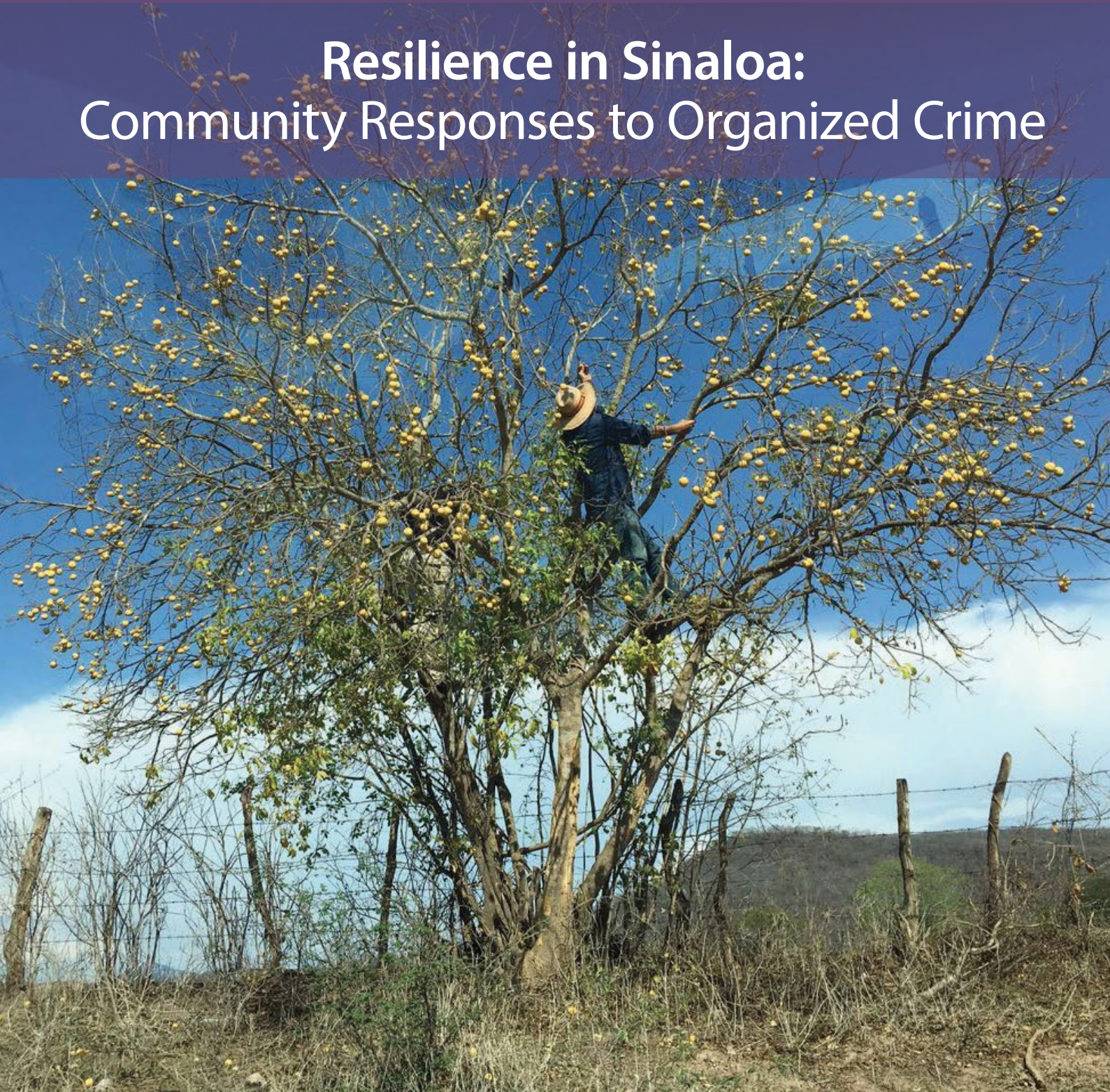
