women who are prepared to defend rights have declared during workshops that the problem with their participation lies behind closed doors: the home is also an unsafe space for them due to the normalisation of violence. This issue of ignoring information and participation from women is a problem for collective protection.



Violence against women as part of the patriarchal system is experienced in the private and public domains.

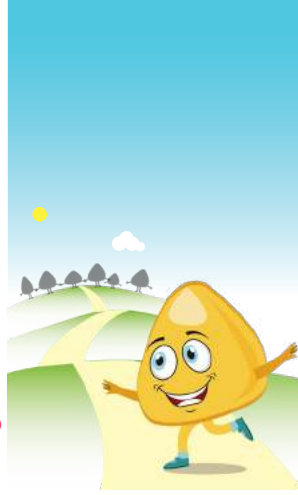
The particularities of a situation of oppression of an indigenous woman farmer are different to that of a mixed-race or white woman, taking into account the violence that is acted out in the different social spheres of domination and the overlapping forms of oppression; indigenous women farmers are also affected by intersectional violence¹, which is a part of a whole series of control mechanisms exerted over women. With regard to the collective protection of HRDs, violence against women is heightened in a threat environment and also occurs within protection networks (PNs). Evidently, this hinders and impacts on protection work.

¹ Conceptualise how PI sees intersectional violence.





WHAT DOES PI MESO RECOMMEND?



The gender and psychosocial approaches are cross-cutting in HRD protection work.

The gender issue should be addressed across the whole collective protection process.

PI considers it relevant to carry out distinct work with women HRDs, due to the particularities of the threats that they suffer. The gender approach proposed is based on community feminism, which takes a broad look at the different forms of oppression experienced in the territory.

Right from the start of PI's analysis and support of a collective subject, it begins studying their situation through analysis of social structures, unequal gender relationships and social status due to situations of dispossession or belonging, as an exercise in deconstruction.

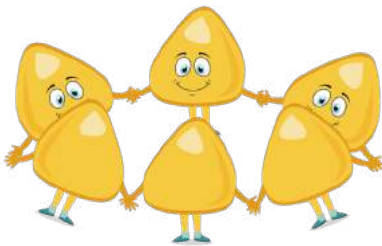
When male defenders are criminalised and taken to prison, their wives are left with a much bigger burden: their struggle involves protecting and sustaining their family, as well as defending their spouses.

However, they do not acknowledge their own struggles in the defence of human rights, and thus lose a sense of their own importance despite carrying the burden of survival of the family. This demonstrates the invisibility of women, which negates their self-recognition and self-image.



PI's approach focuses on carrying out work with women HRDs, strengthening networks of women defenders of territory, conducting a differentiated threat analysis and sharing the lessons learnt with the mixed group - which is strengthened as a whole by the psychosocial work.

7.2 The women defenders network



To understand the particular situation of women defenders, PI proposes creating a space to work exclusively with them. Support groups can be set up to gain awareness of their reality and work with them to develop a new way of taking action within the community, using sorority spaces.

The idea is to build support processes to forge support networks, and give value to emotionality, spirituality and ancestral memory (from mothers, grandmothers) as part of psychosocial work on building safe spaces.

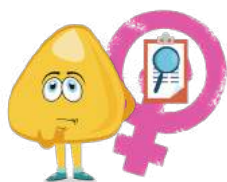
The principle of the sorority mutual relationship is as follows: value should be given to the other and the other should give value to me, because if I harm them I am also harming myself. It involves trust-building.



Networks of women defenders become safe spaces for them to share experiences marked by violence perpetrated by men, both in their personal and political lives. Through the sorority, spaces are created where work can be undertaken on collective protection.

These are spaces where there is recognition of the pluralistic wisdom of women and mutual healing, since healing the body sets the body free. Strong networks of women defenders contribute to the protection of the collective subject in the community organisation as a whole.





7.3 Differentiated threat analysis

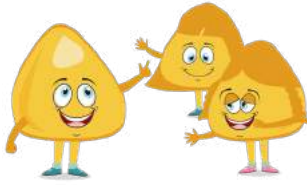
developing a methodology to address these overlapping forms of oppression, PI has created spaces for reflection on unequal gender conditions.

This is a process for analysing the reality from within the context, which involves making women defenders aware of this naturalisation of oppression.

Together with the psychosocial approach, this can reveal the reality experienced within the territory and its gender conditions. This leads to the creation of an analysis identifying forms of violence in different areas of life of women HRDs, which makes it possible to see the differentiated impact and thus helps to dismantle the historically-constructed objectification of women.

The effects of violence on the collective HRD subject are addressed through shared dialogues among communities. In the patriarchal culture, there is no opportunity for dialogue; a single model is imposed. Turning a blind eye to differentiated needs imposes a single model, unintentionally reproducing patriarchal patterns. There is, therefore, a need for differentiated analysis of threats suffered by women, allowing women defenders to have better awareness of the context and the threat.





7.4 Work in mixed groups

After the differentiated analysis for men and women, a circle of connections is set up that allows the groups to meet one another again and build paths together.

The idea is to raise the visibility of women's struggles and gain recognition of women by men in processes women are involved in, encouraging their participation in decision-making.

For work from the gender perspective, it is important to consider the work with mixed groups, and to critique this work when the presence and representivity of women defenders is ignored.

Often in work with mixed groups, men find it difficult to question their privileges, which is why the work PI offers addresses these viewpoints that form part of work with men based on the concepts of non-hegemonic masculinity, while community feminism is used with women.

Collective protection should help to dismantle the naturalised colonisation that perpetuates unequal class and gender relationships, as well as racism.

