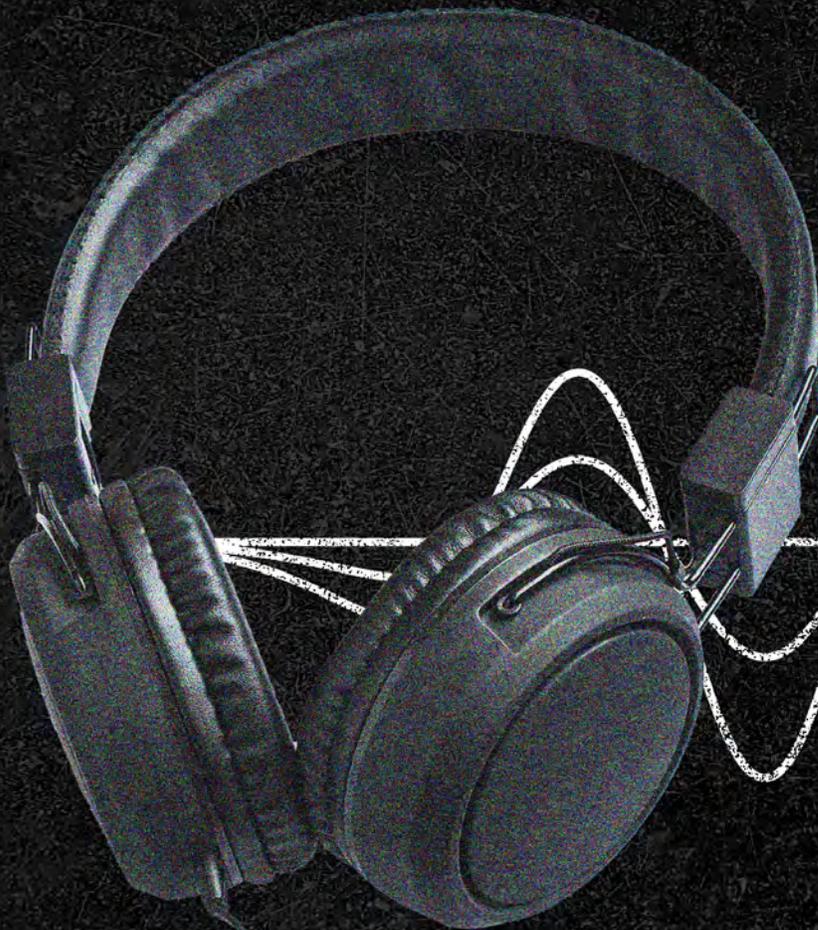


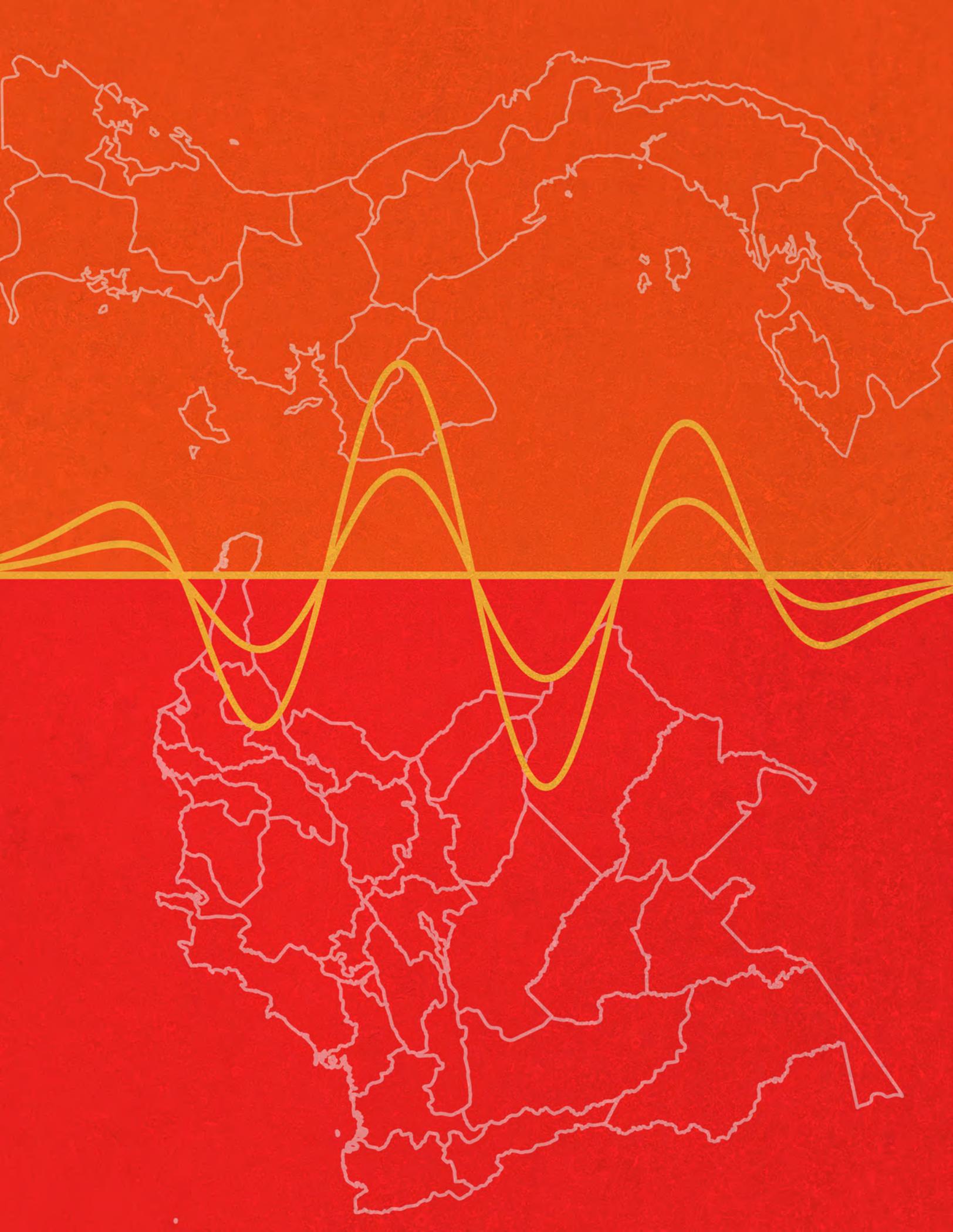
PROYECTO ¡OYE!

**LESSONS ON THE NARRATIVE-POWER
INFRASTRUCTURE IN COLOMBIA AND PANAMA**



REFRAME

AFRORESISTANCE



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study explores the narrative power-building landscape of human rights organizations in two Latin American countries, Colombia and Panama, whose purpose is to pursue social justice, gender equity, sexual and reproductive rights and the rights of indigenous and Afro-descendant populations.

The study's goal was to identify their main needs for and gaps in infrastructure, communications strategies, narrative power-building and training, which are essential for organizations working toward justice and equity in the region.

The study assessed pre-existing research and current training for strategic communications and narrative power-building in the region and formulated recommendations on creating capacities in the diverse topics the study addresses. The results reveal organizations' needs for investment and suggest to funders where they should focus their communications capacity-building funding efforts in Colombia and Panama, in addition to identifying areas where future research is necessary.

A key result is that participants agreed that communications must be integrated as a priority into the overall strategy of human rights organizations. Additionally, many participants noted that it is imperative to understand the context in which organizations do their work and how these conditions impact the implementation of their strategic plans.

The study identified these groups' basic training needs in strategic communications and narrative power-building. Training volunteers

and any paid staff in strategic communications and narrative power-building has proven to be essential for modern social movements; therefore, it is important to properly scale the process of training staff and volunteers to effectively develop strategic communications and narrative power-building efforts within the organizations studied.

The study also found that most of the organizations do not have the resources or equipment necessary to effectively implement a comprehensive communications strategy. With regard to campaigns, we saw that organizations do not currently evaluate the efficacy of their messaging or measure the use and impact of digital communications technology. Therefore, the study recommends that communications matters should be prioritized and integrated into all organizational activities.

In Colombia's case, the main need of 78 percent of organizations is the development of communications strategies and plans. In Panama, however, the primary needs are for narrative research and the development of direct action strategies (66 percent), while the second-most felt need is audience identification and the implementation of campaigns (62 percent).

For organizations in Colombia, the second-most felt need is the use of social media, internet and technological equipment (65 percent), while in Panama, this type of need ranks quite low. This difference is related to the lack of access to internet infrastructure in semi-urban areas, especially in areas where Afro-descendant residents live.

According to the study, in addition to training, building the narrative power-building abilities of these organizations requires investment to increase organizational capacity, sustainability and adaptability to change to help ensure that integrated communications are based on best practices in narrative power-building. New alliances and relationships still need to be developed among the region's movement-building actors and entities, as well as the creation of strategies to achieve direct communication with the desired audience, through multiple platforms. These tasks will help foster an environment that will allow more people to collectively defend human rights.

The philanthropic sector should be a fundamental actor in supporting the region's organizations. The creation of a "Latin American Fund for Communications and Narrative Power" as a study participant put it, would provide organizations with the opportunity to access financial resources to build up their technical capacity. This would allow them to organize, mobilize, build up their digital communications capacity and ensure their sustainability.

A participatory methodology is recommended for further research on how the region's organizations can and should engage in narrative power-building for change. Organizations should create a collective space for reflection and analysis of variables related to communications infrastructure and the building of narrative power, among other topics.

Both training and participatory action research must respond to the imperatives of strategic communications and narrative power-building. Each of these bodies of knowledge must be contextualized in their country's sociocultural landscape and available resources. These resources encompass power, technology, and both digital and analog messaging platforms to empower the creation of narratives and to foster change.

Conservative sectors in the region have a very clear narrative they employ to delegitimize the human rights of gender expansive populations and of women, and their right to control their bodies. Some human rights organizations perceive these conservative sectors as having a great deal of power and influence and feel that their narratives must be countered. However, this is a task that organizations do not have the capacity to prioritize.

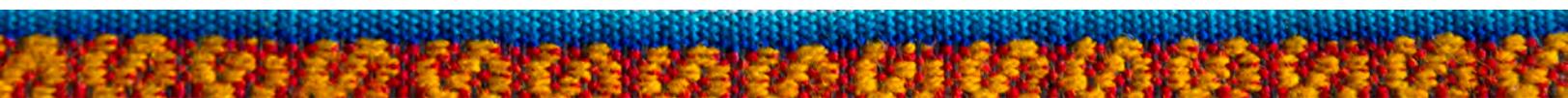
Traditional media and the figures linked to them—such as influencers and journalists—concentrate a lot of power, particularly because of their links to and dependency on the economic and political powers that be. Future research is needed on the power imbalance between human rights organizations in the region and the conservative sectors that are able to keep their narratives in the forefront.