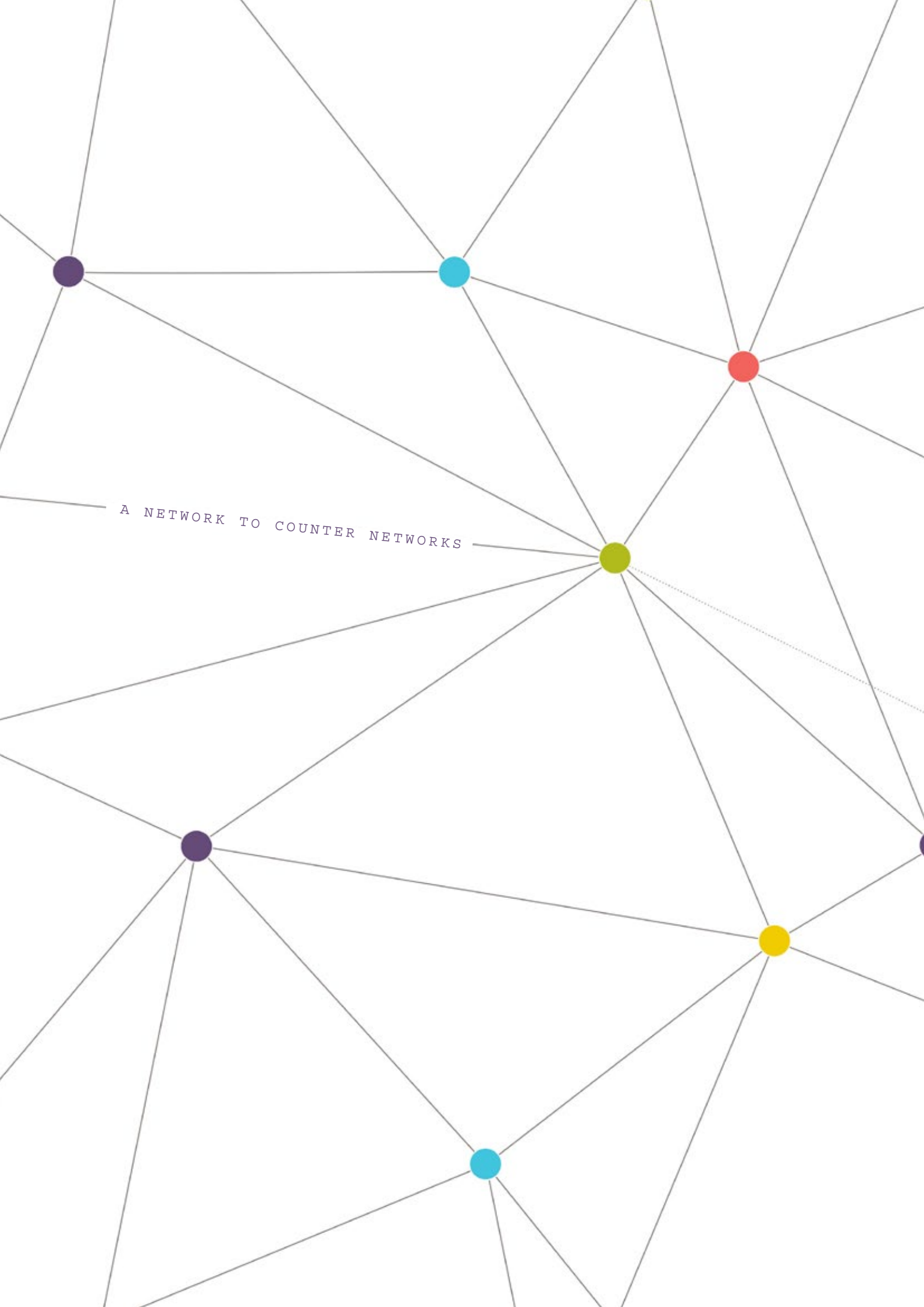


THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

Resilience in Sinaloa: Community Responses to Organized Crime



August 2017

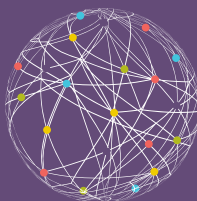


A NETWORK TO COUNTER NETWORKS



Resilience in Sinaloa: Community Responses to Organized Crime

August 2017



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Acknowledgements

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Siria would like to thank Tuesday Reitano, Head of the Global Initiative Secretariat and Chief Editor of all the Global Initiative publications, for her inspiring guidance, and Radha Barooah for her outstanding support conducting research, providing substantial feedback and editing this report.

The Global Initiative wishes to thank all the resilient people of Sinaloa who kindly shared their stories for this report.

The author would also like to dedicate this work to Javier Valdez, who generously contributed with contacts and insights for the elaboration of this report. His life and work were an inspiration for the creation of the #GResilience Project.

Graphics and layout were prepared by Sharon Wilson at Emerge Creative.

Photos by Siria Gastelum.



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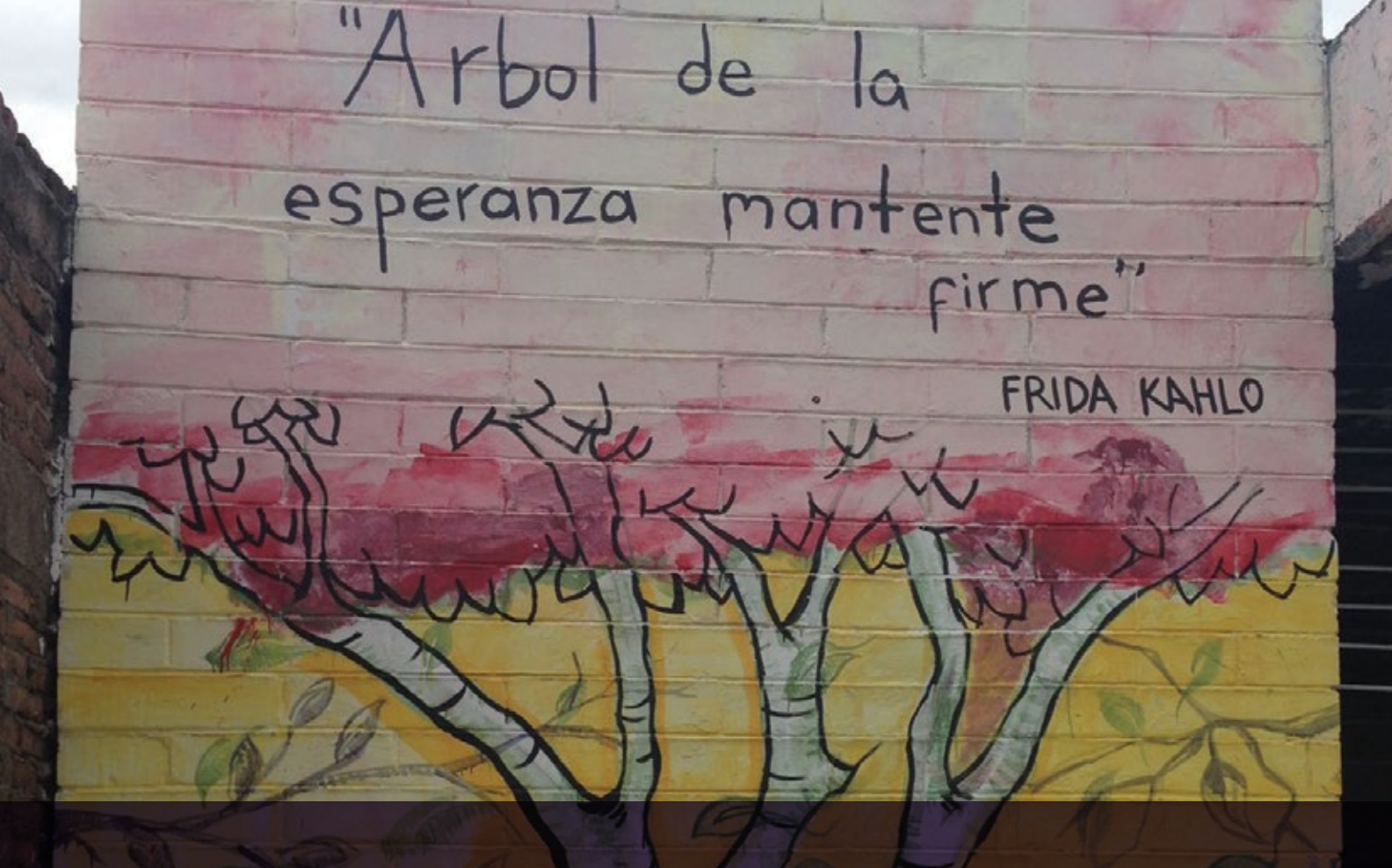
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Acronyms

CIEL	Center for International Environment Law
CONAPO	Consejo Nacional de Poblacion
DTO	Drug-trafficking Organization
DFID	Department for International Development
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IACHR	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
OAS	Organization of American States
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNISDR	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
UNOHCR	UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
USAID	United States Agency for International Development





The Resilience Series Part 1: Sinaloa

I. Introduction

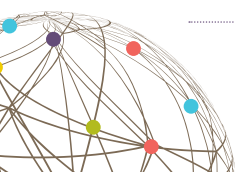
The term resilience has started to sound like a cliché. The concept has become a popular buzzword in development discourses over the last decade, but in the international global policy fora, resilience remains a loosely defined conceptual approach.

The empirical ambiguity of the concept, its incipient implementation as well as its rising popularity can make resilience susceptible to becoming another empty rhetorical promise in development brochures. However, the resilience approach to development has the potential to show us new modes of learning about the ways we organize ourselves into more effective networks to achieve common goals and overcome disruptions.

