

# Women's participation in peace-building in Latin America:

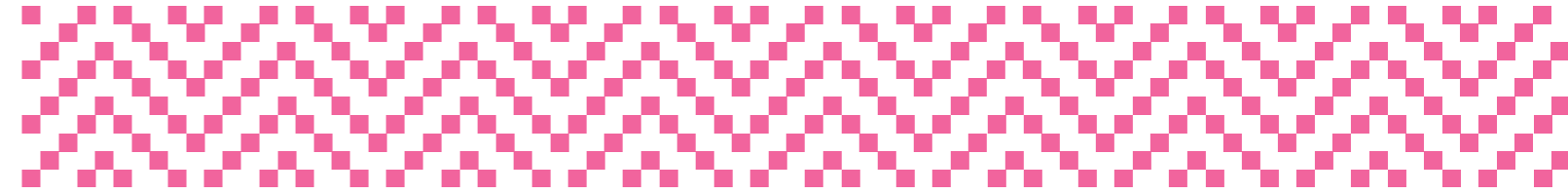
Guatemala, Colombia and Venezuela



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# Introduction



Thanks to the partnership between the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) and the Women, Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF), it was possible to support three Latin American initiatives which focus on strengthening the participation of women in peace processes in Guatemala, Colombia and Venezuela. This support was provided within the framework of the WPHF's Rapid Response Window (RRW), which aims to support women's peacebuilding organizations with short-term projects to address the funding gap for women's participation in formal peace processes.

In this framework, the NIMD established a partnership with Asociación Mujer Tejedora del Desarrollo (AMUTED) in Guatemala, with Movilizadorio in Colombia, and with the Cauce Association in Venezuela to develop initiatives that contribute to democratic

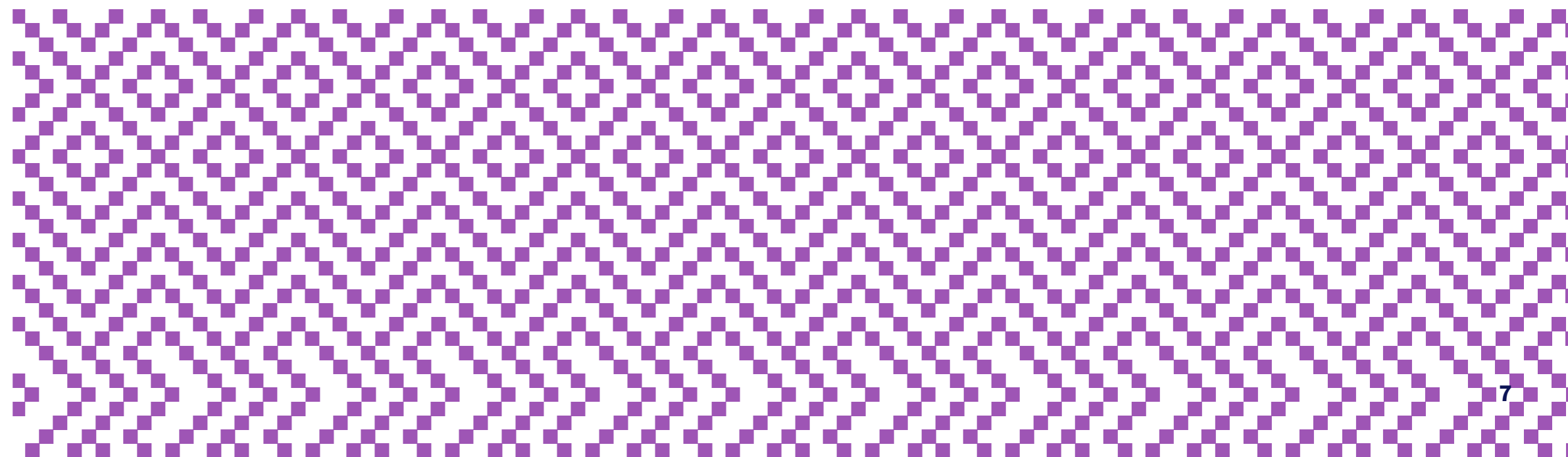
expansion, peace building and gender equality in their countries, and thus, advance in the implementation of the agenda on women, peace and security in Latin America. Each initiative focused on its own national context in relation to the negotiation or implementation of peace accords. AMUTED strengthened the participation of indigenous women in peacebuilding at local and regional levels within the framework of the peace accords signed in 1996 in Guatemala; Movilizadorio worked with female victims and former combatants to support the implementation of the peace accord signed in 2016 in Colombia, while Cauce promoted dialogue among women from various political groups in the current negotiation process in Venezuela.

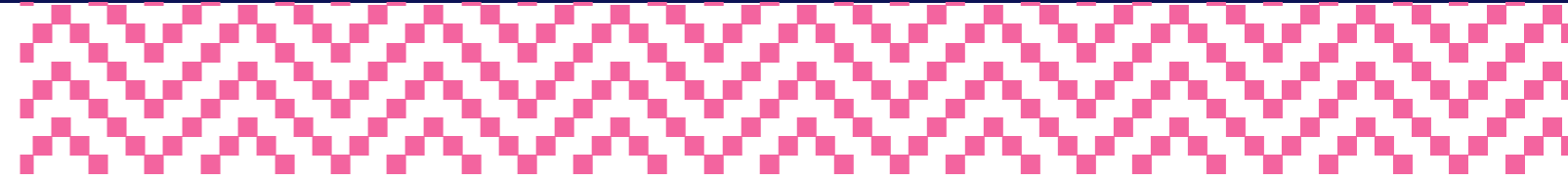
NIMD systematized and analyzed each of the initiatives to document achievements, best practices, and lessons learned for the future.

