



MOVIMIENTOS
JUVENILES
DISRUPTIVOS

MÉXICO . CENTROAMÉRICA . COLOMBIA

**DIVERSE, PLURALISTIC, BRAVE,
AND DISRUPTIVE: RESISTANT YOUTH IN
SEVEN LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



A program of



Seattle International Foundation
Central America





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The project "Disruptive Youth Movements (Movimientos juveniles disruptivos, or MJD) in Mexico, Central America and Colombia" is a collaborative and qualitative research study on the

characteristics, needs and contributions of youth movements in seven Latin American countries: Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia.

MJD arose at the end of 2019 from interest by the Central America and Mexican Youth Fund (CAMY Fund) of the Seattle International Foundation (SIF), Diakonia, the Frida Fund and the Global Fund for Children to better understand youth movements, and from a regional perspective, the ways in which young Latin Americans defend their rights and organize themselves.

This project is based on the idea that young people have been and are today the historical catalysts of social movements and changes in the region. Although in recent years there has been a greater interest in understanding these young people, limitations still prevail in understanding their organizational forms, initiatives, and how to help them approach donors and strengthen the movements themselves through self-knowledge and exchanging experiences.





PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

The study was developed simultaneously by a research collective composed of about 25 young people and activists. The research was led by a team in four countries: **Jóvenes ante la Emergencia Nacional (Youth in National Emergencies)** in **Mexico**, **Instituto 25A** in **Guatemala**, the **Academia de Liderazgo Social (Academy of Social Leadership)** in **Honduras** and the **Escuela de Animación Juvenil (School of Youth Recreation)** in **Colombia**. And in the other three countries, the following people were in charge of young activists or independent researchers: **Cándida Reyes, Carlos Melara and William Ardón** in **El Salvador**, **Jimena Cascante** in **Costa Rica**, and **Natasha Pacheco** in **Panama**. The entire research process was coordinated and guided by **Diana Campos Ortiz**, an external consultant, and **Josué Torres Martínez**, Program Coordinator of the **CAMY Fund**.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

This study was designed with the aim of **understanding the characteristics, contributions and needs of youth movements in Latin America**. Three specific research objectives were proposed, that sought **to identify**:

- The various organizational forms taken by youth initiatives in the region that are considered disruptive youth movements.
- The contributions of youth movements in the region.
- The main challenges faced by youth movements in the region.



THE STUDY IN A COMPLEX CONTEXT



This project began without any idea of what was coming in the region: a global pandemic, two hurricanes, and significant changes in the region's political, economic and social contexts that increased levels of violence.



The sum of events forced a slower pace in the processes and forced changes to decisions on several occasions, including the decision not to include people and organizations that were part of the research plan but that, after in-depth analysis and reflection, it was considered unsafe to include due to the risk of political persecution.



The COVID-19 pandemic caused many structures and ways of organizing to change, and the ways of young people and their movements were no exception.



After a series of crisis talks, analyses and procedures, the political decision was made to continue with the project in 2020 using perspectives different from those initially considered and in which flexibility, patience, attention to emergencies, dialogue and empathy became fundamental parts of the project.



This positioning enabled a different approach to be taken to the social research undertaken by young people who, when participating, were aware of their contexts and committed to raising awareness of the changes and ways of organizing themselves in the context of a global crisis.

The changes and adjustments taught valuable lessons: they reinforced collaborative, participatory work with group security, and showed that listening to many voices requires time, patience and reflection.

STUDY DEVELOPMENT AND CONTENT



Each country developed an autonomous research process. The researchers were given the task of redefining the objectives, adapting the process to the possibilities of the new reality determined by the pandemic and adjusting it to organizational and political interests. This way, they built a concept of "disruptive organizations/activisms", the purpose of which was to be applied in their countries and to the organizations and/or activists that matched this definition.



Researchers had in-depth conversations with more than 150 activists involved in 134 resistance experiences in their countries. From these conversations, which took the form of interviews, focus groups and workshops, various profiles were built based on what it means to be young and to resist.



Being young and resistant in each country has different characteristics and national contexts impose different challenges. Each of the research studies addressed youth movements and their organizational forms in a different way, and thus were analyzed using one approach or another. Research in **Mexico** proposes the historical recognition of what it means to be young so as to understand the challenges of today. In **Guatemala**, the focus is on the importance of politicizing youth participation in order to transform community sentiment in everyday activities, and highlights the fact that 80% of movements or organizations for social change are made up of young people.



Research in **El Salvador** develops the idea of collective action by young people as a way to channel anger and discontent through various counter-hegemonic and anti-systemic actions that emerge from being institutionalized. **Honduras** proposes and discusses how young people rise up and organize themselves from critical events that affect the social structure, such as the coup d'état in 2009.





Research in **Costa Rica** shows how the national context has enabled the diversified advancement of issues addressed by young people and how the different characteristics of being young intersect. Youth in **Panama** have inherited their disruption and organization from the student movements of the 1960s and 1980s. Finally, the research work in **Colombia** portrays the intertwining of experiences of resistance influenced by the social, political and historical context and how the struggling young people negotiate between their dreams for a different country and the safeguarding of their security and well-being in the face of stigmatization and criminalization.