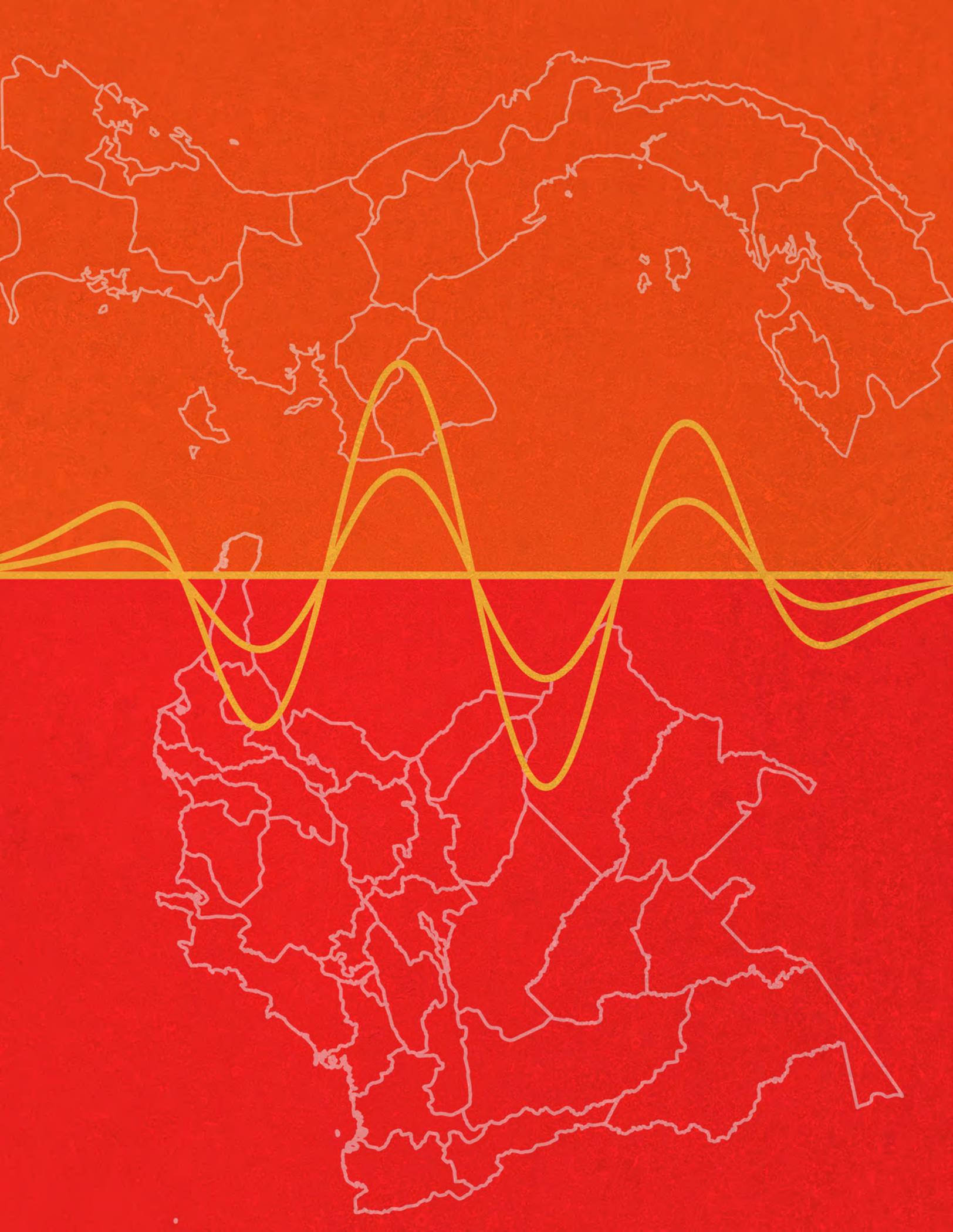
Organizations need advocates and social leaders to actively shape the pro-human rights discourse so that equity and social justice make common sense. They will need to strengthen their internal communications infrastructure, along with building up their use of tools and staff that lead their messaging and content creation.

For a broader view of the reality presented here, more in-depth research is needed in Latin American countries, which will enable leveraging the financial and capacity-building supports for social movement organizations fighting for human rights in the region.

Social turbulence continues in our region. Organizations that fight for social, racial, and reproductive justice and human rights are more necessary by the day. In this region, being a woman, a human rights defender or a community leader entails the risk of death. Integrating communications as a cross-cutting

theme in political action is a challenge in the era of new information and communications technology, yet communications must urgently become an essential component of organizations' political strategies. This study can be a tool to help organizations identify and become more aware of their weaknesses and strengths.





INTRODUCTION

The study's overall goal was to identify the main needs for and gaps in infrastructure, communications strategies, narrative power-building and training for organizations working for justice and equity in Colombia and Panama.

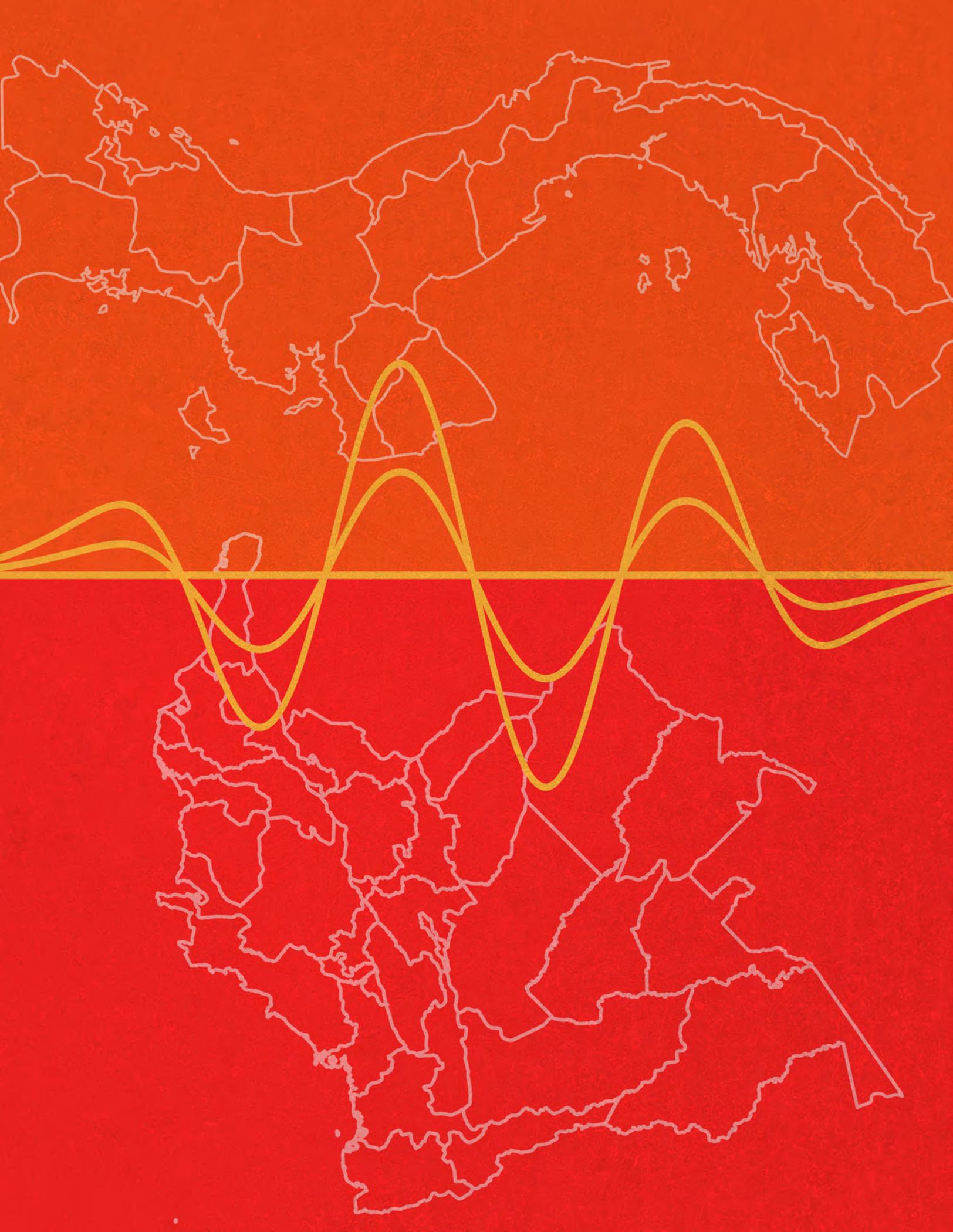
Three instruments were designed in response to the objectives:

1. A survey to gather quantitative and qualitative data from a substantive sample of Panamanian and Colombian social movement organizations active in each of the study's thematic areas;
2. One-on-one interviews with key actors in order to gather information that would give voice to the quantitative survey data; and
3. A focus group in which key actors from both countries participated.

Between the two countries, 44 surveys were collected from social movement organizations working in the areas of interest of this study, 26 key actors were interviewed, and 10 people participated in the focus group (four from Panama and six from Colombia).

A descriptive design with a human rights approach was used, focusing on issues of gender, race, ethnicity, language, residence and migratory status. We then analyzed this data to craft recommendations on practice, training, communications capacity-building and social media.

This study will serve to guide future investment or financing opportunities in the region, while reflecting the efforts of funders, field workers and those who support them in Colombia and Panama.



WHY LISTEN HERE, NOW, IN THIS WAY?

THE SOCIAL & POLITICAL CONTEXT

In Panama and Colombia, the political sphere is experiencing a post-pandemic crisis that has several important factors: the loss of paid employment; the predominance of job insecurity; and the increase of informal work, which is now above 40 percent in both countries. Indigenous people and impoverished Afro-descendants, particularly those living in hard-to-reach areas, do not receive health and social security services.

The region's social, economic and political landscape is changing significantly. The post-pandemic recovery is not going at the pace desired by politicians; the continued slow recovery of formal employment and educational delays in Colombia and Panama are becoming challenges for the governments of both countries.

As of August 7, 2022, Colombia has a left-wing government. The winning presidential ticket was the first to have a political message that expresses “the voice of the nobodies, of the people with calloused hands,” as Vice President-elect Francia Márquez said in her campaign speeches. The country's different interest groups currently have both great expectations and concerns about the agenda that President Gustavo Petro's administration

will be implementing in the coming four years. The new Colombian government has the challenge of consolidating the peace agreements that were signed a few years ago, but so far, the longed-for peace has not arrived. According to figures from the Institute for Development and Peace Studies, as of April 22, 2022, 52 rights defenders have been murdered this year.¹ This is on top of the 1,279 rights defenders that have been murdered in Colombia since the signing of the peace agreements in 2016, of whom 945 were killed during the term of former President Ivan Duque.

In recent years in the Latin American region, narratives have emerged from sectors opposed to the recognition and guarantee of human rights, racial justice, social justice, reproductive rights, gender equity, sexual diversity and the right to emigrate. This reality has led to high levels of intolerance and fanaticism from different groups, such as Opus Dei, organizations linked to evangelical churches and pro-lifers and conservative and ultra-right sectors. These actors exert a strong influence on Latin America's population and institutions, and Colombia and Panama are no exception.

In the coming months, the election campaign season will begin in Panama. Conservatives are now starting to position themselves to spread their pro-life, pro-family narratives, seeking to seize political power, as the Radix political

movement has made clear.² There is a real risk of backsliding in human rights. Elections will be held in the country in 2024, and the results will show whether the political and economic powers will enable and strengthen these risks.

With the recent triumph in Colombia of the Historic Pact, it is now possible that this context offers new opportunities for change to the organizations that fight for human rights in Panama, given the two countries' proximity. However, there is uncertainty. A shift is appearing in the narratives of independent candidates who are betting that now is the time for radical changes in favor of the human rights of the historically most vulnerable population groups. On the other hand, the narratives of conservative movements have ascended within political power structures, producing a complex environment that threatens to roll back rights achieved so far.

Strategic communications have played a key role in producing high-impact changes in Latin America, and have made existing narratives visible and expanded them. Other narratives are also emerging, in particular ones linked to the struggles of the region's social movements—for example, those for environmental rights and the rights of gender-expansive people, among others.

A Colombian leader whom we interviewed said, "There are some narratives that we have also been carrying out, like the droplets of water that eventually carve a hole—alternative narratives, those of young people, women, and others. We are gaining space, in narrating, in narrating ourselves, we go there taking that word, that look, those images, those languages, other realities."

There is no doubt that both the Colombian media and social movements will play a fundamental role in this period, as they did during the recent

presidential campaign, where they demonstrated the power that can be achieved through new ways of transmitting messages and content during Colombia's elections.

CONTEXT OF THE TRADITIONAL MEDIA IN THE REGION

The traditional media that organizations use most are conventional radio and print newspapers. In Panama, 43 percent of organizations use both, and in Colombia, 30 percent use radio and 26 percent use print newspapers, according to our survey. In the region, the public continues to receive information from television, which in Panama is the information medium par excellence for 90 percent of the population. In Colombia, according to surveys conducted by Valora Analitik, 96 percent of the population "indicated that radio is the medium that enables them to be the most informed about current affairs in the country."³

Who owns traditional media such as radio and print newspapers was a key concern of the vast majority of the study's interviewees, as owners play a fundamental role in the editorial stances of their outlets. This was expressed by one of the Panamanian interviewees, who said that there is a link between the medium and a business sector in alliance with the neoliberal economic system: "The issue of television, which is what is consumed nationally here, is monopolized by a business sector. This business sector has two functions: to not shed light on the popular collective project, be it the union sector; the women's sector; the peasant, indigenous, or environmental sector. That is one. The other is to impose an economic system that is truly incongruent with our "productive idiosyncrasy."