To this end, interviews were conducted of the coordinators of the 3 organizations, as well as of women who participated in these processes.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, it created a forum for exchanging experiences not only to discuss lessons learned jointly, but to engage in conversation and inspire other organizations and women leaders in promoting the agenda of women, peace and security in the region.<sup>2</sup>

This document presents the main conclusions of said systematization exercise from a regional perspective. The document begins with a brief introduction of the political context of each country and each of the initiatives developed. It then describes major achievements, best practices and lessons learned jointly, and ends with 8 recommendations that serve as a guide for future actions in the field of women's participation in peacebuilding in the region.

# The participation of women in peace processes in Guatemala, Colombia and Venezuela





## AMUTED in Guatemala:

# Strengthening the political participation of indigenous women of the Western Highlands for peace and security



The Peace Accords were signed between the Guatemalan Government and the leftist guerrilla represented by the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit (URNG) in 1996. The Accords established several commitments to address social inequality, lack of access to land, and the rights of indigenous peoples. Regarding the gender approach, it was limited to including actions related to the active participation of women as an “essential element for the economic and social development of Guatemala”.<sup>3</sup> Despite these provisions, the search for gender equality and the eradication of violence against women continues to be a challenge in the country. Machismo in public and private life, structural poverty, and, above all, racism against indigenous women, has prevented their active participation in political scenarios and public debate.<sup>4</sup>

In response to the lack of progress in the implementation of the Accords’ actions aimed at women, and their limited participation in the post-accord scenario, women’s civil society organizations have taken the lead. In this context, AMUTED led an initiative to strengthen the political participation of indigenous women of the Western Highlands for peace and security. Through this initiative, department level women’s networks were established, political advocacy skills were developed, the Peace Accords were promoted, and economic, social and political opportunities were created for local indigenous women’s organizations. These actions have opened paths towards greater visibility and political participation for indigenous women in Guatemala.

# Movilizadorio in Colombia:

## ¡Nuestras voces!



The Peace Accord signed in 2016 between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Colombian government marked a historic milestone that ended more than 60 years of internal armed conflict in Colombia. In addition to seeking to end the armed conflict through the reintegration of former combatants into civilian life, the Accord included comprehensive reparation for victims and addressed the underlying causes of the conflict. During the negotiations, the women's movement managed to create the Gender Subcommittee, an unprecedented initiative in a peace accord. This subcommittee had the participation of representatives from both the government and the FARC and managed to include a gender perspective across sectors through 122 measures aimed at women and girls, to respond to the different effects of the conflict on their lives and recognizing their fundamental role in peacebuilding.<sup>5</sup> However, the implementation of these provisions has been slow and has faced multiple monitoring and follow-up challenges, all of which highlights the need to lead concrete actions

to guarantee their fulfillment and to achieve the democratic inclusion of women in the territories most affected by the conflict.

In response to implementation challenges, "¡Nuestras Voces!", led by Movilizadorio, was a timely and necessary project. Using innovative technologies, Movilizadorio promoted the creation and positioning of "¡Nuestras Voces!" political agenda, which collected proposals from women victims of the armed conflict and women signatories of the accord from different territories of the country. This agenda positioned the topics of interest of these women in high-level political decision-making spheres, such as the Congress and the Presidency of Colombia, facilitating dialogue between decision makers and community-based women victims and former combatants. These efforts have contributed to opening paths for greater participation and representation of women in peacebuilding efforts in the country.