This report is the first of a series of evidence-based research in Sinaloa, Mexico on community resilience and organized crime supported by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI) as part of the #Giresilience Project. The Resilience Series, as it is formally known seek to provide substantial knowledge and data on building community resilience in the context of organized crime to the ongoing multi-stakeholder dialogue in the international global development policy fora.

Drug wars, illicit economies and weak governance have marred Sinaloa for decades, along with countless failed security policies. In the last thirty years, the state became the base of one of the largest transnational drug-trafficking networks in the world: the Sinaloa Cartel. As the power of the Sinaloa DTO increased, the influence of organized crime became prominent in citizen's daily lives. The Sinaloa Federation became a separate power structure effectively challenging and overpowering legitimate state institutions.

Against this tumultuous background, extraordinary civic responses to the effects of organized crime have been taking place at the community level. These responses are effectively non-violent and demonstrate great capacities of resilience at the grassroots where violence and violations are intensified. Our intention is to bring these perspectives



and resilient actors into the global policy dialogue on organized crime and development, to discuss alternatives to the traditional security-driven responses.

The ultimate aim of the #Giresilience Project is to create a global network of resilient communities to counter and mitigate the effects of criminal networks. This involves a) highlighting the courageous and inspiring work done under the most arduous circumstances, and b) incubating and developing resilience-based initiatives that can protect, enable and empower citizens who have taken and continue to take a stand against organized crime. By tapping into these communities' own sources of resilience, we can build sustainable responses to organized crime and develop their capacity to thrive.



Figure 1: Sinaloa, Mexico





Community Art projects in Culiacan, Sinaloa

II. What is resilience?

The concept of resilience and its applicability in a plethora of fields has received tremendous attention over the past decade. The basic idea underlying resilience is the **capacity** of any system – individuals, organizations, forests, organisms, cities and so on – **to respond to and recover from shocks and stressors that threaten and/or disrupt its structure and functional capacities.**¹

Although frameworks based on ‘resilience’ are increasingly being used in policy papers and programmatic practice, there is a lack of international agreement on the actual meaning of resilience. Its multiple interpretations can accommodate a wide variety of agendas and interests. In the realm of practice, this disconnect is apparent when converting words into ‘action’, which opens up the interpretation of resilience to all stakeholders involved.

The lack of set parameters and definitions continues to obscure the results of resilience-based approaches, which is the main challenge for donors, recipient governments and implementing partners in the field. However, global dialogue on resilience is advancing across different tables of international development.

The indefinite terminology applied to a variety of resilience approaches is thus giving place to necessary reflections about measuring the impacts of the intangible in extremely volatile environments. This conversation is far from over and is gaining traction with more players on board. Tremendous progress has been made, and new frameworks for assessing resilience have been published in the last couple of years.

¹ Shock: A sudden event with an important and often negative impact on the vulnerability of a system and its components (DFID, 2011); Stress: Long-term trend weakening the potential of the given system and deepening the vulnerability of its actors (DFID 2011)

Resilience and Development

In development policy and agenda, the concept gained momentum in 2008 following the global food price, energy and financial crises. A large part of resilience research and practice in the field of development has been in disaster studies, within the broader context of climate change.

UNISDR published the Sendai Framework for Action 2016 – 2030, which is a guide to building 'resilient nations and cities' in the face of natural calamities through development. It is the successor of Hyogo Framework for Action 2005 -2015, a ten-year plan signed by 168 national governments to focus on disaster mitigation strategies and infrastructure.

The Sustainable Livelihood Approach works on another dimension of development, which aims at poverty reduction. This approach in development discourse and practice began around the late nineties and is now the formal approach of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The IFAD uses resilience in the context of livelihood assets of rural populations. The community's access to these assets depends on multiple external factors (shocks, seasonality, trends), which form the vulnerability context that guides the building of resilient capacities in the communities. The IFAD published its Strategic Framework 2016 – 2025 to alleviate poverty using the Sustainable Livelihood Approach in the next decade.

OECD has developed a tool for field practitioners in analysing community resilience in conflict and fragile contexts by identifying gaps in the present systems, and applying the OECD Resilience Roadmap to boost the efforts of these systems.

UNDP too has been working with national governments to incorporate resilient strategies that focus on climate and disaster resistance. Notably, UNDP has been working in Syria wherein humanitarian efforts are combined with development strategies to build resilience of 'individual, household, communities and institutions'. (UNDP 2015 – 2016)

For national governments, the UK's (DFID) international development policy has resilience at the 'core' of its approach. Its actions include resilience building (urban) communities and infrastructure that can respond to environmental disasters in developing countries.