During the study, several participants mentioned examples that, according to them, demonstrate

the alliance of the traditional media with high-income sectors. For example, an economic activity such as open-pit mining, which affects the lives of large numbers of people due to the serious harm it poses to the environment and health, is promoted intensely and justified by the traditional media, and is presented as a valid alternative for post-pandemic economic revitalization.

One Colombian who participated in the focus group stated:

“The traditional media represent the culture and norms that the bourgeoisie wants to maintain. That culture in Colombia, and I would dare say in other countries as well, is racist, classist, and uses the media to maintain discriminatory practices and to deepen the ideas of a capitalist economic system. At the same time, it seeks to prevent social and political changes, which does not allow people to reflect, to analyze.”

COLOMBIA

This alliance between the media and the political and economic elite leads to a high level of censorship of information coming from left-identified popular sectors.

As one Panamanian interviewee put it: “Well, in Panama, especially since 2005, the last general strike by the workers’ and popular movement, the media, the owners of the bourgeois media, decided to cut off all possibility or almost all possibility of transmitting some of the things that are done by the workers’ and popular movement. That leads us to continue believing that the traditional methods, such as news

bulletins and newspapers, from the point of view of leftist organizations, are the media that allow us to have direct contact with the public.”

PORTRAYAL OF AFRO-DESCENDANT, INDIGENOUS, AND LGBTQ+ PEOPLE IN THE TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Afro-descendants, indigenous people, and gender-expansive people are portrayed in the media in a way that perpetuates stereotypes in the country’s social imaginary. One interviewee said: “The Chinese man is the one who owns the store, the LGBTQ+ people are the ones that come out in June—that is only the stereotypes that they promote...”

A narrative is being developed about Afro-descendants that is, according to one of the interviewees from Panama, “a narrative that for me, frankly, is racist, even though in Panama we say that racism doesn’t exist and that it’s only classism. Classism and racism go hand in hand, because we see that economically, certain people have access to a lot of money, while others do not, and that is directly linked to race.”

In both Panama and Colombia, the traditional media encourages racism and discrimination, as one Colombian said: “The official media, the public and private media, both television and radio and the press—throughout my life, I’ve been able to examine them, and I can say with all certainty that there is no policy aimed at making visible, through the media, the problems we have in the face of different kinds of discrimination.”

Another participant from Colombia said: “The media respond to the logic of a capitalist, bourgeois hegemony that is not really very interested in looking at these racial dimensions,

because they are scenarios where stereotypes of Black life continue to be reproduced in the way life is narrated. Many characters in soap operas also embody roles where, let's say, colonial history has also been responsible for setting us in places we cannot leave, where we are gossips, filth, witches, quarrelsome, bad friends, schemers, the maid, the builder, the womanizer, the bully. They are those places that ultimately reduce Black life to various essentialisms."

The ways in which the Afro-descendant population in Colombia and Panama is portrayed in the media does not contribute to eradicating the high levels of racism that exist in both countries. Research such as this study can help organizations carry out the work of narrative change, which will have a direct impact on the social imaginary in the region's countries by shifting the narratives promoted by the traditional media that currently reinforce stereotypes about certain populations.

One of the people interviewed in Panama told us what elements are needed to build and transmit a narrative different from those disseminated by the traditional media: "The issue is that one of the elements that must be considered in narrative-building is the degree of commitment and awareness, because obviously, the discourse contrary to the vision of the Black population is not the discourse that has historically been present and that the traditional channels have, which at different times recreate that same discourse. The racist narrative exists, slavery does not disappear; rather, at different times it realigns and rearranges itself. It's true that the formal media reproduce these different methods, then you're fighting like salmon swimming against the current, and that somehow forces you to be persistent, to be well grounded, to face this with a very high level of awareness, because otherwise, the effort and

strength of the hegemonic discourse eats at you, wears you down and drives you to despair."

THE CONCEPT OF NARRATIVE

The concept of narrative in the region has been developing gradually over the years; for some sectors, the concept has always been tied to literature. During this study, some of the key participants stated that this concept is an Anglicism that has depoliticized what in other times was called "discourse," and they consider that it has depoliticized the political discourse or the political position of a given organization. One Panamanian interviewee said: "Well, now it is called 'narrative,' but fundamentally it is a discourse. Discourse is the way in which someone formulates, poses, or analyzes a certain event or problem in society."

Another interviewee from Panama said: "From my point of view, it is like a new way to say discourse...We always work on discourses, on the feminist social political position, on certain events. That is to say: What is our position regarding disappearances of women? What is our position on the issue of violence against women, which happens all the time? That's why I say that for me, the narrative is like that position, it is the development of a discourse and a political commitment to how I am seeing a certain social phenomenon."

We will find this critical position on the conceptualization of narratives more in Panama. One interviewee in Colombia, when asked what narratives are, answered: "For me, narratives are the ways in which human beings express what we live, what we feel, and sometimes even what we want. That to me is a narrative, the way we express ourselves." Another interviewee in Colombia tells us: "We must see the topic of narrative as a tool for the efficient and truthful transmission of what we really want

to communicate." This conceptualization in Colombia may be related to its literary tradition.

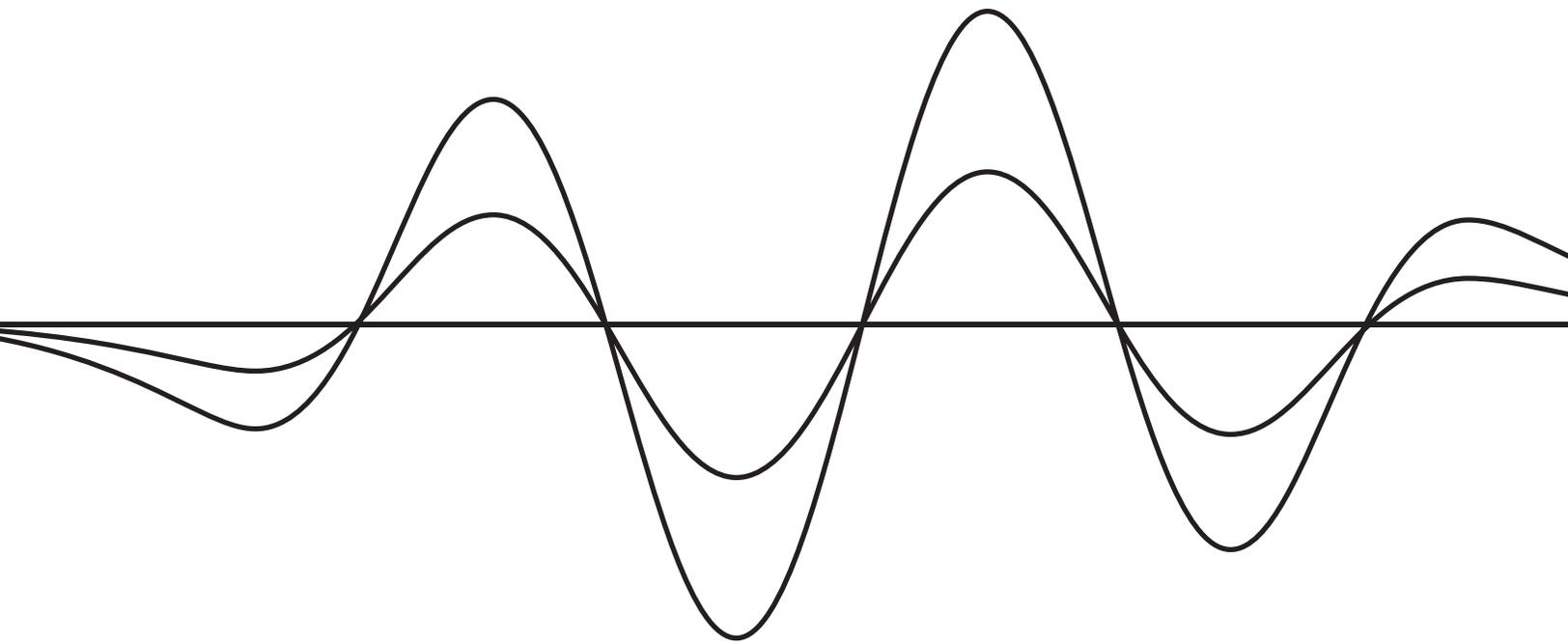
An example of this last idea was given by one of the Panamanian interviewees, who spoke of the importance not only of the narrative communicated, but also of the technique used to communicate the message: "We discovered that for a long time, when in Latin America, in an effort to make Latin American cinema, people thought that the discourse and the narrative were more important than the technique with which you narrate, so that Latin American cinema was somehow more than anything

propagandistic, ideological, political cinema, but it lacked the techniques that somehow Hollywood commercial cinema achieved, in order to have influence and insert its messages into people's heads. Technique continues to be a valuable element, so if you are going to make a radio program or if you are going to make a film, you have to do it with the highest levels of technical excellence, because that will guarantee that the messages you are going to put forward will have a stronger impact on people's conscience."





THE DIGITAL CONTEXT, INTERNET, AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN COLOMBIA AND PANAMA





COLOMBIA

Colombia has a total population of 51,390,000, of which 82 percent live in urban areas.⁴ There are 65,750,000 cellular phones, which represents 127 percent of the total population. There are currently 35,500,000 internet users, representing 69 percent of the total population. To navigate the internet, 97 percent of users use cell phones. The top five reasons for using the internet among people aged 16 to 64 are: to find information (78 percent), to learn "how to do things" (76 percent), to keep in touch with family and friends (71 percent), for education and studying (68 percent) and to follow news and current events (65.9 percent).

As for social media users, 41,800,000 people are on a social media platform, representing 81 percent of the population. The reasons why internet users aged 16 to 64 years use social media are: to keep in touch with friends and family (61 percent), to read the news (52.3 percent) and to search for content (44 percent). The most used social media and instant messaging platforms are: WhatsApp (94 percent), Facebook (91.7 percent), Instagram (84.4 percent), Facebook Messenger (73.8 percent) and TikTok (69.5 percent). Rodolfo Hernandez, a presidential candidate in the last elections, won by Gustavo Petro, used TikTok as an essential platform for his campaign.



PANAMA

The total population of Panama is 4,410,000, of which 69 percent live in urban areas.⁵ There are 5,270,000 connected cell phones in the country; this number represents 119 percent of the population (i.e., there are 20 percent more cell phones than people). There are 2,940,000 internet users, which is 66 percent of the total population. Most people use cell phones to navigate the internet.

The number of social media users is 3,450,000, this figure represents 78 percent of the population. The most used social media platforms are Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

CONTEXT OF ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS AND THE INTERNET

A survey by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) in Colombia found that “in 2020, the percentage of households that owned a desktop, laptop, or tablet computer was 39.3 percent nationwide, with a higher proportion in departmental capitals (48.2 percent), while in towns and rural areas the proportion was 10.4 percent.”⁶

This same survey reported that “56.5 percent of all households nationwide had an internet connection, 66.6 percent in capitals and 23.9 percent in towns and rural areas. The department with the highest proportion of connected households is Bogotá D.C. with 78.0 percent, and the department with the lowest proportion is Vaupés with 3.1 percent. By type of connection, the majority of households nationwide have a fixed internet connection (81.3 percent), with a higher proportion in the capitals (85.6 percent); however, in towns and rural areas, the largest type of internet connection is mobile with 60.9 percent.”

Our research concurs with this data; organizations located in rural areas have less access to communications infrastructure.