# Cauce in Venezuela:

## Strengthening women's leadership in negotiation processes in Venezuela

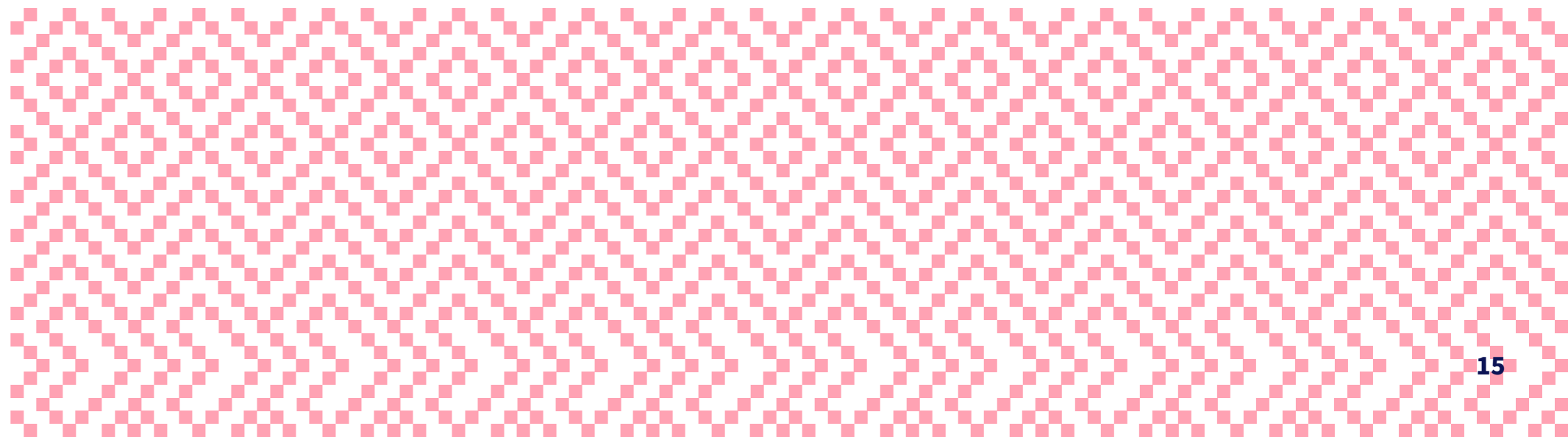


During the last two decades, Venezuela has faced intense polarization and a political, economic and humanitarian crisis that has led more than 7 million people to migrate.<sup>6</sup> This polarization is caused by the tension among sectors of society that support the national socialist and Bolivarian government, and those who group together to pursue independence or are in the opposition. This political crisis has had different repercussions on the lives of Venezuelan women and girls. The feminization of poverty, barriers to access to sexual and reproductive health, obstacles to accessing justice and receiving support in cases of gender-based violence, and lack of guarantees for political participation,<sup>7</sup> demonstrates how women, regardless of their political background, are affected in the same way by the Venezuelan conflict. Despite several attempts at dialogue between the government and the opposition since 2002, none have been successful, which has generated mistrust and lack of credibility between both parties. Additionally, although discussion groups have representation of women from both actors in conflict, this

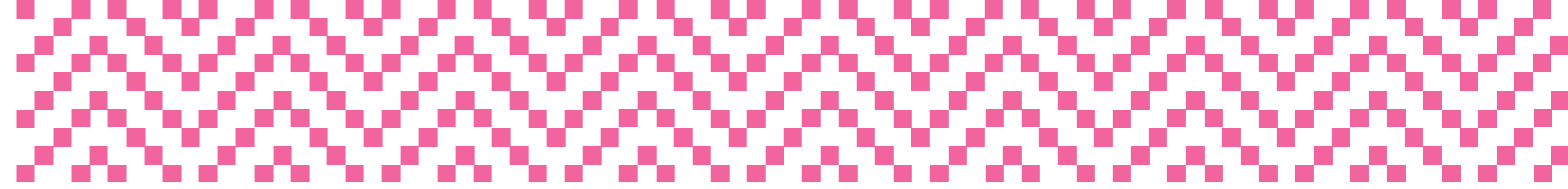
representation is limited and has not made it possible to guarantee a gender focus in the negotiation process.

In this context, “Women for Dialogue and Peace in Venezuela”, created with the support of Cauce, has played a fundamental role in expanding democracy in the country. Formed by more than 20 feminist women from various political tendencies, they unified their perspectives and reached consensus on more than 20 recitals and 37 commitments reflected in the agenda: “From Partners in Conflict to Partners in Peace: together to defend the rights of women in Venezuela”. Through this agenda, the group actively seeks inclusion in discussion groups with the objective of including their visions and perspectives in the search for solutions to the crisis facing the country, and thus, contribute to the fulfillment of women’s rights in the process of building Venezuela.

**What were the collective accomplishments? How did women's participation in peacebuilding grow?**







# Create and strengthen feminist women networks for peace

Despite the difficulties and obstacles that may arise among highly diverse and divided women's movements, and even while immersed in strong political polarization, the three initiatives managed to create and promote networks and partnerships of women that share a common interest in building peace and gender equality in their countries. In this way, it was shown that it is possible to build trust, reach agreements and generate empathy when the conversation focuses on women's rights and not on ideological or partisan positions.

In Guatemala, even though the Peace Accords stipulated *“respect, promote, support and institutionalize women's organizations in rural and urban areas”*,<sup>8</sup> the women's movement continues to experience enormous difficulties for freedom of association due to few and limited guarantees for participation.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, there is currently polarization among women's organizations that arises from purely partisan and electoral reasons. Regarding this, one of the women participating in the initiative shared: *“(in Guatemala) there*

*is no synergy among indigenous women and there is no explicit indigenous women's movement, because there are many interests and strategies mixed between the left and the right. “Feminists get mixed up in that and a movement in itself is not formed.”*<sup>10</sup> Therefore, a significant contribution to build peace in Guatemala has been to broaden the social base of the women's movement at the local and regional level, allowing it to strengthen and expand its networks through sisterhood and gender awareness. Furthermore, these partnerships have created economic and cultural opportunities for women, allowing them to share knowledge and experiences from highly diverse territories and ethnic groups.

