



POLITICAL SUBJECTS IN THE FACE OF COVID: REFLECTIONS FROM PSYCHOSOCIAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial¹

This article presents an analysis of the work carried out by Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial (henceforth Aluna²) with political subjects in Mexico within the setting of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on our experience of accompanying over 30 individuals, families, and organizations that defend human rights and freedom of expression, we addressed the impacts that COVID-19 has had on personal, family, collective, and social levels and in the fields of the psycho-emotional, internal dynamics, political projects, and security.

We also reflected on the ground covered with Aluna's pedagogical accompaniment model: the constraints and challenges of working in confinement; the adjustments in the methodology of our workshops with political subjects; the dilemmas, internal conflicts, and strategies that organizations have used to cope with the pandemic and carry on with their rights defense work, recognizing their grave context of sociopolitical violence; and, finally, some lessons that we have developed together with political subjects in the face of COVID-19. The psychosocial approach is the cross-cutting theme of the data systematization, of our analysis, and of the presentation of results throughout this article.

¹ Written by Jessica Arellano and Clemencia Correa. Reviewed by Lorena Peralta (independent consultant) and Laura Espinosa. Edited by Flor Goche. Translated by Idiomatics English Communications.

² Aluna Psychosocial Accompaniment is a Mexican civil association that was formed in 2013 motivated by a concern for the effects of political and economic violence in Mexico. It aims to develop work in mental health and human rights from a psychosocial perspective that offers tools to organizations and communities that are victims of human rights violations so they can face the effects of this violence and establish conditions that allow them to carry out their work. The name Aluna is adopted from the creation myth of the Kogui peoples of Columbia. www.alunapsicosocial.org/english

COVID-19 Context in Mexico: a psychosocial perspective

Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has marked the global scenario. Its rapid propagation and serious effects on human health have been a watershed moment in contemporary history. More than one year after it began, this disease has brought with it an alarming number of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths around the entire world, which is why its impact is immense if we acknowledge that all of humanity is going through a complex historic moment that its present-day generations had never experienced, even considering the avian influenza epidemic.³

COVID-19 has been difficult to manage in terms of socioeconomics, politics, and public health, and there is no certainty about its end date, even though vaccines arrived in 2021, promising to reduce infections and the deadly effects on the health of the world population. The race among major world powers to develop vaccines reached a point that is comparable to the Cold War, in which the rush to advance technological innovations (which would make it possible to create not only the preventative medicine but also the tests that would support its use, manufacturing, distribution, and application) marked a continuous state of economic, political, and ideological competition, which has entailed repeated questioning and distrust surrounding the geographical origin of the laboratories as well as the capital for their manufacturing.

Moreover, the hoarding of vaccines by countries like the United States—to the detriment of their accessibility for purchase by many nations in the Global South—has marked a phenomenon that heightens inequality in access to health and, in this case, in the possibility of preventing infection in peripheral countries where precarization is already part of structural living conditions.

The work of civil society organizations has not stopped and neither have the struggles of political subjects⁴ in Mexico and Latin America for the defense of life, dignity, territories, and, in general, for human rights as a whole; to the contrary, they are carried out within the setting of the risks involved in this public health crisis.

³ Beginning in Mexico in the year 2009; however, public health control was swift, and there was a significantly lower rate of infections and mortality, which is why it did not represent the same risk and impacts as COVID-19.

⁴ “From our scope of work in psychosocial accompaniment, we explain that political subjects are the people or groups that become aware of their reality and get involved to denounce and transform it through processes of questioning and liberation before powers that oppress them and violate their human rights.” (Correa and Barrios (2018). Political Subjects: a viewpoint from the psychosocial approach. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3CB3ijQ>)

For Aluna this disease represents a large-scale psychosocial trauma⁵ due to its multiple impacts⁶ that have occurred globally on personal, family, organizational, community, and social levels as well as in the psycho-emotional, physical, and economic spheres in the short, medium, and long term. These negative effects are superimposed on the context of sociopolitical violence, as in the case of Mexico, with decades of accumulated corruption, impunity, and serious human rights violations, which are heightened in community and rural contexts or in situations of extreme marginalization.