In Panama, 2010 census data showed that 91 percent of the urban population and nine percent of the rural population had access to computers. Additionally, that access was not evenly distributed—37.2 percent of urban households had a computer, while 9.2 percent did in non-indigenous rural areas.⁷ According to Raisa Urribarri, “These data show that in Panama, social inequality, with a marked territorial imbalance, is also expressed digitally, because as the distance from cities increases, the level of access also decreases.”⁸

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT IN COLOMBIA AND PANAMA

Most of the organizations that participated in the survey, interviews, and focus group in Colombia are located in Valle del Cauca. In Panama, most of the organizations and individuals interviewed are located in the country’s capital. In both countries, most of the organizations have legal status, and the 44 organizations work on issues of gender justice, human rights, migrants’ rights, social justice, economic justice and reproductive justice.

The organizations surveyed in both countries have low communications budgets. In Colombia, 48 percent of organizations have no budget allocated to communications, and in Panama, this same variable is 23 percent.

As a Colombian participant told us:

“For us to have, ensure, and address our unmet social needs, we lack resources, not to mention that sometimes we don’t even have furniture to sit on, because there is no money, and...to obtain resources, we need to work on public relations all the time non-stop, be strategic and be ready, because many times, [funders] set the conditions, they tell us the how and the when.”

COLOMBIA

In each of the two countries, most organizations have a budget of \$1,000 USD to \$25,000 USD per year for their operations. It should be noted that the largest source of income for organizations in Colombia is self-generated and comes from charging participation fees (48 percent), while

22 percent of their income comes from member contributions. As one Colombian participant told us: "Funding in recent years has been generated more by network members' own resources, from local income generating activities that contribute to the sustainability of the work and the main office."

In Panama, 33 percent of organizations' budgets are self-generated. Of their total budget, 83 percent of Colombian and 38 percent of Panamanian organizations invest less than five percent in new information and communications technologies (NICTs). There are also organizations that do not invest in NICTs; in Panama, 33 percent (seven) do not. "People think that communications work can be done by anybody without any kind of field study, so there is no investment, no investment in communications," one Panamanian interviewee noted. These organizations' modest budgets limit their ability to hire specialized communications personnel, and they have to rely on volunteers being available to carry out communications work.

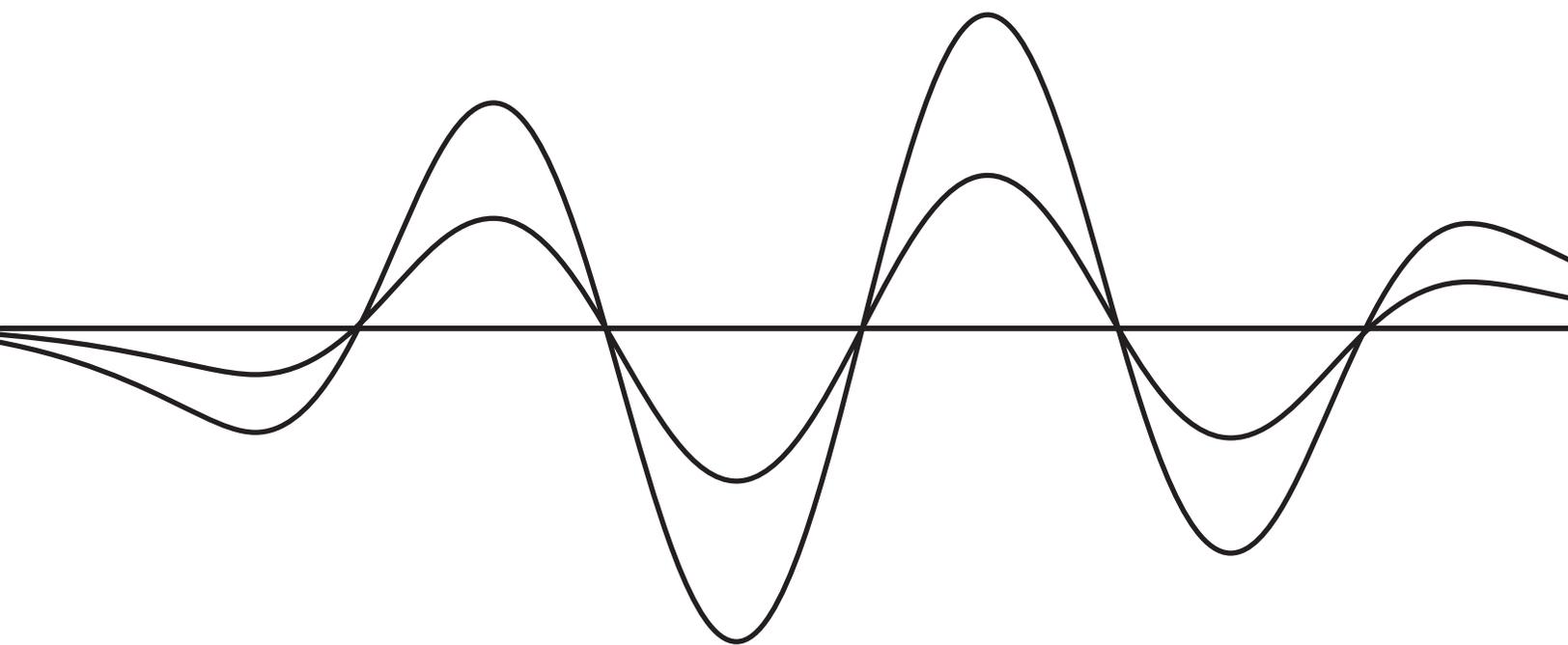
For human rights organizations to promote and position their values, they need infrastructure that facilitates this process, including the technological equipment that is a fundamental piece of this. In these areas, the organizations we surveyed present worrying data: in Colombia, 47 percent of organizations do not have their own equipment and use members' equipment; this is also the case for 57 percent of Panamanian organizations.

Furthermore, organizations in Colombia and Panama are characterized by low use of NICTs. Although organizations have access to NICTs, existing gaps in financial and human resources prevent them from making more efficient use of NICTs, and in the end, they are mostly used to maintain and manage internal communications. Few organizations achieve a high use of NICTs. "We have some computers, but they are very outdated, and we can no longer even work on simple tasks because of their slowness, and because they are so old, their operating life has actually ended. Staff members are using their own devices," a Colombian interviewee said.



OVERVIEW OF KEY PARTICIPANTS

As part of the methodology for this study, we interviewed 25 key movement actors between the two countries—11 in Panama and 14 in Colombia—so that their experiences and knowledge could help us identify the communication and narrative power-building needs of the region's social movement organizations. We also interviewed 10 people as part of a focus group. The 35 people who participated in interviews or the focus group fell into three groups.



GROUP 1

Social leaders, activists and human rights defenders.

Some have dedicated themselves since their teens to the defense of the human rights of women, Afro-descendants and the working masses. In this group, the work of an indigenous environmental leader of the Ngäbe Buglé people of Panama and a Colombian trans woman stand out.

“We are now at the forefront of a movement, which was created because of the struggle over mining and hydroelectric issues. We are still in this movement and in this struggle,” the Panamanian environmental leader told us.

“I am a Black trans woman, I lead an organization called Trans Empoderarte, a collective that was founded only by trans people, that is, people who inhabit trans realities from their body, from expression, because we believe it is very important to situate the narratives of those people who have historically been discriminated against, segregated, and had their rights to participation, and especially political participation, violated,” the Colombian trans organizer said.

GROUP 2

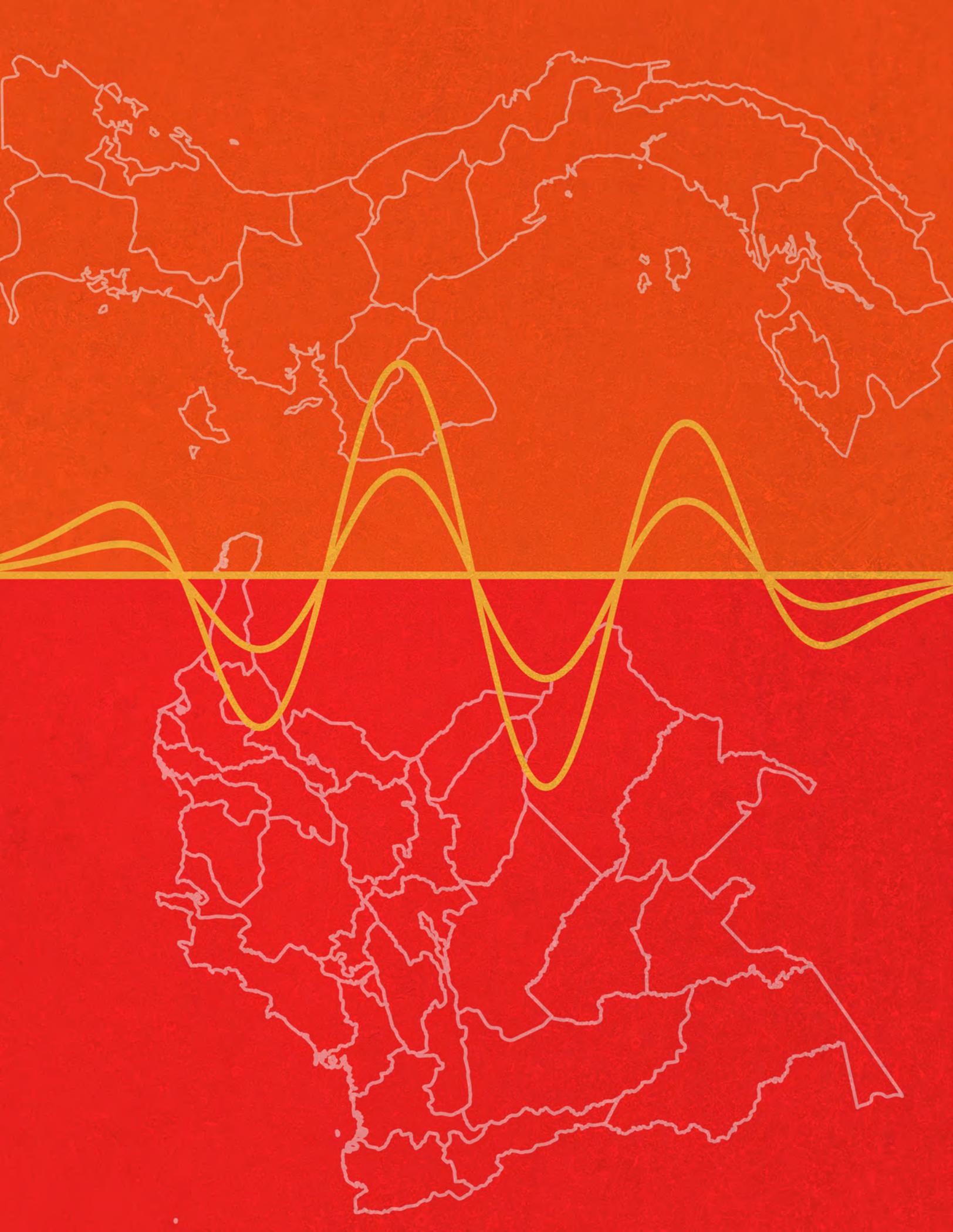
Social media communicators and communications experts and advisors for social movements.

This group includes journalists, social media communicators, specialists in audiovisual production and film directing, and people running a weekly magazine and community radio station. They are an important and experienced group of communications activists.

GROUP 3

Social scientists.

We interviewed three social scientists—two sociologists and a psychologist—who are committed to peoples' rights, particularly the defense of the human rights of the general public including indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants and women.



COMMUNICATIONS PRACTICES IN THE SURVEYED REGIONS

In this section, we focus on the media used by organizations to communicate their public narratives and positions and their mechanisms for action and dissemination of information to the people.

Analysis of information and communications technology and the factors associated with it, lead us to say that effective availability of the latest technology and access to the internet should be promoted through public policies.

According to the organizations surveyed in Panama, only 19 percent (four) of them stated that they receive economic aid or subsidies from the government. In Colombia, no organization obtains this support. However, 95 percent of the organizations in both countries stated that they have financial needs.