Similarly, the Colombian Peace Accord understood the participation and representation of women and their organizations as a main pillar to achieve a democratic and peaceful society in the long term.<sup>11</sup> However, individual women, and women who act within an organization at community level, continue to face multiple

barriers to accessing decision-making spheres in the country. Through the ¡Nuestras Voces! initiative, Movilizadorio was not only a spokesperson and broadcaster of major female needs in the territories but went beyond to promote reconciliation with a gender focus. Although the Accord stated that all reconciliation efforts should incorporate the voices of women,<sup>12</sup> it did not include measures related to reconciliation processes between women victims and signatories of the Agreement. Movilizadorio identified this gap and proposed to advance in reconciliation by finding political partnerships and shared needs. Thus, this initiative was a clear example of how women victims and former combatants were able to find common ground for the effective implementation of the Peace Accord, where they all seek a peaceful future where women's human rights are guaranteed, regardless of their political stance.

Finally, the Venezuelan case is where the importance of creating networks and partnerships among women is most highlighted, considering the current context

of polarization. The process led by Cauce and the confirmation of “Women for Dialogue and Peace in Venezuela” set a significant precedent by demonstrating that, despite high political polarization, it is possible to build trust and reach agreements when collective objectives are found. These women, with different ideologies in opposition, united around a common goal: guaranteeing women's rights and promoting peace in the country. One of the participating women stated: *“We understood that we must put aside our own interests as people, even our ideologies, and put what unites us all at the center.”*<sup>13</sup> Their ability to put aside their differences and work together for the common good becomes an inspiring example for their country, showing how dialogue and trust can transcend political divisions and generate concrete solutions in the midst of a complex crisis.

In conclusion, these experiences show that it is feasible and necessary to overcome ideological differences among women's movements to build partnerships and networks that contribute to the achievement

of peace and gender equality. In fact, one of the main conclusions of the experience exchange forum was precisely the importance and need to consolidate strong and long-term partnerships among different women's organizations in the region, because by working together and collectively, they have greater impact and progress to guarantee their rights.



# Doing political advocacy collectively and in coordination

In the search for processes that have significant impacts and are sustainable, participating women recognized the importance of implementing and materializing advocacy actions in a collective and practical way, especially after completing training and agenda-building processes. It is commonplace that, in similar initiatives, the lack of advocacy after these processes is a deficiency that limits the political empowerment of women, which is why it is notable that these initiatives did take the next step towards collective advocacy.

An example of this is the AMUTED initiative in Guatemala, which went beyond creating opportunities for reflection and training, by exposing women to practical situations that strengthened their security and empowerment to carry out political advocacy actions. About this, an indigenous woman stated: *“in an exercise they had us write a strategic plan, and some of the colleagues were writing for the first time, but then when*

*we reviewed what we had written, we said: wow! we are producers of knowledge. After that we felt much more comfortable when we presented the plan to key actors in the municipality”*.<sup>14</sup> As a result of the training, participating indigenous women now have political agendas which are implemented at the local level with AMUTED’s coordination.

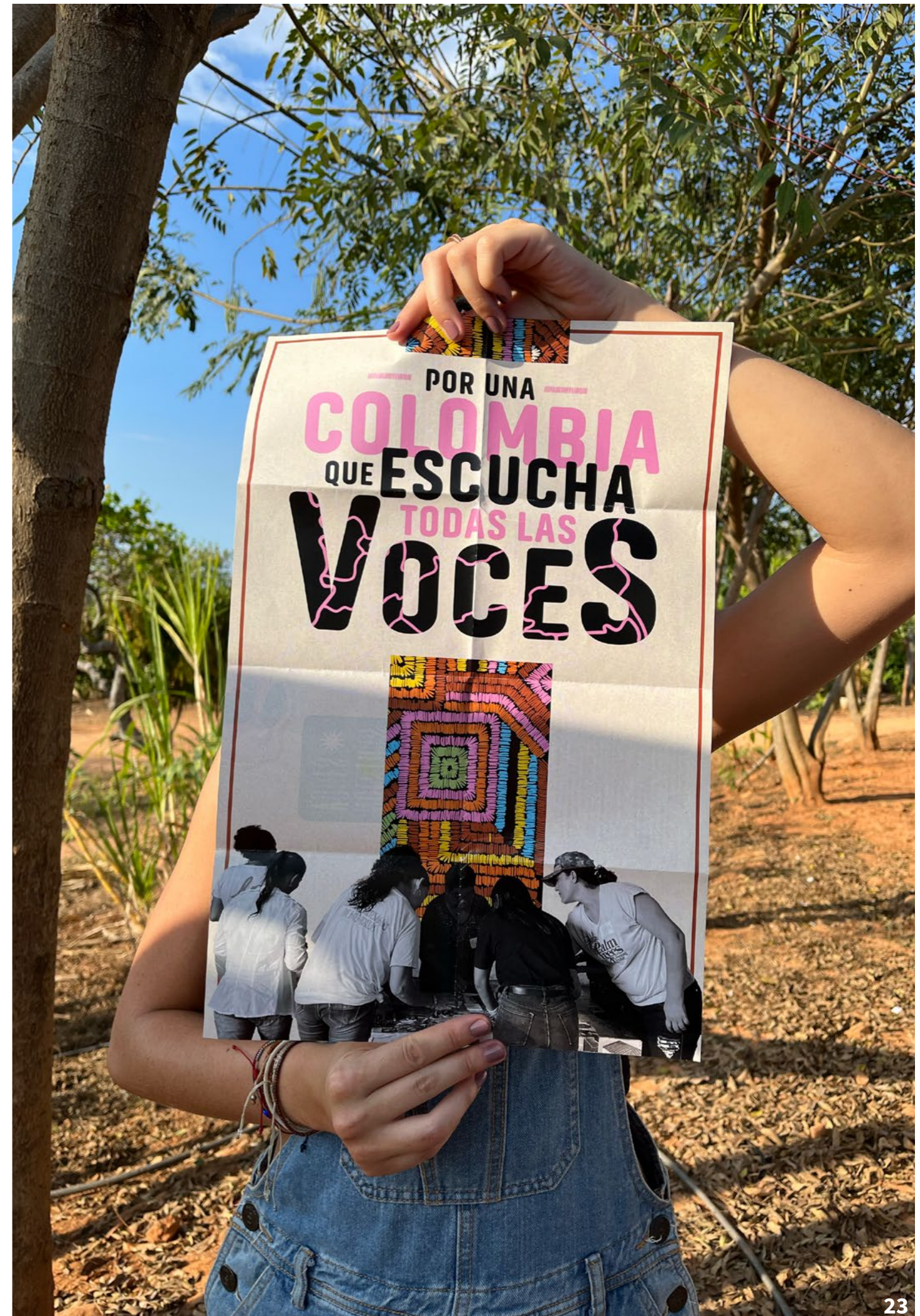
In the case of Cauce in Venezuela, achievement of the concrete coordination of collective advocacy actions brought together in a struggle/action plan that involves actions with both the national government and the “opposition” movement is also highlighted. With this plan, the group will avoid spreading its efforts through individual advocacy actions to walk together towards the same objective but taking advantage of their respective areas of influence. This is what a feminist woman from the “opposition” said: *“Each one can have impact from her area of influence, for example, the ruling parties have closer contact with the authorities in Venezuela, and those*