COVID represents a large-scale psychosocial trauma due to its multiple impacts.

At Aluna, we accompany individuals, families, and organizations whom we consider to be political subjects,⁷ that have been direct victims of sociopolitical violence, or that, in turn, accompany other vulnerable populations in the defense of their rights: relatives of disappeared persons, women day laborers, prison populations, immigrants, rural-indigenous populations defending territory, displaced or at-risk journalists, feminist collectives, and LGBTIQ+ populations, to mention some.

The COVID-19 pandemic intensifies and bears witness to the precarious and unequal situation of structural socioeconomics, labor, and public health in our country, which is expressed in phenomena such as limited access to health services and consequent deaths from a lack of timely assistance; insufficient hospital capacities or an economic situation that hinders access to oxygen, medicine, and proper treatment; historical labor precarization that, at the root of this crisis, has increased the number of people who are unemployed and do not have social security as well as

⁵ Concept developed by Ignacio Martín-Baró, a psychologist and Spanish Jesuit priest who was the founder of Social Psychology of Liberation. Psychosocial trauma [...] is harm inflicted on a person from a violent circumstance whose causes and consequences are not only located on a personal level but also on a collective and social level. Among political subjects, the psychosocial trauma expresses itself in impacts, such as fear, guilt, fatigue, powerlessness, and the rupture of bonds, in detriment to their physical and emotional health and the negative effects on their life plans and projects. (Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial (2020). Political Document. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3zwfEli>. Page 14-15)

⁶ Unlike sociopolitical violence, in which harm is intentionally provoked, the pandemic brought about multiple unintentional impacts that bear witness to the structural roots of social inequality, impoverishment, and the shortcomings of global health systems as well as of social security as a whole.

⁷ “Aluna’s notion of a political subject is sustained by several Latin American theoretical approaches, many of which are inspired by Marxist theory and processes of liberation struggle. For example, the approach of subject and process of hominization against process of oppression and dehumanizing alienation from the pedagogy of the oppressed by Paulo Freire, the notion of the historical subject and the dialectical relationship of the subject and its context from Ignacio Martín-Baró, and the notions of social actor, political subject, and popular subject from Isabel Rauber, to mention a few. For Aluna, political subjects are social collective actors that are constructed in processes of socialization in the praxis of a political struggle for social transformation. They live out and analyze their situation in the social structure, as well as the political and economic mechanisms of oppression, within the political praxis, they broaden their awareness of class and role and sociohistorical contribution, and they have a project and coordinate together to construct projects of political transformation or social liberation” (Correa and Barrios, 2018)

work shifts that are fulfilled at the expense of the physical and psycho-emotional health of the working class; the increase in gender-related violence against women and gender-sex diverse populations in the setting of home confinement in a country with high rates of feminicides and attacks against the LGBTIQ+ population; social control measures⁸ established by governments (through digital platforms as well as restrictions of operational hours and mobility in some Mexican states, similar to what has occurred in other countries); and finally, the increase in attacks against journalists and human rights defenders.⁹

Since 2020, political subjects have been facing this double vulnerability in their work: sociopolitical and patriarchal violence in addition to the constant state of alert for the risk of being infected by the coronavirus.

As a whole, these phenomena present an outlook that warns of a clear structural crisis with manifestations of sociopolitical violence in Mexican territory, which have been heightened by the context of the pandemic. Accordingly, it is essential to create visibility around the fact that, since 2020, political subjects have been facing this double vulnerability in their work: sociopolitical and patriarchal violence in addition to the constant state of alert for the risk of infection in the setting of the public health crisis.

In parallel, society has had to face psychosocial trauma with deep-seated ruptures that have affected psychological, collective, and social structures and led to having to assume multiple losses, starting with the way of life we once knew (socializing, the care and expressions of interpersonal and family affection); the permanent closure of in-person schools and the implications for parents; the loss of jobs and financial undertakings, which heightened the economic crisis that most of the Mexican population was already experiencing.