Based on the above, we believe that public policies aimed at granting economic resources and technical assistance should be created. As one Panamanian participant told us:

“The government tells many citizens that they have to make media outlets, they have the right and the authority, but they do not have the right to the media which is another matter, because in Panama, they say you can carry out communications, you can do radio in rural areas. Yes, perfect, we can do it, but we do not have legislation that protects that activity, like a community radio law. Communication, besides being recognized within the public sphere or agenda, must be valued and responded to through a legal system that gives all citizens the right to have the means of communication.”

PANAMA

As another interviewee said: “We don’t get any kind of government subsidy, we don’t get any funds that allow us to have someone on the premises. On the contrary, we have premises, but we pay for these premises with our own funds. Yes, we run some projects, but these project funds are not enough to maintain the life of the organization. If we didn’t have this extraordinary support from friends who voluntarily give of their knowledge and their efforts, we would simply not have any way to work on any of this.”

Given this scenario, public policies should be enacted that would provide economic resources and technical assistance through institutional programs, in addition to creating spaces and opportunities within government media outlets that would help civil society spaces define and position their narratives.

TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Traditional media outlets, with their large audiences, also have a leading role in the dissemination of messages for organizations.

The traditional media that organizations use most in Colombia are conventional and community radio (seven organizations, or 30 percent), print newspapers (six organizations, or 26 percent), and traditional television (four organizations, or 17 percent). Panama has very similar data, with only the use of traditional newspapers standing out (nine organizations, or 43 percent).

The media does not usually promote the struggles of popular movements, but when social movements take to the streets to demand rights or the solution to a problem, the traditional media almost feels obligated to report the demands being made in the streets, as one of the focus group participants said. As a Panamanian interviewee noted:

“Recently we had an example in Panama, where a serial criminal was abducting women over a three-year period, but until civil society and women’s organizations raised their voice, the traditional media did not use their power to take on the issue with strong leadership. Then, sometimes, there are moments because these same media outlets are the ones that repeatedly foster communication that goes against a narrative that brings about social change.”

PANAMA

The interviewees did not see traditional media outlets as allies, and disseminating information through these outlets is extremely costly. As one participant told us: “I see it from the same satellite that is in Costa Rica with Teletica, it is the same with Caracol and RCN (radio and television channels) in Colombia, and the same in Televisora Nacional (TVN-2) in Panama, which are members of an international information alliance. The corporate communications sector is the most recalcitrant sector in the region, whose goal is to promote the right wing here, since they are against all grassroots efforts.”

Rather, the allies turn out to be specific journalists who are sensitized and do not necessarily toe the editorial line of the media outlet, and who in one way or another try to address some of the issues raised by social movements.

SOCIAL MEDIA & NEW MEDIA

This study also focused on social media and new technologies used by organizations to communicate with their audiences and with authorities. Colombia and Panama have very

similar data on social media usage, but the difference is in the percentage of people who use each platform in the country.

The new media used most in Panama are Facebook and Instagram; 95 percent of organizations use these networks to communicate with their audiences. Other popular social networks are Twitter (by 86 percent) and YouTube (by 68 percent). The most used instant messaging platforms are WhatsApp (by 86 percent) and Telegram (by 33 percent).

As one interviewee from Panama said: "Social media is a power that is there and that we can't ignore, even less so in these pandemic times. Using it correctly is the weak link of the social movement. Because everyone jumped on social media in the pandemic, thinking that Zooming in, or grabbing a cell phone was doing good communication. Social media is a tool."

For organizations in Colombia, the most used network is Facebook (78 percent, or 18 organizations), followed by YouTube (49 percent, or 11 organizations). Organizations communicate through Instagram (43 percent, or 10 organizations) and Twitter at (40 percent, or nine organizations). Instant messaging app usage is led by WhatsApp (91 percent, or 21 organizations), followed by Telegram (44 percent, or 10 organizations).

There is a significant difference in the use of Instagram and Twitter between the two countries; this difference may be due to the greater limitation on access to communications infrastructure that organizations have in Colombia.

With the pandemic, there was a boom in digital communication: virtual education, remote work and digital content platforms. With this, virtual threats also increased, since the growth in users and the use of technological tools also represent a potential point of attack by cybercriminals. While no participants raised cybersecurity as a need, it

should be acknowledged that there are potential vulnerabilities in the organizations' platforms, which do not have sufficient means to protect them. It is possible that there is an environment of vulnerability and threats around digital communications. For example, in Panama, a former president was accused of wiretapping journalists, political figures and human rights defenders during his presidential term.⁹

METHODS ORGANIZATIONS USE TO COMMUNICATE WITH THEIR AUDIENCES

Organizations in rural areas have limited access to technology, which is why they have developed communications strategies to maintain links among their members. These actions have been effective, as one Colombian interviewee explained:

"In the department of La Guajira, we have a very constraining gap in connectivity. It is a constant concern, because communities are very isolated; they are many kilometers apart. And that's where I've put a community radio station, to be able to start disseminating women's rights; this has been done by broadcasting. And I have learned through social platforms that today, there is a very easy-to-use tool, which are podcasts, and through recordings as well, that has led me to be in the cloud. Let's not forget that in the digital world, there is also a population waiting for us. In isolated populations, very few are connected or have internet; this is, therefore, a constant concern."

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Along the same lines, a Panamanian indigenous leader who lives in an indigenous region told us how they communicate for social mobilization: “We did not foresee this communications issue, but thanks to cell phones, it was a basic tool for being able to communicate with different bases. At that time, we called the places that were supporting us ‘bases,’ from Pacora, Las Garzas, towards the interior of the country, here in Chiriquí, even up to Boca del Toro. So we saw cell phones as essential to communicating.”

This reality in both countries shows that different strategies are needed in different places, depending on the resources available within those areas.

Social media is very popular today, and organizations recognize that they have weaknesses in how they use these platforms. However, an important characteristic is that they communicate with their audience through press releases which are disseminated through print and social media. They also communicate through meetings, text messages and emails; this dynamic is similar in both countries. However, organizations in both countries are committed to communications such as phone calls and meetings and by using print documents. These means of communicating are in line with the needs and limitations of all 44 organizations that are part of the study.

Print media, newspapers, press releases and newsletters (physical and digital) make it possible to reach more audiences, mainly the elderly. However, the stark limitations in financial and human resources make the aforementioned very challenging. Despite the digital evolution, print media are still used and indeed have evolved over time, adapting to the needs of users and maintaining their legitimacy for the region’s social movements.

HOW ORGANIZATIONS BUILD POWER

According to the organizations surveyed in Colombia, digital power is achieved through telephone calls and emails (48 percent, or 11 organizations), while in Panama, 48 percent of organizations, 10 in total, stated that they build power in the digital sphere through mobilizations and mass actions in the streets. In Colombia, this same option—building power through mass mobilization—was the second-highest method, at 21 percent, or five organizations. In Panama, the second-highest option is linked to the digital sphere (28 percent).

There seems to be a significant difference between the two countries in how organizations build power. In Panama, building power in this way is related to the specific history of the Panamanian people, where their achievements have been the product of mobilization and street actions. Even though many years have passed, the country is still marked by a struggle that began in the early 20th century—the recovery of its territorial sovereignty and the departure of the Americans from Panamanian territory. This movement led to countless mobilizations and strategies seeking the country’s sovereignty. Today, these strategies still exist—no longer to remove an imperial power from its territory, but to demand solutions to the country’s countless social problems, and it is through these actions that organizations build their power. These actions also contribute to relationship-building between organizations. “More work can be done, and particularly if the organizations are small, they can join forces,” one Panamanian participant said. “Here in Panama, they also do it mainly through marches. Several organizations join together, but sometimes they can also join together to transmit a specific message.”

Colombians, on the other hand, build their power through phone calls and emails. This may be due to the limited access to communications infrastructure that the surveyed organizations have, given that most are located in towns in Valle del Cauca. One Colombian interviewee said:

“It is essential to be able to consolidate alliances with various academic institutions and/or among organizations to promote strategies for regionalization, visibility of actions, strengthening of leadership, and technical capacity in the Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero populations in Colombia to contribute to their different processes.”

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LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT TRAINING AND INFRASTRUCTURE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND NARRATIVE POWER-BUILDING

Content creation by organizations in both Colombia and Panama also shows significant shortcomings; these shortcomings interfere in building narrative power and prevent them from positioning their narratives.

Several Colombian organizations lack experience with content creation (35 percent, or eight organizations). The lack of resources is an important factor, and organizations say that this lack leads them to react, instead of developing strategic proposals (39 percent, or nine organizations). Regarding content creation teams in Colombian organizations, 30 percent (seven organizations) receive support from these teams, which are usually composed of volunteers. Only 13 percent (three organizations) have a specialist who helps them create communications content in the organization. "Another limitation is the lack of resources. Sometimes the message is great, but not many people receive it, so that's like a lack of publicity within the narrative," one Colombian interviewee told us.

In Panama, in terms of the development of content or products to disseminate their values and narratives, 62 percent (13 organizations) have a team in charge of content creation, 24 percent of organizations have a specialist to help them create content and 19 percent have no content creation experience.

Similar to Colombia, 38 percent of organizations said they react and fail to develop a strategic response. As a focus group participant said, "I think that this opportunity for social organizations to analyze narrative-building is very important, because there is, from my point of view, a weakness in content production. I think it's part of the lack of knowledge by activists, who need to better use the communications services offered by the internet and social media."

The lack of technical and financial resources has a direct impact on organizations' level of positioning and visibility, not only in Colombia, but also in Panama. Organizations recognize that their level of positioning is low—in Colombia, this percentage is 49 percent, or 11 organizations, and in Panama, it is 14 percent, or three organizations. As one participant said: "It's very low because we don't understand social media management very well."

On the other hand, many organizations say their positioning is average. The percentage of organizations who say their positioning is average in Colombia is 26 percent (six organizations), and in Panama, it is 67 percent (13 organizations). Only six Colombian organizations recognize that their positioning is high or very high, while in Panama, five organizations say that their positioning is high or very high.

"It's average because we lack part of the infrastructure; communication is not fluid and constant," one Colombian interviewee said. As another Colombian participant noted, "In recent years, funding has been difficult. For organizations, it is very difficult to keep a communicator who is dedicated only to that, so everything is done by volunteers or interns who have knowledge of and can develop the information and mobilize it. In addition, this requires time, and sometimes there isn't even time to update the website or activate online networks."

According to the organizations, the main reason for their low positioning is a lack of communications tools and resources that could enable them to develop a communications strategy. Along the same lines, organizations that say they are well positioned and can transmit their messages or narratives believe that this is due to several key factors: better use of social media and their credibility as human rights experts.

One of the people we interviewed in Panama noted that having the tools are important, but that it is also necessary to have the knowledge to create content that reaches people. "I believe that it's not about the tool, but about how to build or manage content. And this content of course produces emotions in the recipient and can motivate them to advocate," she said. "We have peers who create a news item, a press release, a chronology, an investigation, and make the reader burn neurons. But if readers don't mobilize, if they don't impact an arena, then I believe that what's being done isn't having an effect. I believe that for us, if an individual or a media outlet doesn't have a bearing on public opinion towards mobilization, then I believe that...we have to reassess. Where are we going wrong?"

One stopgap measure is for organizations to develop their content depending on the topic

or project they are working on. "People have their own voice; what we do is act like a window display, a showcase, so that these voices can be seen and heard. But it would be very interesting for these same organizations to narrate what's going on where they work, explain their reality. I think that networking, building bridges, can work very well and can be brought to light," said one interviewee from Colombia. "We can produce the conditions to create the narrative power that we're talking about. I think it's also important to offer training opportunities on topics that can be used in practice. How to write? How to draft? How to publish in social media?"

Organizations are currently facing constant and changing challenges to provide continuity to their work; even more so in these times, where trying to humanize communication is essential. Interacting with people these days is complex. For the organizations in the study countries, content and narrative creation is among their most important challenges.