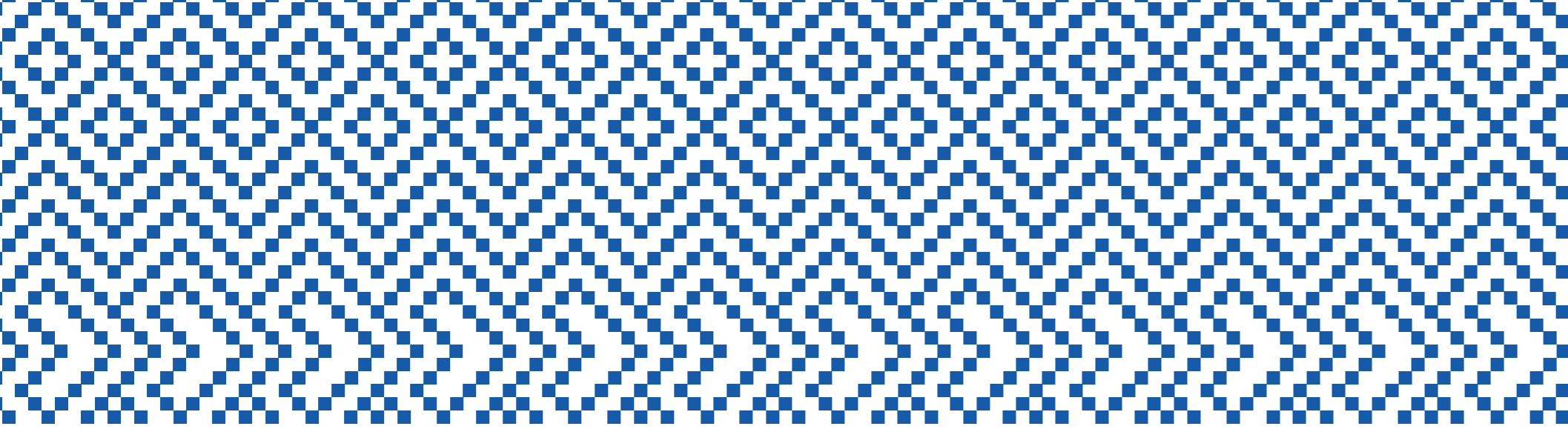
*of us who do not, have impact from and with other sides.”*<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the plan will also allow them to strengthen and maintain the trust created in the medium and long term. The group is aware that after reaching agreements comes a much greater challenge in maintaining ties of trust, but it conceives a strategy in collective advocacy to continue strengthening its relationship based on trust and transparency. Thus, the way Venezuelan women find a mechanism to incorporate their voices in the negotiation process and at the same time a tool to continue maintaining the partnerships created in collective advocacy, is evident.

Now, although the commitment to implement agendas collectively is applauded, it is important to say that AMUTED and Cauce face several obstacles to achieve their adequate implementation due to the lack of financial and technical resources to establish a structured monitoring and follow-up plan. Therefore, it is essential to continue supporting and strengthening these initiatives to ensure their sustainable impact on the women, peace and security agenda.