Even with vaccines and possible epidemiological control, new dilemmas and uncertainties have emerged when launching the return to in-person activities—at schools, offices, recreational and sporting areas, transportation, etc. New daily life entails readjusting and a constant effort to go

⁸ See: Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial, “Dilemas del control social en el marco del Covid-19” [Dilemmas of Social Control in the Setting of COVID-19]. Available in Spanish at: <https://bit.ly/2Zo6GjW>

⁹ According to the 2020 Annual Report of ARTICLE 19’s Office in Mexico (www.articulo19.org/distorsion/): “In 2020, aggression against the press was recorded every 13 hours. During this period, there were 692 attacks against the media and journalists; six were assassinated.” (Quote translated to English for its use in this article.)

back to interacting and reconnecting with the socializing spaces we had lost. It is important to highlight that, at Aluna, we do not speak about going back to normal, as previous conditions were not normal either when seen from a viewpoint of leading a dignified life and having access to basic conditions for living within a framework of human rights; we prefer to speak about returning to our previous daily lives, which is still distant or practically impossible when facing changes and losses and standing before the still invisible transformations.

At Aluna, we do not speak about going back to normal, as previous conditions were not normal either when seen from a viewpoint of leading a dignified life and having access to basic conditions for living within a framework of human rights; we prefer to speak about returning to our previous daily lives.

“Cabin syndrome,” as some psychologists have named the experience of being afraid to leave the domestic space after the prolonged period of staying home—possible for members of the educational sector and middle classes who worked virtually—presents itself through emotions like fear, anxiety, or stress that the readjustment and contact with the outside world entail. Facing this, from the psychosocial approach, we have identified the need to adapt, gradually, as a society in order to revisit and rebuild family and community life and the territories we inhabit; to break through the comfort of being at home and start interacting again; to live in the world again, with the necessary measures and as public health conditions permit.

A fundamental aspect for psychosocial accompaniment work has been to assume that we are facing a change in life, as well as naming what is happening to us on personal, family, and organizational levels and dialoging about it.

A lesson has been to acknowledge that it is no longer possible to do everything the same way as before, given that material conditions are different, and the risk of infection and disease is real and ongoing. In this way, a fundamental aspect for psychosocial accompaniment work has been to assume that we are facing a change in life, as well as naming what is happening to us on personal, family, and organizational levels and dialoging about it in order to develop tools that allow us to face the scenario.

This document presents themes or ideas from our experience of systematization and reflection from some accompaniment processes with political subjects, which we carried out in the setting of the COVID-19 pandemic. We reflected on the work and characterization of psychosocial accompaniment during the pandemic, the limitations and scopes of virtual settings, the methodological challenges, the implications of COVID-19 for organizations and the defenders

and journalists with whom we have developed processes, and on adapting Aluna's work to make the psychosocial accompaniment model sustainable.

The aim of presenting the most evident impacts is to prepare not only an analysis but also keys for interpretation, challenges, and experiences that organizations contribute with their wisdom and that, at Aluna, we gather together on a collective path that reflects strength and hope for coping with the difficult context of the pandemic this year. For all people and organizations, facing the pandemic's impacts has involved a new and constant interpretation of the political, social, and economic context that they face to do their work and a reconsideration of working conditions.

Facing the pandemic's impacts has involved a new and constant interpretation of the political, social, and economic context that they face to do their work and a reconsideration of working conditions.

Psychosocial accompaniment in the setting of the COVID-19 pandemic

From March 2020 (when public health measures were put in place due to the propagation of infections in Mexico) to date, Aluna has accompanied more than 30 organizations, individuals, groups, and families;¹⁰ some of these accompaniment processes respond to institutional policy strengthening processes¹¹ that have been evolving for months or even years, and others have begun recently, while approximately a third are accompaniment processes for specific situations or—as they are characterized at Aluna—for crisis/emergency.¹²

¹⁰ Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial. 2020 virtual meeting on accompaniment analysis, internal working document.