The most important challenges for Colombian organizations are:

- Increasing and improving collaboration between organizations (69 percent, or 16 organizations)
- Increasing and improving their advocacy in defense of social rights; positioning their narratives and objectives (69 percent, or 16 organizations);
- Developing their team's capacity to promote their core messages and values.

Among the top three most important challenges for Panamanian organizations are:

- A lack of competency and technical capabilities to produce and promote messages (85 percent, or 18 organizations)

- Measuring and communicating with greater impact, increasing advocacy work, and positioning narratives (66 percent, or 14 organizations)
- Obtaining long term sustainable funding to invest in organizational communications (66 percent, or 14 organizations).

All these findings portray the reality that organizations in both countries are experiencing today in terms of narrative-building and their positioning in the outside world.

In both Colombia and Panama, organizations place challenging the dominant media narratives and those of opposition figures at a lower level of importance advancing their own narratives; they consider them a challenge of little to medium importance. Organizations are neglecting this part of their struggles—conservatives' power is increasing by the day, and they easily position their narratives, which they project through political figures. "We're in a situation where these groups get their vigor, their strength, first of all because of their links with the most politically reactionary sectors, the

most conservative people, the people who have enacted neoliberal policies, they are really very conservative," one participant noted. "The other thing is that they have the support of the churches, both the Catholic church and the evangelical churches and all the Pentecostal churches; furthermore, they have a lot of resources."

Many of the organizations we surveyed do not give any weight to opposing narratives; this has the effect of strengthening those sectors, which continue to assume greater control as they position their anti-rights narratives. In view of this reality, some of the interviewees pointed to collaborative networking among organizations as a way to address these shortcomings. "We need to be able to set up more support networks and have opportunities to meet with other organizations that work on similar things, so that we can...leverage experiences based on what we've done," said one participant from Colombia. "I think that's what's needed."



NEEDS AND ASSETS SHARED BY KEY PARTICIPANTS

When inquiring about communications needs, 95 percent of the organizations responded they have countless needs related to communications, both in Colombia and in Panama. As one Panamanian interviewee said: "I think that the first thing to do is to look at where we have gone wrong, a diagnosis of the situations we want to address. We can't talk about everything; I think we have to know how to choose. The agenda is thought out, we have so many shortcomings in all degrees of the social movement."

In terms of the different communications needs, all options were greater than 30 percent, which shows the profound communications deficiencies in the study organizations. These needs centered on a lack of knowledge about message and narrative development, communications strategies and campaigns, and audience identification, and not so much about how to disseminate their messages.

In Colombia's case, the main need of 78 percent of organizations is the development of communications strategies and plans. In Panama, however, the primary needs are for narrative research or development of direct action strategies (66 percent), while the second-most felt need is audience identification and the

implementation of campaigns (62 percent). For organizations in Colombia, the second-most felt need is the use of social media, the internet and technological equipment (65 percent), while in Panama, this type of need ranks quite low.

Over half of both Colombian and Panamanian organizations identified the need for defining and positioning their narratives.

Other organizational needs identified in the study are related to communications actions. Three communications tools were explored in the study: communications campaigns, plans and strategies.

In both Panama and Colombia, the most common communications actions that are

developed are communications strategies. In Panama, 13 organizations have developed their communications strategy in the last five years, and in Colombia, 12 organizations have done so. We must mention that during the study, we learned that some organizations have not been able to implement their strategies due to lack of resources—in Panama, 12 organizations carried out communications campaigns, but in Colombia, only six organizations stated that they had done so. The organizations stated that these campaigns are not durable and cannot be sustained over time due to a lack of financial resources and technical personnel. In Colombia, nine organizations have not carried out communications actions in the last five years. As one Colombian interviewee told us: “We would need more technical work in the sense of campaign messages and content. This is actually a truly voluntary process by some colleagues, who dedicate their personal time outside of work to make posters and develop campaigns. However, we have not been able to set up campaigns with certain objectives, which is a weakness. We don’t have anyone who can carry out these campaigns. But we have often started campaigns very enthusiastically, but then all the work we personally have keeps us from getting much more out of those campaigns.”

Organizations also identified needs in the area of communications research, as the survey revealed that organizations have conducted very little research. In Colombia, 87 percent of organizations have not conducted communications-related research, and in Panama, the figure was 67 percent. One of the Panamanian interviewees said: “Organizations show no intention to clear up doubts or create a culture of research.”

In addition to the number of needs mentioned above, it is hard for the study organizations

to maintain a technical team to develop their communications areas. The quantitative and qualitative findings reveal that the teams working in both the Colombian and Panamanian organizations are primarily composed of volunteers. In Colombia, volunteers represent 73 percent; in Panama, it’s 66 percent. It should be noted that of the total staff, only 28 percent are full-time salaried in Panama, and in Colombia, that figure is four percent. As one participant told us: “No, we don’t have specialized people, we have colleagues who know about HIV, for example, who know about violence against women. We ourselves have made a great effort to train ourselves in the issues, but none of us is one hundred percent dedicated to this because we have to live—we have to work elsewhere to be able to take care of our own lives.”

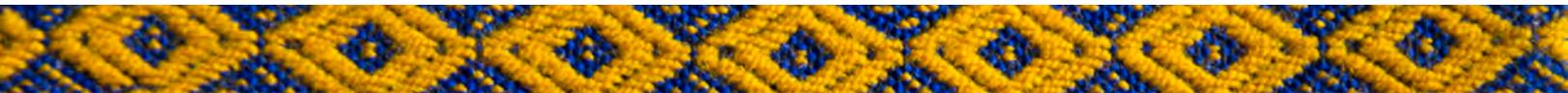
Organizations in Panama have a higher percentage of people assigned to communications than in Colombia—81 percent and 57 percent, respectively. However, when asked about the roles of these people, the most common title is community manager: 30 percent in Panama and 17 percent in Colombia. “We don’t see the need to take care of the communications person, to recognize their work, to acknowledge that it is a tiring job to manage social media in the organizations,” one participant noted. “This media management, it’s not being paid, it’s being done for free in the organizations.”

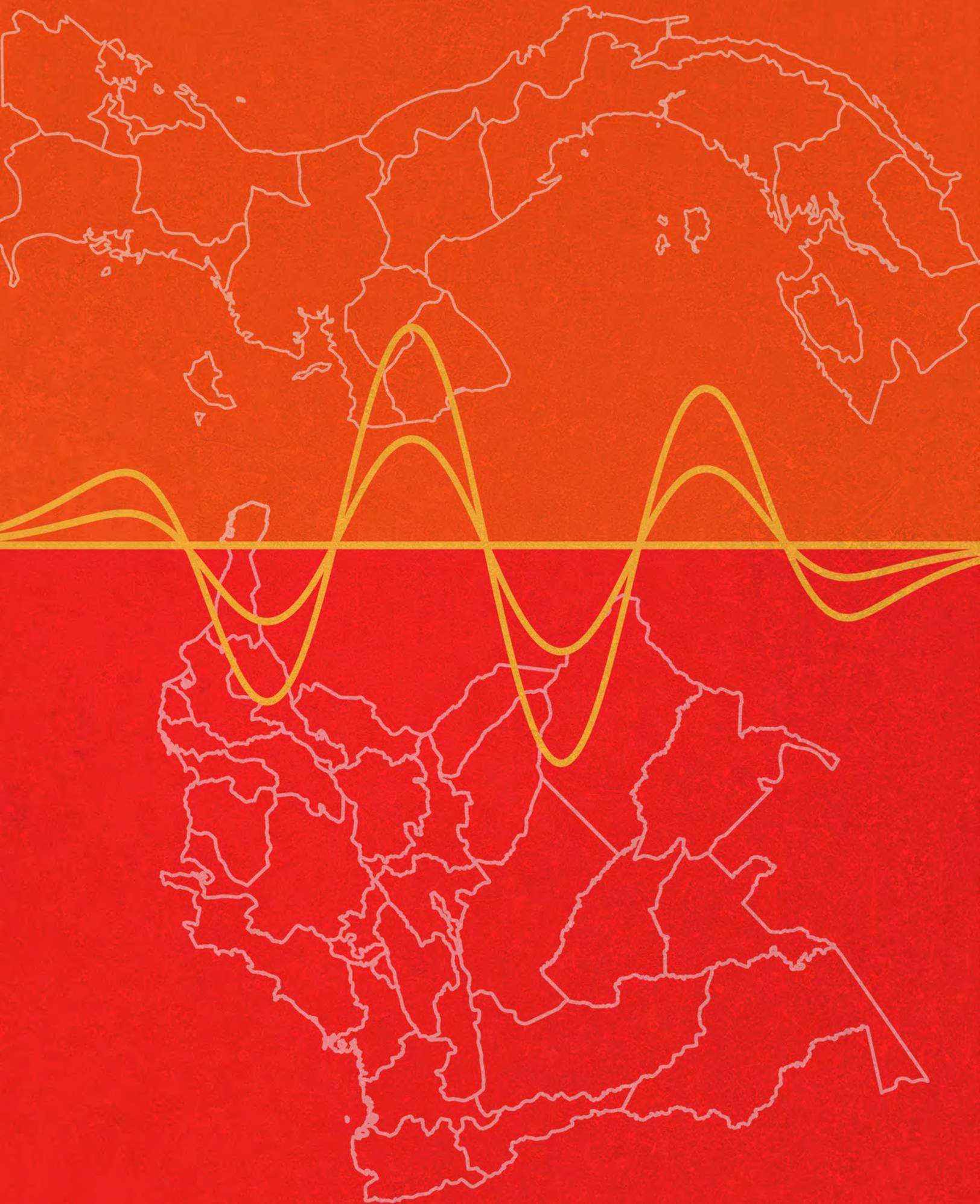
In Colombia, 39 percent of the organizations do not have personnel who play a communications role; in Panama, eight percent of organizations have no communications staff. It was widely acknowledged that this needs to change. As one interviewee told us: “We have to acknowledge the work of the communications person in the organization and seek funding. Right now, we don’t have any because our organizations

haven't considered it, and the funds are not there for that either. But I think this study could make the point that we need to recognize the communications field just like any field, like political science, or whatever, or sociology. Nobody would think that a sociologist is going to work for free, so why do we have to think that a communications person has to do so."

It is important to highlight that all the organizations that participated in the study are committed to social justice and human rights, and have access to new information and communications technologies, even if this access is limited in some areas where organizations are located. Most of the participating organizations are legally registered, allowing them to apply for international cooperation funds. They have trained teams specialized in the organization's

issues, such as human rights, racial justice and social justice, to give a few examples. There is a desire to strengthen their communications strategy, as one interviewee told us: "I think it's progressively growing and that there is greater awareness of the strategic value of communications. I often say that it's done in a very homegrown way, without the required expertise, because remember that having technicians is a control mechanism. So the big companies have technicians because they pay them; the Afro movement doesn't, the organization doesn't have money. Many times, they improvise or appeal to a resource that shows up. What one does somehow, is to establish alliances with institutions and people who can give you the support, regardless of the economic costs."





RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations apply to both countries equally. The vast majority were suggested by the study participants. Without financial, technical and strategic support, it will be very difficult for organizations in the Latin American region, especially in the countries studied, to carry out these recommendations and incorporate them into their daily work.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTHENING

To strengthen the organizations, groups must have the necessary technological equipment, and the technical capacities of all the people who make up the organizations must be improved—and in particular, the communications departments, teams and committees. Finally, they must have people specialized in communications and narrative power-building.

- Skills and resources should be assessed, with the goal of strengthening technical capabilities, oriented to the use of technological tools and content creation.
- Organizations should receive basic training in strategic communications and narrative power-building.
- Strategic investments by foundations and donors to increase organizational capacity and ensure integration of best practices to build narrative power.
- A communications team should be created, and the entire organization should be trained in proper management of communications processes, so that communication becomes a crosscutting theme in everything the organization undertakes and not an entity separate from the organization's work.
- Support the inclusion of specialists to address capacity challenges in social media management.
- Develop a work plan and corresponding budget that substantially includes communications strategies and the use of NICTs.
- Encourage the use of communications infrastructure for conducting research, creating narratives or carrying out actions aimed at social participation and advocacy.