# Using innovative advocacy technologies for peace

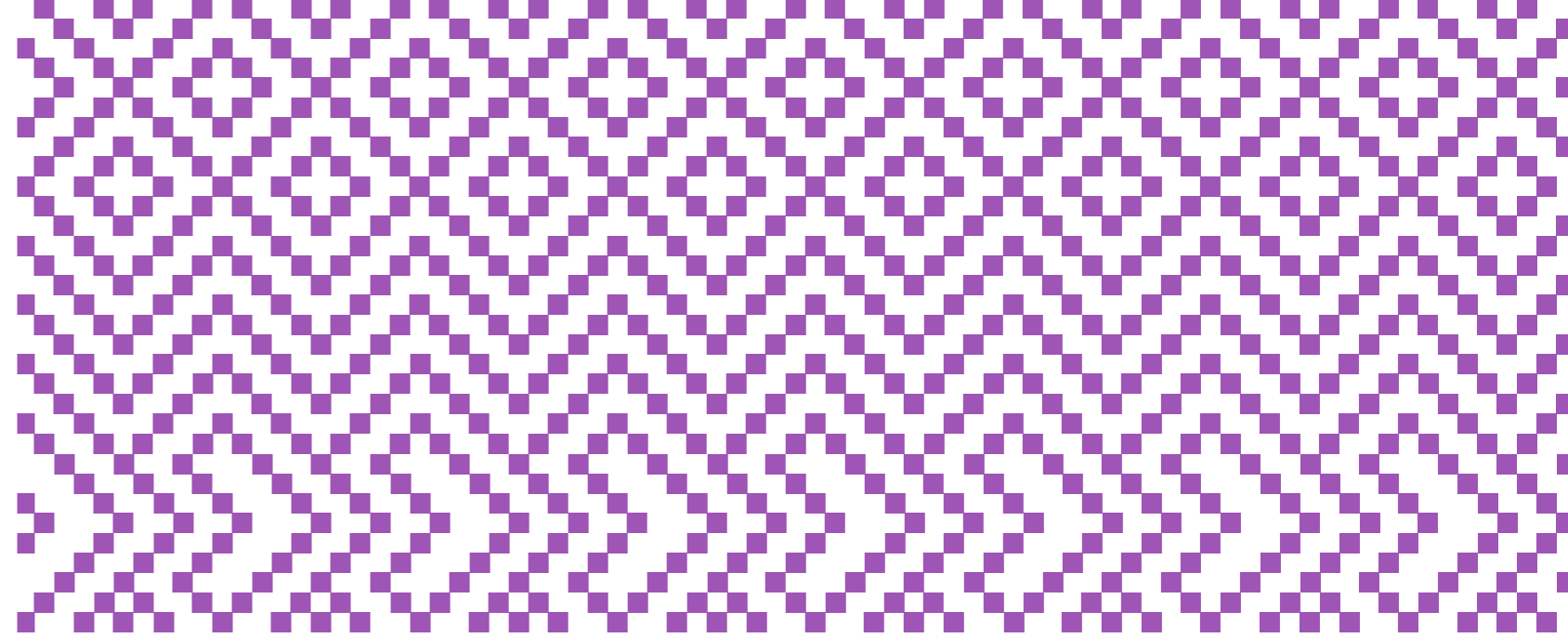
Another accomplishment which is highlighted is the implementation of a different form of advocacy using innovative technologies to broaden the scope of the agenda built with a diverse and nation-wide citizenry. Movilizadorio developed a platform to collect support signatures from the citizens to back the “¡Nuestras Voces!” agenda. Through this tool, formal petitions were sent automatically by e-mail to national decision-making bodies. Thanks to this strategy it was possible not only to amplify the voices of community grass-roots women but also to seek support from other sectors and movements of civil society in a simple, quick and effective manner. A significant success was to gain the participation of a representative of the Medellín Chamber, which has a particularly relevant impact, since Medellín was one of the priority territories in the initiative.





# **What were the best practices: Lessons learned and successful actions**

# Build and implement processes with an intersectional view



In the three initiatives analyzed, the importance of applying an intersectional approach has been demonstrated to achieve the proposed objectives and obtain significant results. Examples such as AMUTED when it included the views of indigenous women throughout the process, when Cauce made a selection based on broad feminist representation, and when Movilizadorio identified the needs of women in their own territories, show how this approach has been key to addressing the particular characteristics of indigenous, rural and feminist women from their respective contexts.

In the case of AMUTED, it was crucial to understand the connection that indigenous women find between spiritual and “healing” aspects of political participation. For participating indigenous women, all political schools must understand “healing” as a central pillar that allows collective work, and therefore, brings cohesion and empowerment to the indigenous women’s

movement. *“We have many deep wounds to heal, and they have individual and collective implications, which is why we must always pay attention to healing in these processes”*<sup>16</sup>, said an indigenous participant woman. It is key to continue to promote initiatives that not only recognize but also promote the organization peculiarities of indigenous women.

On the other hand, Movilizadorio reached rural areas directly affected by the armed conflict through the implementation of a territorial approach. Despite the difficulties of access to these micro-territories, Movilizadorio was assertive in identifying and prioritizing the needs of women victims and signatories of the Accord in their own communities, allowing them to holistically understand the concrete realities of women and obtain first-hand information to then have impact in high political decision-making spheres. This territorial approach contributed to opening a more transparent dialogue between decision-makers at the national level and

community grassroots women victims and former combatants.