¹¹ “Accompaniment for organizational strengthening is the process that allows more time for developing the decisions and actions that are taken so that political subjects can recognize the damage and changes this entails and also strengthen or build resistance and prevention strategies through psychosocial work in different fields [psycho-emotional, internal dynamics and relationships, political project, and security] of their organization.” (Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial (2017). Modelo de acompañamiento psicosocial [Psychosocial Accompaniment Model]. Mexico: Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial. Available in Spanish at: <https://bit.ly/2XGebC0>. Page 151. Quote translated for its use in this article.)

¹² “We understand accompaniment in an emergency to be that which takes place when a political subject is facing borderline or critical situations derived from serious human rights violations, from working or living in contexts of sociopolitical violence or in the accompaniment of actors who are living in high risk or violent situations. We understand crisis as a rupture from the psychosocial balance to which people are accustomed and in which they stretch their coping resources or capacities to the limit.” (Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial (2017). Modelo de acompañamiento psicosocial [Psychosocial Accompaniment Model]. Page 149. Quote translated for its use in this article.)

While most of these accompaniment processes—around 20—did not originate or center on COVID-19, in every case, the impacts of the pandemic have affected collective work and,

Since March 2020, Aluna has accompanied more than 30 organizations, people, groups, and families. In every case, the impacts of the pandemic have affected collective work.

therefore, have been predominant in the subjects and methodologies that are taken on, even postponing previous reflections and work that had been planned before the 2020 context. In this way, by strengthening political subjects' internal dynamics and political projects, developing coping strategies to deal with the pandemic's impacts is cross-cutting on individual, family, organizational, community, and social levels.

Following our psychosocial accompaniment model, our work with each organization is based on four fields that, in our experience, are those that are affected within the framework of sociopolitical violence: psycho-emotional, internal dynamics, political project, and security, which are approached on personal, family, organizational, and community levels. The accompaniment methodology begins by carrying out a participative diagnostic activity to learn about needs and identify the impacts on each person and collective and, consequently, the fields to be strengthened. Later, through a pedagogical process, the coping mechanisms that will allow them to sustain their struggles and political projects are developed collectively.

Around June 2020, having gone through the first quarter of the pandemic in the country, five of the crisis accompaniment processes responded to requests to address the impacts of COVID-19 on organizations, whether on the mental, physical, and emotional health of staff members, on their internal dynamics—such as work plans and methodologies, communication, adjustments in work shifts and spaces—, or even on the uncertainty surrounding the sustainability of their projects. While COVID does not cause the same negative effects and damage as sociopolitical violence, we believe, due to the complexity of the pandemic's impacts, that political subjects have been affected in every field, which is why, in some accompaniment processes, we have focused on working on the coping mechanisms that are necessary for continuing with their work.

Given the risk of being infected with COVID-19, the format of the accompaniment processes has changed. Although in-person workshops were formerly prioritized, starting in March 2020, when the first “local” cases appeared in Mexico, sessions and workshops have mainly been held virtually. Gradually, in 2021, we have implemented hybrid schemes—virtual and in-person—and,

on some occasions, in-person sessions following the internal health protocols of our organization and of those we accompany.

This has presented different challenges in methodological and logistical-technological terms, considering the specific characteristics of the virtual medium,¹³ which impact the depth and progress of the work done with organizations, workshop safety, and/or the formation of bonds between accompanied individuals and facilitators. Accompanying without looking into people's eyes, without reading non-verbal and body language, makes it complex to build that basic bridge of trust and intimacy, which is so natural in life and so difficult to establish in the virtual world. On local and national levels, constant assessments of public health conditions for returning to in-person formats along with considerations for emerging needs from social actors have contributed to making accompaniment processes more complex.

Given the risk of being infected with COVID-19, Aluna has held most of its accompaniment processes virtually, which has presented different methodological and logistical-technological

Below, we consider some of the impacts from a reading organized according to Aluna's accompaniment model, centered on the fields of the psycho-emotional, internal dynamics, security, and the political project. The systematization of impacts, which is based on the experiences of 2020, is complemented by a correlate of challenges, keys, and tools developed by the organizations during the accompaniment workshops to face the impacts of COVID-19, from their know-how in adversity, situated in the multiple sociocultural and political contexts and identities of work in Mexico.