- Advocate for a resource assessment as part of the development of the communications strategy.
- Build the capacity to close observable technological gaps in the use of NICTs.

It is important to keep in mind that a long-term durable infrastructure, in this context, can best be understood as networked people, organizations and institutions aligned around shared objectives, who shape the vision and policy agendas.

TRAINING FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGNS

Some of the potential training topics that can be developed are:

- Introduction to communications and strategic narrative power
- Narrative power analysis
- Narrative self-assessment
- Integrated narrative strategy
- Audience identification

TRAINING PROCESS FOR AUDIENCE IDENTIFICATION

This process should aim to:

- Develop skills and resources to push messages into the public sphere
- Conduct training in communication skills and tactics
- Develop skills to motivate audiences to take action
- Provide training in the use of tools that enable greater digital security

During this process, the following must be done:

- Training on narrative creation tools and processes

As a result of this training, the organizations will succeed in:

- Using technological tools more efficiently
- Develop audience-identification capabilities.

- Develop abilities to perform an analysis of narrative power and to transfer of their narratives to other audiences

One must contextualize these topics to the sociocultural and resource environments, such as power, technology, and people's access to platforms for advancing digital and analog messages when implementing training.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

- Support shared strategies and actions among a variety of human rights groups. The transformative power of collective actions should be explored and their own narratives developed, to put in the public eye the issues that social movements want to be discussed or debated in the country.
- Incorporate communications into the organization's general strategy, to ensure the defense of human rights and to move from reactive planning to strategic planning.
- Take into account the study findings related to the use of the internet and the most commonly used social media platforms in Panama and Colombia. Any communications campaign or action in the countries studied should be based on these results, which will enable focusing on the media that will be most effective for those actions. The study identified the cell phone as the means of communication most used to connect to the internet; any communications strategy developed in these countries should take this finding into account.
- Create a communications strategy that includes monitoring and evaluation of the communications plan.
- Create a database with different communications strategies that can be used in building narratives aimed at defending, defeating or advancing social issues.
- Create communications guidelines for transmitting narratives and messages for the organization's membership and the general public that include the channels through which the messages are conveyed and indicators that evaluate its impact.

TRAINING

- In terms of training, organizations in both countries require support that would enable them to develop their communications plans and strategies.
- Training is required to identify tactics aligned with the organizations' strategies, so that they can address their target audience, at the right place and time, with the right message, to generate collective action that promotes and supports human rights.

- Training in the use of social media, technological equipment and the internet is also required to contribute to the development of effective strategic communications. In this area, they will need to gain knowledge in the use of basic tools such as cell phones, cameras and computers.
- Organizations need to receive training in the design, development and implementation of campaigns to disseminate and position their narratives.
- Training needs to be developed to identify and create strategies to address their various audiences through multiple platforms in both analog and digital spaces.

THE USE OF NARRATIVES TO BUILD NARRATIVE POWER

Organizations must be able to develop strategies for narrative change as they see fit, as well as measure the impact and effectiveness of the narratives themselves to achieve the desired results. In addition, mechanisms should be developed to monitor their narratives and evaluate the impacts of their narratives.

The responses from the organizations, as well as from key stakeholders, express that the following training is indispensable and urgent in this area.

Collective Actions

- Integrate the power that can be exercised through social media and digital activism into the forms of mobilization that organizations already know.
- Find support in shared strategies and actions among a variety of human rights groups.
- Create and strengthen a specialized team of digital activists.
- Learn to develop advocacy campaigns with other players and organizations in order to pool experiences, link campaigns and build coalitions.

THE ROLE OF THE PHILANTHROPIC SECTOR

Latin American funds for communications and narrative power need to be created, in order to provide organizations with the opportunity to access the financial resources and technical capacity that these opportunities can enable.

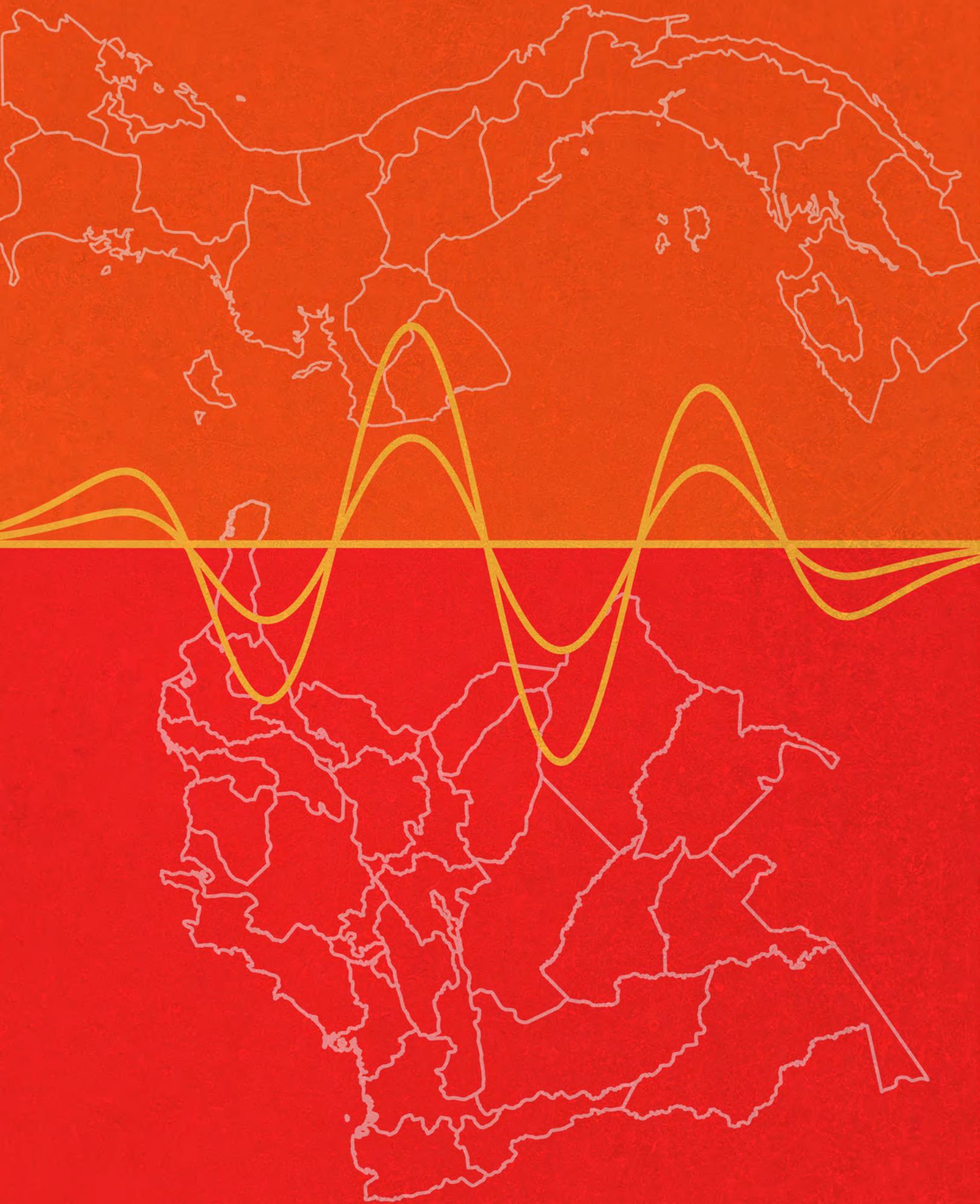
- Fund the creation and strengthening of organizations' communications departments beyond providing technological tools, which will contribute to the sustainability of the entire organization.

- Create opportunities for organizations to learn about communications resources and develop strategies to win campaigns and social struggles.
- Support researchers from the region in conducting projects and studies on narratives and narrative power-building.
- Promote projects involving participants from several countries, in order to generate exchanges of experiences and collective knowledge among organizations and facilitate comparative analyses.
- Support organizations in exploring diverse fundraising options (e.g., crowdfunding campaigns).

Alliances created in the framework of international cooperation must take into account the political positions of the organizations they want to support, since social justice organizations in the region have very clear political stakes. As one Colombian participant told us:

“Sometimes we find ourselves with funding opportunities for certain actions, but when that funding comes from agents that are reproducing those same conditions of injustice, we’re like, well, what are we doing here? Because much of the money that comes from cooperation agencies is also money that is generated from the destruction of those territories of communities where we want to intervene.” They added, “So, I think that alliances must manage to have a real, permanent, solid and transcendental connection to the extent that they do not contradict political projects, and instead contribute to making them a reality.”

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CONSTRAINTS OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY

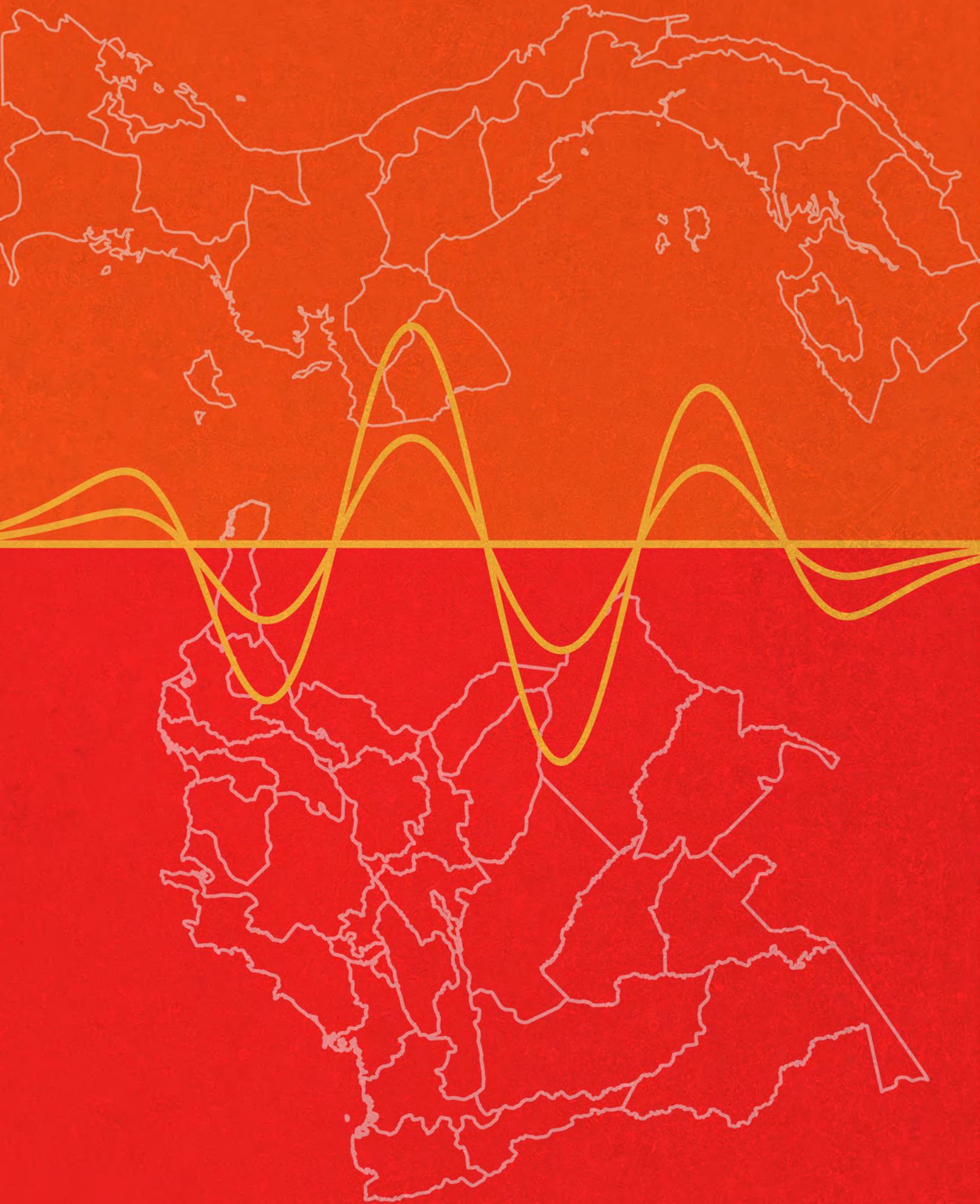
This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the middle of an election campaign in Colombia, which impacted not only the time available for research but also how it was developed.