At the same time, “Women for Dialogue and Peace in Venezuela” built, with the support of Cauce, an agenda “From Partners in Conflict to Partners in Peace: together for the defense of the rights of women in Venezuela”. They applied ethnic, racial and sexual orientation and gender identity considerations. This is what the coordinator of Cauce said: *“We were able to bring together a group of diverse women, beyond the opposition/ pro-government dichotomy. We had indigenous women, journalists, members of the LGBT community, afro-descendants, elected women and women who work in communities in the various territories”*.<sup>17</sup> As we shall see in the next section, one of the reasons why Cauce meets its objectives is for the attention and criteria established in the process of selecting participating women, where the intersectional approach was fundamentally important to recruit broad feminist representation coming

from different political, institutional, private and academic spheres of Venezuela.



## Establishing close ties with feminist organizations and activists

The establishment of close links with feminist organizations and activists has proven to be a fundamental factor in understanding their needs, as well as in identifying women with whom it is most strategically important to collaborate in the processes. In fact, these close ties have allowed the initiatives to be promoted and ensure their long-term sustainability. Both AMUTED and Cauce have achieved this closeness by making connections that go beyond the period of a project but have also worked to cultivate relationships of collaboration and joint work.

AMUTED has stood out for its ability to listen and for its closeness to local organizations, which has been essential to achieve its objectives. In addition to collaborating closely with these organizations in various previous advocacy processes, its strategy of identifying women community leaders has given rise to “two-way support,” where AMUTED gives empathetic and complete assurance of all guarantees for participation and

strengthens their leadership, while, in turn, local organizations replicate the knowledge acquired and promote the sustainability of agendas built at community level.

In the same way, thanks to its knowledge and closeness to feminist activists and the women’s movement, Cauce achieved a meticulous and strategic selection of participating women. Its objective was to focus on convening a profile of women with a high level of activism who were truly committed to the resolution of the conflict in the country and to gender equality, seeking quality rather than quantity in the effort. Considering the context of political polarization in the country, the effort involved a long process with several challenges and difficulties for Cauce; however, they always knew that only by identifying the profile of these women could they achieve consensus, promote and make visible the constructed agenda.

## Using effective and highly technical methodologies

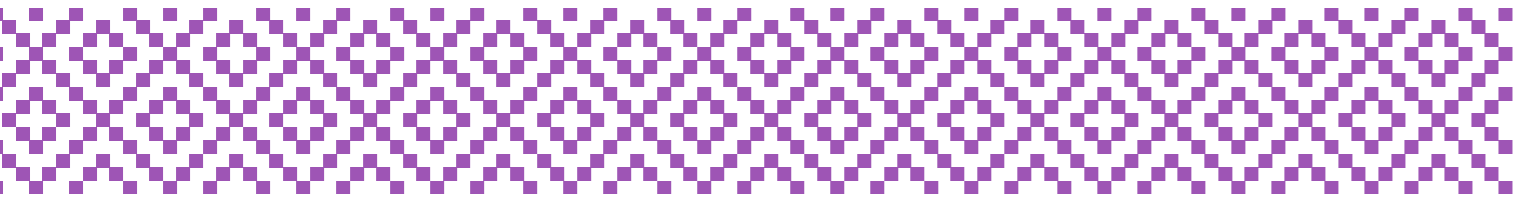
In the initiatives carried out in Venezuela and Colombia, the implementation of appropriate and effective methodologies was an essential factor to strengthen the processes instead of hindering them or undertaking harmful actions. Through the interviews carried out, the commitment and dedication of both organizations in search of suitable experts and in testing the methodologies in advance has been evident. These practices have become a direct contribution to achieving the objectives established in each case.

In Venezuela, the involvement of experts in negotiation and conflict resolution was essential to really build emotional ties and mutual recognition among the participants, which made it possible not to do harm by widening their differences, but rather to achieve group cohesion to reach agreements responsibly. Cauce was very assertive in involving experts Ana Bourse and Edward Kaufman, who developed a methodology widely recognized worldwide called “From

*Partners in Conflict to Partners in Peace*”<sup>18</sup>, that seeks to build relationships of trust and conflict resolution skill sets to accomplish agreements. On the other hand, in Colombia, Movilizadorio used a “methodology of prioritization skills that it has tested with more than 600 persons and is used to reach consensus without the feeling that their own experience and banner are being betrayed.”<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, by taking the time necessary to select experts and test the methodologies beforehand, both Cauce and Movilizadorio have guaranteed that these practices are an added value to their processes, driving them towards achieving their goals with greater success and efficiency.

# Final conclusions and lessons learned jointly



In short, the main lesson learned from the initiatives is the importance of further expanding the connections and bonds of trust between the women's movement from the local to the national and regional levels. Networking, solidarity and the exchange of experiences are critical to identify and face the common challenges that women have within the framework of the peace processes carried out in their respective countries. In fact, in the experience exchange forum, women's organizations and independent women from the three countries made the same call to work in partnership and collectively and to continue developing this type of exchanges.