The impacts and their corresponding challenges are presented in two parts: the first falls under the organizations' internal dynamics, and the second is aimed at aspects to be developed concerning the processes, territories, and communities that they, in turn, accompany.

¹³ Difficulties organizing and holding meetings with large teams, a change in the dynamics that were traditionally employed, work with teams that have been divided due to technological issues, and a need to keep sessions short due to the fatigue caused by the continuous use of screens, the lack of physical closeness, and the need to open more spaces for individual work, among others.

Strengthening human rights organizations and journalists

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, confusion and uncertainty have become cross-cutting elements that are apparent in accompaniment processes. Consequently, workshops have made it possible to build spaces for collective reflection and for understanding what COVID-19 has meant, its consequences, and possible ways to cope with it. Under the psychosocial approach, it is fundamental to understand what is happening in order to get out of the confusion. This also makes it possible to take a stance and adopt a political interpretation of reality.

Accordingly, in the workshops, we have seen that, while COVID-19 is a disease, the ways of dealing with it have been marked by the political management of each of the world's nation states. Similarly, the confusion worsens with media manipulation, which is why it has been essential for each organization to identify its context and develop its stance on the pandemic, which comes from building the autonomy to cope with it.

On a psycho-emotional level, we have found a prevalence of uncertainty and powerlessness caused by a lack of knowledge about what has been happening—infections, a rupture from daily life, losses—and the future implications of the pandemic. Facing this, work has been done with organizations to identify where there is certainty, given that recognizing what is known, what one has, and what can be done on individual and collective levels creates some certitude amid the chaos and presents the possibility of taking responsibility and playing an active role in daily decisions of life and political work.

Fear of being infected and infecting loved ones is a constant impact that we see among those we accompany, which is why we have worked on tools in both the subjective sphere and as part of individual, collective, and institutional measures to avoid and/or cope with possible infections and, in parallel, deactivate anxiety by distinguishing fear from risk.¹⁴

Confusion and uncertainty are cross-cutting elements that are apparent in the accompaniment processes that have been carried out during the pandemic.

Fear of being infected and infecting loved ones is a constant impact.

On a psycho-emotional level, there is a prevalence of uncertainty and powerlessness caused by a lack of knowledge about what has been happening and the future implications.

¹⁴ “Risk assessment is a process that consists of analyzing different components of security with regard to a specific

As time went on, people who were close to us died, including a member of an organization we accompanied. As a result, work on mourning processes has been a central point in our workshops, in a context that makes many of the usual funeral rituals impossible, which is why we have collectively developed new ways of being present, of saying our final farewells without being physically present, of symbolizing these farewells and evoking memory. Recovering local traditions and ways of saying goodbye to loved ones, reconstructing how previous experiences were coped with to heal and reformulate losses, innovating strategies to be present and hug each other from a distance have been challenges and processes that make it possible to cope with death.

Mourning the former ways of life, the rupture with daily life when faced with confinement and social distancing measures, and remote work are some factors that have triggered processes of physical and emotional fatigue. Therefore, within the framework of accompaniment, we work on developing this mourning process; recognizing stress, guilt, and excessive demands with double and even triple work shifts and exhaustion; identifying its impacts on the body

Mourning the former ways of life, the rupture with daily life when faced with confinement and social distancing measures, and remote work are some factors that have triggered processes of physical and emotional fatigue.

and family, organizational, and community relationships; and socializing strategies to face these impacts, such as meditating, exercising, doing leisure activities individually and with family, identifying causes of stress and insomnia, such as alcohol consumption, strengthening the spiritual dimension based on ideological beliefs and orientations, among others.