Recognition of the role to be played by women and men in forming inclusive, pluralistic societies is the fundamental step to reducing the risks faced by women defenders. In addition, it is a way of consolidating the integral protection mechanism put forth by PI.





SEVENTH PRACTICE

METHODOLOGY FOR MEETINGS WITH WOMEN DEFENDERS

RECOGNISING MY HISTORY AND MY ANCESTORS

Objective: To self-identify as women and recognise the historical process in which they have lived.

Description: The women form a circle and are asked if they would like to volunteer to tell their story: how they lived with their families, what they taught them, and particularly how and what they remember about their female relations or peers. About 5 women's stories can be heard.

Then, one or several cards are handed out to participants for them to note down the name of the woman who has meant a lot to them in their life, either because they learnt something from her or because she was a role model to them. The person may be deceased.

They are asked to place the card on the floor and state why they have chosen this person as their ancestor or inspiration. Reflection is carried out on what they recognised.



IDENTIFYING STRUGGLES OF WOMEN AND INDIGENOUS WOMEN

Objective: To identify the rights acquired by women and indigenous women at the national and international levels.

Description: On a coloured card, the women are asked to write an activity that they can do nowadays, but that was prohibited for their mothers or grandmothers.

The cards are arranged in age order of the women (from old to young) along a wool thread, forming a timeline.

This exercise is used to reflect on the achievements of women with regard to women's rights. The activities noted down are explained or linked to laws that have been introduced at the national and international levels defending the rights of women and indigenous women.



CAT AND MOUSE

Objective: To identify threats that directly affect women.

Description: The facilitator asks for two volunteers: one to be the cat, and the other the mouse. The other members of the group form a circle and help the mouse to stop the cat from trapping them, but without speaking.

The following questions are asked once the exercise has come to an end: the mouse is asked how they felt, and to express their emotions; likewise, the cat is asked how they felt being the hunter; the participants in the circle are asked what they saw when they were pursuing the mouse.

They are asked to express their feelings and use this as a starting point for recounting incidents they have experienced as women; occurrences in the family, community and outside of these are noted down. Incidents that limited their participation as HRDs are highlighted and differentiated.



PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION

Objective: To create a space for personal reflection, based on emotions triggered by violence perpetrated against the participants' human rights, within the context of the territory.

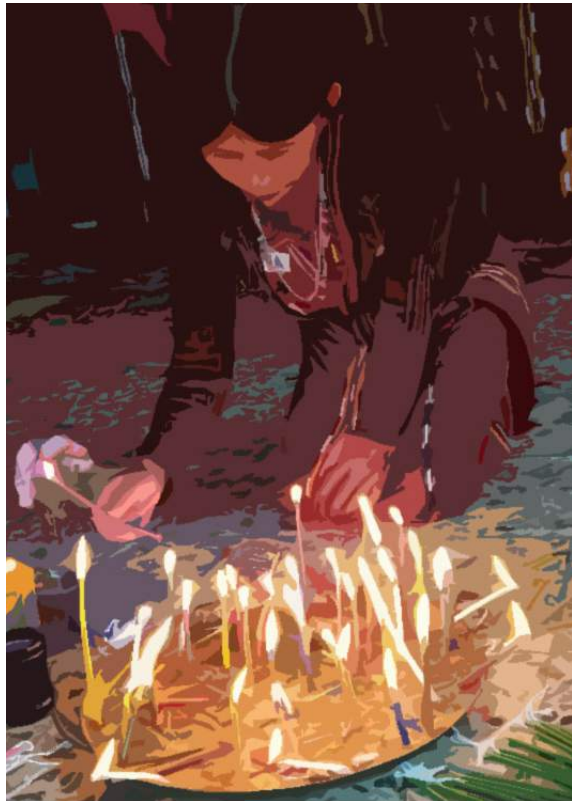
Description: The participants are instructed to identify and differentiate their emotions into 4 levels:

- ❖ Physical
- ❖ Psychological
- ❖ Family
- ❖ Community

This exercise can be used to identify high-risk aspects and derive processes for protecting the physical and emotional integrity of HRDs, using community mental health tools, with people affected by a context of institutionalised violence.

Coloured cards are used to place what the HRDs identify on each of the levels. This identification can be done through drawings or in written form, depending on the group conditions.

The cards are then placed into blocks to proceed with identifying centres of conflict and how these produce a chain reaction, affecting the participants' defence of human rights, deactivating their activity and serving as fuel for individual and group conflicts.



THE BODY MAP

Objective: To draw the emotions stored in the body and identify the impact of violence suffered on our health.

Description: Participants are to identify what impact violence has had on their body, creating a body map, with the intention of raising their awareness among HRDs of accumulated problems, irrespective of their origin.

Left unaddressed and without opportunities to develop emotions, these manifest as disease.

After the body maps, a timeline is drawn to identify the levels of effects of the problems situated in time and in the body. Group reflection is facilitated.







is an international organization that works in collaboration with people and organizations that defend Human Rights in different parts of the world, generating a "network of activity centers or Hubs" that act as regional centers with experience in security management, capacity building, as well as the development of protection networks and monitoring of public policies related to the right to defend human rights, responding to the strategic objectives of the "theory of change (ToC)" outlined by PI.

The regional hub in Mesoamerica continues its efforts to increase its research capacities with the Social Network Analysis tool, it has promoted the "Participatory Action Research" (PAR) on Protection Networks in order to develop strategies together with Human Rights Defenders. that allow them a greater approach to their realities, as well as a strengthening of their social cohesion to carry out the fight for human rights in a more secure way.

It is part of networks of international organizations interested in the situation of people and groups that defend human rights, such as the Forum of International NGOs in Guatemala (FONG), Coordinator of Spanish NGOs in Guatemala (codeg) and Red EU Lat in Brussels.



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