The experiences of AMUTED, Movilizadorio and Cauce show that the construction of networks and partnerships is possible and fruitful, and they show significant progress in this direction. However, the challenge lies in maintaining these partnerships over time and continuing to involve more women in the agendas built, so that they

become efforts driven by the breadth of the women's movement. For example, the Cauce coordinator shared in the experience-sharing forum: *"Our next step is to develop partnerships and broaden our advocacy actions so that the agenda expands and is more inclusive. This agenda was developed with 20 women with different thinking but it needs to include new words and voices."*<sup>20</sup>

Likewise, the exchange of experiences among women's movements from different countries represents a valuable opportunity to learn lessons and successful practices that can be replicated in other contexts. A relevant example would be the case of the women's movement in Colombia, which could benefit from understanding and deepening the experience of Guatemalan women in building and implementing the Action Plan for Resolution 1325 in 2017.<sup>21</sup> During the experience-sharing forum, Colombian organizations shared that they are currently immersed in the process of

building the National Action Plan for 1325, holding meetings at the macro-regional level and with different populations. Guatemala's experience in this process would be very useful for Colombian women to replicate its best practices and lessons learned. Similarly, the women's movement in Guatemala and Venezuela could also find successful references in the case of Colombia, specifically in its ability to create partnerships among various women's organizations that seek to promote a policy and culture of peace at the national level.<sup>22</sup>

Collaboration and exchange of experiences among these countries could further strengthen their efforts in achieving women's rights and building peace. Without a doubt, taking advantage of these opportunities for learning and collaboration among countries can generate powerful synergies for the advancement of the women's movement in Latin America.

On the other hand, systematizing initiatives also made it possible to see the importance of providing constant support to strengthened leaderships and the processes initiated. Although the objective is to build installed capacity, it is crucial to recognize the importance of providing adequate follow-up once the budgetary, operational and administrative aspects of projects have been completed. Maintaining this continuity would allow building long-term relationships, increasing women's political advocacy capacity, and more carefully monitoring the results of advocacy actions.

To achieve this support, AMUTED, Movilizadorio and Cauce have a great area of opportunity in recognizing the importance and effectiveness of advocacy at local level. Although advocacy at the national and international levels is essential, it is critical to complement that with advocacy strategies at the local level, above all, since in contexts where peace accords have been signed, a local institutional framework emerges for their implementation. Furthermore, in contexts where civic action is restricted, local advocacy can have greater impact on the lives and specific needs of women. Therefore, it is strategically important to create partnerships and promote advocacy actions with those territorial entities. Additionally, incorporating advocacy actions at the local level in constructed agendas would contribute to the political leadership of women by developing political advocacy capability in both technical aspects and interpersonal skills.



# **Recommendations to advance with the 1325 Agenda in the region**

Advancing the 1325 Agenda in Latin America involves a joint and sustained commitment among various actors, including governments, civil society as a whole, and international cooperation. Below are eight recommendations that should be promoted through co-responsibility and support among these parties involved:

- 1.** Strengthen regulatory frameworks or other policy instruments that seek to promote the participation and representation of women in decision-making spheres, including measures to prevent and punish gender violence in politics.
- 2.** In compliance with the participation pillar of Agenda 1325, the inclusion and representation of women must continue to be promoted holistically, that is, from the negotiation of a peace process to its implementation and monitoring. Their participation in decision-making spheres and politics must also continue to be promoted. To achieve this, women must continue to look for paths that open the way to this representation, identifying partners and building strong and trusting partnerships within the women's movement.
- 3.** Always use an intersectional approach, recognizing and addressing the various forms of discrimination and inequality that women face in their diversity.
- 4.** Continue with and broaden political training opportunities for women, especially for indigenous, Afro-descendant and rural women. Guatemalan indigenous women stated in the experience exchange forum that thanks to the training of women it is possible to include indigenous women in peace-building processes.

- 5.** Ensuring adequate and sustainable financing for initiatives related to Agenda 1325 is essential for its successful implementation. Governments and the international community must commit to allocating sufficient financial resources to support programs and projects that promote gender equality and peacebuilding.
- 6.** Provide technical support to women's organizations to implement effective monitoring and evaluation systems for their action plans or advocacy agendas. This will help identify areas that require greater attention and adjust strategies to achieve more effective results in the short, medium and long terms.
- 7.** Build partnerships and regional cooperation channels. It is essential to foster collaboration among countries in the region to address common challenges and share good practices in promoting the women, peace and security agenda. For example, spaces for conversation and exchange of experiences must continue to be fostered to identify commonalities and generate impactful solutions at the regional level.
- 8.** Generate greater ownership of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda by the women's social movement, and begin to view it as a political advocacy tool with international force to lead the conversation about the intersection between peace and gender in multiple decision-making spheres.

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13. Interview of Venezuelan feminist activist in the “opposition”. (June 2023).

14. Interview of indigenous female leader of the Department of Sololá, Guatemala. (June 2023).

15. Interview of Venezuelan feminist activist in the “opposition”. (June 2023).

16. Interview of indigenous feminist leader of the department of Totonicapán, Guatemala. (June 2023).

17. Interview of Cauce coordinator, Venezuela. (June 2023).

18. The methodology used was this: Ana Bourse and Edward (Edy) Kaufman. (2004). De socios en conflicto a socios en la paz. Métodos y estrategias para transformar las diferencias en oportunidades para beneficio de todos. (*From Partners in Conflict to Partners in Peace. Methods and strategies to transform differences into opportunities for the benefit of all.*) Icaria Editorial / Ediciones CRIES.

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21. Inter-Agency Roundtable on Women, Peace And Security (MIMPAZ). (2017). National Action Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council and Related Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security – Guatemala, 2017. Unofficial translation, funded by ARC DP160100212 (CI Shepherd).

22. For example, these partnerships are evident in the Gender of Peace Group (Gpaz) and in the Alianza Cinco Claves.