Facing the guilt surrounding infections or losses, work has been done on recognizing where each person's responsibility falls and identifying what is in their hands and what is beyond their control; in turn, by discerning between them, it is possible to take measures and assume responsibility in order to release and discharge the guilt surrounding what is out of our control.

objective within organizations; this can be as general or specific as the needs of that moment require it to be. But the psychosocial perspective broadens its elements of analysis, also including other aspects of the psychosocial approach, such as the impacts and coping mechanisms that we find in the psycho-emotional fields and those of the political project, and internal dynamics, in addition to those that form the known risk formula [...]. The risk is not only physical or against liberty and integrity; there is also other damage that is not visible and that disrupts multiple aspects of personal and organizational life. Providing evidence of these other impacts and analyzing them is addressing security in a comprehensive manner.” (Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial (2021). Valoración del riesgo en la defensa de derechos humanos. Guía metodológica desde el enfoque psicosocial [Risk Assessment in Human Rights Defense. Methodological Guide from the Psychosocial Approach]. Mexico: Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial. Available in Spanish at: <https://bit.ly/3m5DCpd>. Page 23. Quote translated for its use in this article.)

On a level of internal dynamics, we identified a change in relationships among work teams caused by the pandemic, which affected organizational fabric and internal communication.

On a level of internal dynamics, we identified a change in relationships among work teams caused by the pandemic, which affected organizational fabric and internal communication. First, the impossibility of working in the same physical space and, instead, working from home, due to social distancing measures, changed the usual dynamics. In this scenario, strategies have been adopted and developed based on each organization's needs in order to strengthen assertive, effective, and fluid communication and provide activities that reintegrate and allow for bringing the staff together.

We highlighted the importance of constantly remembering and activating the need to encourage staff and prioritize strengthening and institutional collective care measures as well as doing group activities that maintain human ties in organizations. These activities do not put people's health at risk; to the contrary, establishing agreements, responsibilities, and prevention protocols, as well as ones for assistance in cases of COVID-19 infection, can help strengthen trust among members of organizations, measures that can even be replicated with the population that they in turn accompany. Finally, it is important to stress that establishing boundaries and being clear about which responsibilities are institutional and which are individual helps people adopt an active role in taking care of the staff, the organization, and their political project.

During the accompaniment processes, we found that some organizations did not have internal measures for coping with COVID-19, while others were developing them. Something that has been fundamental in all the processes is contributing tools so that all the individuals who form the organizations feel acknowledged in the created protocols and designing mechanisms to reach agreements that allow for work to continue. The intersectional perspective has been put into practice as a reading that makes it possible to differentiate between each person's conditions and take them into account when safety measures are carried out, basing them on their particular situation and vulnerabilities: mothers, fathers, women, people who are sick or caring for others, place of residence, and geographical location, among others.

Something that has been fundamental in all the processes is contributing tools so that all the individuals who form the organizations feel acknowledged in the protocols that are created to cope with COVID.

The passage of time and the changes in the "traffic light" epidemiological monitoring system

have made it possible to gradually return to shared physical spaces; in this context, it has been important to work on recognizing that the pandemic is still happening and will continue to be present in our lives, and more so as new strains of the coronavirus arrive—such as the Delta variant, in 2021, which is highly contagious and has more serious health consequences. Facing this certainty, we have supported organizations in forming routes that allow them to create conditions for developing their work in mixed formats (in-person, partially in-person, remote), both in internal activities and in their work with other organizations and with victims of sociopolitical violence.

Keeping a close watch on the context of ongoing human rights violations and attacks on defenders during the pandemic positions us within the relevance, validity, and importance of political work and projects. Therefore, maintaining or reactivating human rights defense is vital, while also doing so in accordance with the local and national context of risk and under the security measures for the staff and individuals who do accompaniment work.

Facing all that has been deconstructed on individual and organizational levels due to the pandemic, we seek to rebuild a structure that allows for a process of visualizing and establishing new forms of daily life. Here are some keys that we have found in accompaniment processes: organizing the information we have and receive, guarding ourselves against the infodemic—the excess of information and lack of support from trustworthy sources—, assessing the strategic lines of political subjects, reassuming the struggle’s political meaning, recovering organizations’ missions before the new challenges of the context, and also strengthening internal coping mechanisms through COVID-19 prevention and reaction protocols, security tools for the attacks that are a product of political work, and the development of agreements that contribute to preventing conflicts among staff.