All of the studies show that, historically, youth movements in these countries face repressive, violent, adult-centered systems that undermine young people's rights to live a full and free life.



After these analyses, written reports, executive summaries and creative products were produced to present the findings, honor the forms of political actions adopted by the movements and highlight the faces of the various MJDs. As part of these creative products, videos were made in Mexico, El Salvador and Panama - in Mexico, in particular, one was made in the style of a mini-documentary. In Costa Rica and Honduras, fanzines were produced to portray the resistance experiences that contributed to the research. And in Guatemala, a microsite was created to compile research elements, findings and data.



Finally, the researchers drew up a regional summary and this executive summary with the intention of presenting a regional view of the MJDs and explaining how it is possible to define shared elements in a regional context.

FINDINGS AND LESSONS



We can't talk about young people or their movements and forms of resistance as a homogeneous group. However, there are common features that define the ways in which young people participate politically: young people tend to work informally (i.e. not in a legal capacity), to be self-financed, and to organize themselves based on the concept of intersectionality.



The diversity of young people and their resistance plays a central role, both in their organizational forms as well as the issues they address, their working methods and their motivations for participating.



Their issues and ranges of action are varied. More than one hundred working issues were counted in experiences across the seven countries. A significant amount is defined as feminist, but can also be placed in one or more of the following twelve categories: political participation, student movements, LGBTQ+ rights, community action, education and research, activism, Afro identities, indigenous identities, territory defense, environment, disability and communication.



The organizations tend to take on their political work based on the concept the intersectionality and with a clear mission towards human rights, gender equality and environmental and territory defense. To this end, they consider the role that young people should play in their social and political contexts. They participate through a variety of organizational figures including (but not limited to) associations, collectives, artistic groups, or individual activists.



To exercise their resistance efforts, young people make use of innovative forms of political and civic action that include activism, non-violent positions, internet activism, direct actions in their communities and territories, creating alternative training and communication spaces, and building alliances.



MJDs have shared challenges. One of their tasks is to be attentive and vigilant in sustaining their horizontal and feminist forms of organization in the face of a patriarchal and adult-centered culture, within the context of profoundly unequal and violent societies. In addition, access to funds is a central conflict. Despite limited access to resources, MJD members do not want to receive any funding that would involve modifying their agendas.



For some people interviewed, the main purpose of MJDs is to simply exist among their complex realities. Their contribution lies in their impacting their contexts as they develop novel forms of citizen participation and political exercise, and acting directly in communities, territories (whether physical, virtual, or tangible) and subjectivities.





Young people who organize, resist, question, reflect, propose strategies and imagine another reality contribute their time, body, mind and emotions to transforming their realities. They donate their everyday lives, safety and desires to the service of collective projects that are inclusive and transformative. Although they start by subjectively questioning their own experiences, organizing has collective purposes: to change the shared environment.

HOW RESEARCH IS USEFUL FOR DISRUPTIVE YOUTH MOVEMENTS



Research on young people by young people, in an exercise of self-recognition, should not be limited to paper or the internet. This is a matter that aims to account for their shared challenges, how the different contexts are addressed and the various recognitions and meetings that strengthen their fight. In this sense, the research within the framework of this project seeks to contribute to strengthening youth movements.



We want the stories of resistance shared in this project to help shed light on the work of young activists in each of the countries involved and to be a meeting point and a way to exchange experiences, in order to continue expanding and strengthening networks and so that young people know that they are not alone in their struggles and processes.



We want this project to promote more collaborative and participatory research and for young people to lead their own learning process and understanding of themselves. We also want young people to be able to identify their challenges, their areas of learning and the best tools for building sustained, diverse, intersectional, critical, and disruptive movements.



The aim is also for these research and knowledge creation processes to be useful for the people involved and to maintain a way of returning what has been learned, so that the participants can acknowledge research as a tool for their reinforcement, empowerment and self-recognition.

HOW RESEARCH IS USEFUL FOR THE PHILANTHROPIC COMMUNITY, DONORS, AND ALLIES



The lessons and knowledge derived from this research invite donors, allies, and the philanthropic community to review, reflect on, and discuss their processes for financing youth organizations and collectives, as well as the relationships they maintain with them.



There is a need to understand and respect the agendas of youth movements and to avoid obstacles and a lack of interest in the issues that young people consider important. Horizontal guidance should be provided in the administration of resources and efforts should be made to make access to funding more flexible. There is an urgent need to simplify processes, forms, and platforms for requesting funds.



An active and guiding presence is also necessary. The responsibility of donors is not limited only to financing, but also includes promoting the work of young people, maintaining relationships beyond projects and creating spaces for young people to meet, share information, discuss issues, and learn in order to continue legitimizing the importance of MJDs for social change.



The role of donors and the philanthropic community can be fundamental for the MJDs if they can work from a place of horizontality and respect, and a political position of knowing that youth movements are capable of modifying agendas that contribute to systemic change and the recognition of human rights in Latin America.



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