Another constraint was language. Two languages were present in this study: English and Spanish. Even when using English-to-Spanish translators with digital tools, there is always a divide that sometimes does not allow full understanding of exactly what is meant or transmitted. This is where language justice principles must be taken into account. It is important to identify native Spanish-speaking translators familiar with the region's culture.

Other constraints had to do with the broader political context present in the countries that were studied.

Both Panama and Colombia have had a love-hate relationship with the United States, and everything that sounds like “gringos” is rejected, especially in a social movement that is positioned on anti-neoliberal leftist thinking.

The relative ease of implementing these recommendations in other Latin American contexts will be impacted by access to resources, knowledge and infrastructure, disparities between urban and rural areas, power dynamics in government, major religious institutions and the interests of the wealthy.



CONCLUSION

This study was focused on perceiving and listening to a group of organizations that promote human rights, social justice, gender equity, sexual and reproductive rights and the rights of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples.

According to the interviewees, the reality reflected in this study is not far from what is experienced in other countries in Central America and South America. More than one key participant made reference to the fact that in Latin America, the social and popular movement has countless communications needs.

From the data collected in the study, the organizations in Panama are better positioned with regard to their ability to engage in strategic communications. These results may be due to where the participating organizations are located. Most of the organizations that participated in Colombia are located in the rural region of Valle del Cauca, and in Panama, most of the organizations are located in the country's capital. Despite this fact, in general, there are no significant differences in the data between the two countries, which is why the conclusions apply equally to both countries.

According to the study's participants, there is an urgent need for training in communications. There is a gap in the sustainability of the organizations' actions because their organizational structure depends on members' time.

Although they have access to NICTs, gaps in financial and human resources prevent them from using them efficiently, and in the end, they are mostly used to maintain and manage internal communications. When organizations have been able to make extensive use of NICTs, they state that this has helped them to forge greater ties

with other organizations and to denounce social problems in the country.

Despite the fact that conservative narratives may be clear, organizations are neglecting to effectively push back against them as part of their struggles. Partly as a result, these sectors are becoming increasingly more powerful and are able to easily position their conservative narratives, which they project through political figures.

The main reasons for the low positioning of the organizations we studied are lack of communications capacity and resources. Organizations that are well positioned and transmit their messages or narratives believe that their success is due to three factors: better use of social media, their credibility and their recognition as experts on certain human rights issues.

The lack of resources compromises the missions of these organizations, preventing them from developing significant communications components. As a result of their constrained communications, social movements in both countries are not able to compete with the power of the traditional media and figures with ties to economic and political power.

If communications strategy continues to be the Cinderella in these organizations, and if it is not given the place it deserves, few changes will be achieved in the not-so-distant future.

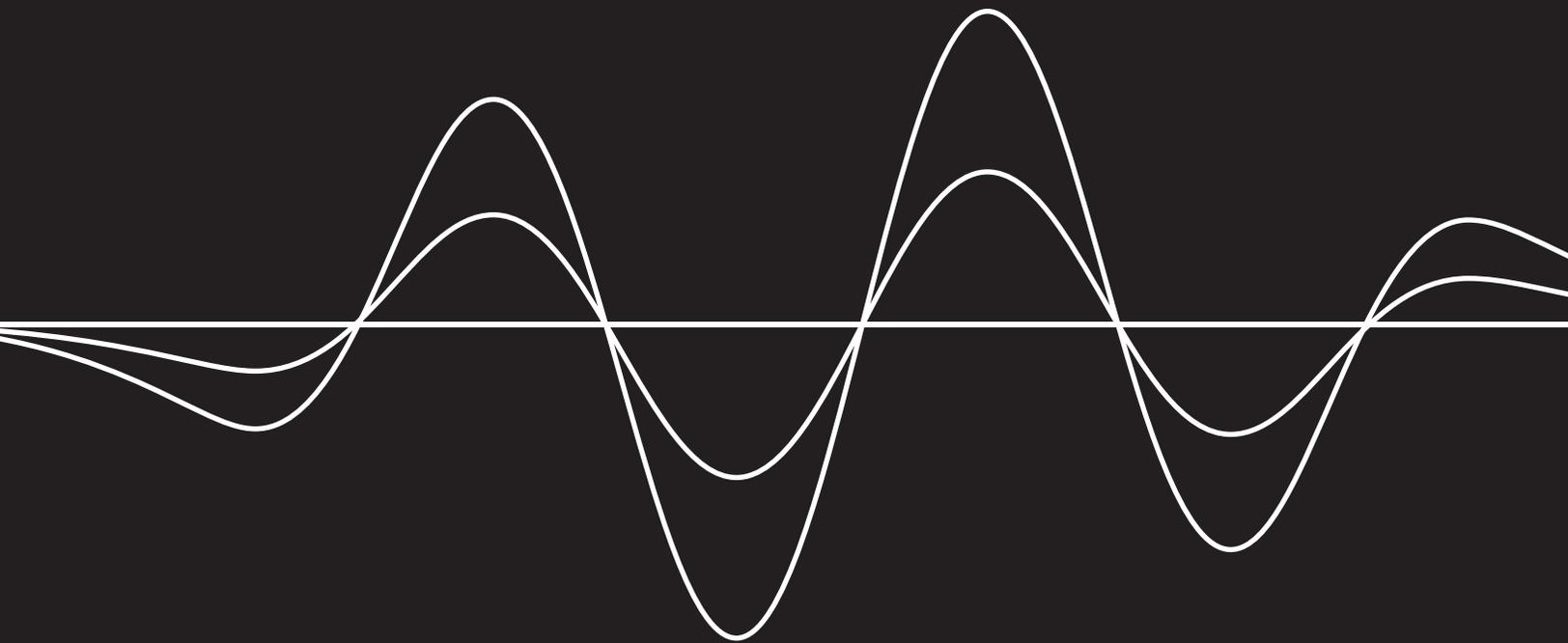
WHAT WE HEAR WHEN WE LISTEN: NEXT STEPS FOR THE FUTURE

For a broader view of the reality presented here, more in-depth research is needed in Latin American countries.

Latin America is changing with the advent of progressive governments, such as those in Colombia, Honduras, Brazil and Chile. What role will the traditional and alternative media play in this political contest? What narratives will be positioned and will dominate future election results in the region? And what impact will the Latin American social movement organizations have on this?

Future research is needed on the power imbalance between human rights organizations in the region and conservative sectors that continue to position their anti-rights narratives; we need a better understanding of the methods these sectors use to entrench and reproduce their narratives.

Organizations will need a group of advocates and social leaders to actively shape the pro-human rights discourse so that equity and social justice make common sense. They will also need funding to provide them with resources, not only to strengthen their internal communications infrastructure, but also to strengthen their messaging and content creation teams, so that they can grow stronger in the coming years.



SUMMARIES OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Transvestite to Trans Study: Sexual Narratives of Panama (2021): This report examined local literature that portrayed transvestite men and transgender women as negative and sinful, a predominant perspective in Latin American societies.¹⁰ In Panama, for example, the Catholic church and the government have influenced common society by promoting the idea that homosexuality constitutes a threat to society. This perspective has forced the many people who do not conform to heteronormativity and the gender binary to flee their families to hide their sexual orientation or transgender identity. Others choose to internalize patterns of behavior and expectations normalized by society towards gender and sexual diversity.

Study on Narratives and Information Contamination in Vulnerable Groups During the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Cases of Panama and Venezuela (2021): This paper identifies narratives and misinformation that spread in two vulnerable population groups during the COVID-19 pandemic: women and the LGBTQ+ population in Panama, and returned migrants in Venezuela.¹¹ Twitter, Google Trends and the media were the information sources used, during the period from March to November 2020. In Panama, there was an increase in the volume of the discussion around gender themes. The topics of "feminism," "abuse," "gender violence," "domestic violence" and "gender" increased significantly. However, the main narratives detected were not directly related to

COVID-19 and its effects. The narratives were framed within the confrontation between conservative and progressive values in the debates around gender equality, the right to abortion and recognition of gender diversity. The most frequent form of misinformation was through unfounded accusations of crimes of opponents.

Newspaper article: Panama Adds a Virtual Mechanism to its Fight Against HIV-AIDS (2021).¹² Panama developed a novel mechanism to provide care, information and follow-up to key population groups using virtual communications channels, including social media platforms, dating apps and chat channels such as WhatsApp. In addition to ensuring constant communication with the users of these channels, this approach has served to promote health measures that seek to halt the advance of COVID-19.

An online approach was the strategy adopted by several organizations that work with people living with HIV, men who have sex with men, sex workers and the broader LGBTQ+ population, to continue providing basic support and accompaniment services for HIV testing, prevention, counseling and psychological assistance, among others.

Book: Gender, Communication and Journalism (2017).¹³ This book analyzes the role that social media can play to reduce violence and discrimination against women in today's society.

As the author writes: "Inclusive communication that addresses the issue of women with their differences and special needs, and that brings to light all social manifestations of violence and discrimination, while empowering women around the exercise of their rights. This is communication for social change, for the progress of our nations, and for the strengthening of democracy."

Study: Communication (Internal and External) and Awareness Raising: Business Practices to Promote Gender Parity in Panama.¹⁴ This study

focuses on the ways that internal communication and awareness-raising are vehicles used by a company's leaders to demonstrate their commitment to its workforce, ensure knowledge about and the free exercise of existing equality measures and apply gender equity in all company communications. The measures identified in this area involve, for the most part, implementation of the following actions: use of specific tools and training.

PROYECTO ¡OYE! RESEARCH TEAM

AfroResistance

Marcia Olivo
Janvieve Williams Comrie

Panama

Chevy Solis Acevedo
Ana Elizabeth Lemos Fulwood

Colombia

Beneditha Cantanhêde E Silva
Waldestrudis Hurtado Minotas

ReFrame

Miguel Andrade
Shaira Chaer
Liz Hynes
Joseph Phelan
Márquez Rhyne
Dulce Rojas

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Ernesto Andrade
Jamila Brown
Reyna Mendez
Maria Del Pilar Serna
Wellspring Philanthropic Fund

GLOSSARY

Chiriquí: A province in Panama.

Colombia: A country in South America that's part of the South American Bloc.

Comadres: A female neighbor or friend with whom one is on good terms.

Comarca Ngäbe Buglé: Indigenous region in Panama.

Lobbying: The period of outreach to and conversation with organizations before requesting them to fill out an instrument, such as a survey, interview, etc.

Las Garzas: An impoverished community in Panama inhabited mostly by the indigenous Ngäbe Buglé people.

Gringo: A derogatory name to refer to people from the United States.

Communications infrastructure: This is best understood as the technology, products, and network connections that enable the transmission of communications over long distances.

Narrative infrastructure: The system of knowledge, skills, tools, institutions.

Guajira: Department in Colombia on the Caribbean coast, bordering Venezuela.

Traditional communications media: Media that are issued by a sender and are picked up in a similar way by several groups of receivers, thus having a large audience. The world knows them as television, radio, and newspapers, with the goals of informing, educating, and entertaining.

New Information and Communications Technologies (NICTs): Modern technologies developed for more efficient information and communication, which have modified both how we access knowledge and human relations.

Raizal: An Afro-Colombian ethnic people living on the Colombian island of San Andrés and surrounding islands.

Narrative power: The power to create a connection and a feeling, which you present to an audience.

Panama: A country in Central America.

Palenquera: An Afro-Colombian people concentrated in northern Colombia.

Productive Idiosyncrasy: An educational aim that allows learners (at appropriate times) to follow their bliss in their work. It recognizes diversity at the level of beliefs, interests, talents and values. In the long haul it's the cultivation of those positive aptitudes that will feed back into the culture," he maintained. "It's through the interaction of complexities, not the production of uniformity, that a democracy grows."
Elliot W. Eisner

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