Facing all that has been deconstructed on individual and organizational levels due to the pandemic, we seek to rebuild a structure that allows for a process of visualizing and establishing new forms of daily life.

In some cases, because of internal adjustments and even due to adjustments to the political project, the annual strategic plans were negatively affected, although most of the organizations were able to resolve this situation and follow through with what had been planned, despite fatigue and constant adaptations to the context. A shared impact for most of the organizations is the concern about the financial sustainability of projects due to layoffs in the work force, agencies’

redployment of funds, and/or the impossibility of meeting work expectations due to local public health limitations. Accordingly, these are some aspects that have been addressed in accompaniment processes: the relevance of having clarity about the fact that we are facing a reality and global context with multiple negative effects and rethinking strategies to carry on with the projects' sustainability.

Facing this situation, part of the institutional strengthening is established around relationships with funding agencies, with actions like providing evidence of the changes in work methodologies, policy and financial adjustments, and the negative effects experienced internally. The more detailed of an explanation is offered to agencies, the more possible it is to provide better support for the changes that each organization has had to make, both in the processes they accompany in the field and in the difficulties of carrying on with regular work. Adapting ways of working and establishing partnerships with other organizations and networks are components of mutual support that strengthen this process in internal work processes, in the far-reaching space of social struggles, and also in project management and agendas with external agencies and actors.

For groups that have self-managed operations, the pandemic's financial impact has been terrible. Some have needed to close, and others have had to rethink strategies to professionalize their labor.

In the case of organizations, movements, and collectives that have self-managed operations, the pandemic's financial impact has been terrible: job loss and the labor precarization of people who volunteer for projects along with the strategies for paying work expenses—modified or canceled because of COVID-19 risks—led to an economic crisis of such a magnitude that organizations have needed to close due to their unsustainability. Other organizations that are going through this crisis have had to rethink strategies to professionalize their labor, which will mean establishing new networks or seeking funds to compensate defenders for their work and, therefore, strengthening their main base of staff members.

Strengthening processes and work with accompanied communities

The challenges that some organizations have faced in the setting of the pandemic are found in the accompaniment processes that they offer to other political subjects, given that this is the

meaning of their work and, therefore, their greatest concern. To take on this dimension, work was done based on their experience and knowledge of local contexts, strengthening methodologies and strategies that allow them to better develop their accompaniment activity with other social organizations.

First, for staff, it has been fundamental to start with their experience with political subjects and document the contexts in which they work; similarly, monitoring the situation of health and public health risks in towns has contributed to establishing protocols and to the possible creation of materials that can be useful for accompanied individuals. In human rights matters, and based on each organization's profile, documenting the impacts of COVID-19 can be strategic for developing future plans or reports on the local situation, or for demanding rights before government authorities.

Monitoring state discourses on COVID-19 and their intersection with actions or omissions in public policies for dealing with the pandemic represents a possibility for recording and assessing that sets precedents for firsthand information about how this context is experienced locally, which, added to the framework of sociopolitical violence, allows for building panoramas and discourses to create visibility around the reality of organizations, peoples, and communities in Mexico.

An underlying discussion that organizations have faced is related to managing rumors and disinformation from the government, media, and social media. The analysis we did shows that the strategy of disinforming operates as an additional element for social control, which is a deliberate act of the powers that be. Concerning this, we determined that improving communication with accompanied political subjects and establishing mechanisms to share clear and truthful information is crucial; a first step is questioning what kind of messages, data, and general information is relevant and necessary and with what aims.

An underlying discussion in organizations is related to managing rumors and disinformation about the pandemic from the government and media.

In contexts of high marginalization—an absence of alternative media and health centers, among other factors—human rights defense organizations must socialize truthful and timely information about COVID-19, which will help communities have ways to cope with the pandemic and

provide them with materials to develop their own analyses. A political and scientific stance can be included in the discourse, with a narrative that contributes to strengthening communities, because we are speaking of integral collective health.

It is fundamental to recognize that we live in a multicultural society, where explanations and coping mechanisms for dealing with the pandemic will be interceded by world views or ways of understanding that are culturally situated and even by the denial resulting from the high impact on some sectors. For some communities, fear makes every person or group experience COVID-19 in a particular way and develop strategies for coping with it from their ideological stances, beliefs, religious frameworks, or historical lessons; in turn, identifying these sociocultural particularities will make it possible to identify the coping mechanisms that are set in paralysis or inaction and also relate within a framework of respect and understanding of the context where they work and the local ways of accompanying pain, processing grief, and experiencing final farewells.

Conclusions

The intersectional approach teaches us a lesson about how the collective development of agreements should consider the different capacities and needs of the staff according to each person's circumstances and particularities. That is, it should be based on the recognition of the different conditions resulting from being a man or woman, being cared for or living alone, enjoying good health or being at risk due to comorbidity, living in an urban center with access to clinics or in a rural environment lacking basic services, to mention a few.

Unlike what was believed in early 2020, it is crucial to acknowledge that the pandemic will continue and that its impacts on individuals and social organizations will accumulate as time goes by and heighten the economic, public health, political, and social crisis. Therefore, recognizing these circumstances is fundamental as a starting point for redirecting and strengthening the political and security strategies of individuals, organizations, and communities. Now more than ever before, developing mechanisms to monitor and secure political subjects' collective health—both physical and emotional—and to put it at the center is a priority need in order to make human rights defense sustainable in Mexico, Latin America, and the entire world.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about losses and established changes to our familiar ways of socializing, it has also brought life lessons with it, evidence of the breaking points of a neoliberal capitalist system and the multiple forms in which it harms, jeopardizes, and invisibilizes minorities; in addition, it opens up the possibility of developing new ways of organizing, from the grassroots, to cope with the impacts of this context and strengthen social struggles and resistance movements.

For all of the above, the pandemic has represented a psychosocial trauma, given that it collectively affects social, political, and economic structures as well as the material and symbolic living conditions of families, peoples, and nations. Despite the arrival of vaccines and the development of improved treatments for the disease, the impacts of COVID-19 continue. Some of these impacts have been overcome and turned into coping mechanisms; others will remain; and others will appear sometime in the future due to the continued presence of COVID in the world.

For these reasons, working within organizations to recognize the impacts and to develop coping strategies will make it possible to reformulate and create ways to reunite with people, putting the social fabric at the center along with the need to keep in touch and uphold affective ties. In the face of the fear, distance, and isolation imposed by the pandemic, it will be possible to break away from individualism through affection, respect, and solid bonds as well as by recovering relationships, therefore strengthening solidarity, mutual support, and collective care, which are so necessary, both for rebuilding socially and for constructing a dignified life.

Works Cited

Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial (2020). Dilemas del control social en el marco del Covid-19 [Dilemmas of Social Control in the Setting of COVID-19]. Available in Spanish at: <https://bit.ly/2Zo6GjW>

Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial (2017). Modelo de acompañamiento psicosocial [Psychosocial Accompaniment Model]. Mexico: Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial. Available in Spanish at: <https://bit.ly/2XGebC0>

Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial (2020). Political Document. Available at:

<https://bit.ly/3zwfEIj>

Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial (2021). Valoración del riesgo en la defensa de derechos humanos. Guía metodológica desde el enfoque psicosocial [Risk Assessment in Human Rights Defense. Methodological Guide from the Psychosocial Approach]. Mexico: Aluna Acompañamiento Psicosocial. Available in Spanish at: <https://bit.ly/3m5DCpd>

ARTICLE 19 (2021). Distorsión: el discurso contra la realidad [Distortion: The discourse against reality]. Available in Spanish at: <https://articulo19.org/distorsion/>

Correa and Barrios (2018). Political Subjects: a viewpoint from the psychosocial approach. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3CB3ijQ>

August 2021



We would like to thank Bread for the World for supporting the publication of this article.