III. Community Resilience

In the context of organized crime, the community resilience approach involves understanding how drug trafficking and organized crime are part of the local culture and their impact on people's lives. It is also pivotal to identify the vulnerabilities and risks faced by communities to highlight the factors that make communities withstand the adversities, and strengthen key actors.

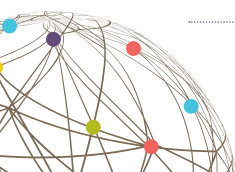
Community resilience can be identified as a community's ability to respond to adversity while retaining its functional capacities. It refers to the collective competency of a community to absorb change, transform and seize opportunities to improve conditions. It includes the community's capacity for concerted actions as well as its ability to solve problems and build consensus towards negotiating coordinated responses.²

Social capital plays a critical role in enabling community resilience. It is formed through the links, shared values and understandings in society, which enable individuals and groups to trust each other and work together.³ These formal and informal networks among individuals and groups tend to become actual drivers of resilience in times of crisis.⁴ The community resilience approach focuses on the existing social capital at the local level, which it aims to identify, support and strengthen.

What is community?

A community refers to a form of social organisation that can exist at various levels, from large group affiliations such as the international community to neighbourhood groupings. Mcmillan (1986) defines community through the perspective of members as, 'sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together'. Our report considers this definition and factors within the notion of 'territorial community', which references location and is also known as place-based community.

-
- 2 Walker B, Sayer J, Andrew NL, Campbell BM. 'Should enhanced resilience be an objective of natural resource management research in developing countries?' *Crop Science* 50 (1):10–19, 2010; Frankenberger, T., Sutter, P., Teshome, A., Aberra, A., Tefera, M., Tefera, M., Taffesse, A.S., and T. Bernard. 'Ethiopia: The path to self-resiliency. Final Report prepared for CHF-Partners in Rural Development', 2007
- 3 OECD Insights, 'What is Social Capital', in *Human Capital: What you know and How it shapes your life*, February 20, 2007, <https://www.oecd.org/insights/37966934.pdf>
- 4 Aldrich, D. & Meyer, M., 'Social Capital and Community Resilience', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 59 (2): 254 -269, 2014





Women of Las Buscadoras starting one of their searches under the hot summer sun in the Sonoran desert.

IV. The Global Initiative Approach

The **Global Initiative Approach** to resilience is set in the context of organized crime. It is a multi-dimensional framework for a systemic method that aims to expound the capacities of resilient communities taking into account the vulnerabilities that stem from a volatile environment.

The three capacities of community resilience analysed through this approach are:⁵

- **Absorptive Capacities:** These capacities refer to how the community manages and resists immediate threats and adversities through resources that are directly available.
- **Adaptive Capacities:** These capacities are identified in the community's preventive measures against the threat and/or stressors by adjusting or modifying the present system from their experience and perception of the threat(s).
- **Transformative Capacities:** When the community movement is able to influence changes in external structures or identity or create new ones demonstrates transformative capacities.

Resilience in this Project is:

A **MULTI-DIMENSIONAL** operational and conceptual framework, to understand the complex relationships between transnational organized crime and development.

A set of **INTERRELATED** community capacities for collective action.

A **CONTEXT** where communities react to multiple shocks and stressors incited by criminal action and weak governance.

⁵ OECD, Interpeace, DFID have all identified the three capacities to be demonstrative of resilience.



Prayers after finding human remains take place next to excavation site.

V. Methodology

Five cases demonstrating community resilience to organized crime in Sinaloa, Mexico were selected for analyses.

The case studies are exploratory at this stage, and are part of a larger programme examining community resilience in three different countries, in three different continents. This method was employed to identify resilient actors and actions. The overarching goal driving the research is to identify successful practices that can be potentiated and replicated in countries and regions across the world that are threatened by organized crime.

Primary data were collected through field observations and interviews conducted with the concerned actors between May and June 2016 by the lead author. Secondary data related to figures and statistics were obtained from valid official, academic and programme-related sources.

Secondary research on development and resilience was guided by a) the widely available and a large amount of academic, policy and programmatic literature in disaster studies and b) academic and policy literature on peace building and conflict.

In addition, available literature on Sinaloa and Mexico and the phenomenon of organized crime and drug-trafficking industry provided contextual frameworks to support the case studies.





Authorities arrive after Las Buscadoras dig out a body.

VI. Overview of Organized Crime in Sinaloa

The Drug-trafficking Industry and Organized Crime in Sinaloa

The Mexican state of Sinaloa has long been a crucial region for the drug-trafficking industry. The infamous Sinaloa Cartel began their worldwide drug-trafficking and money laundering syndicate in the mid-1980s from this state. The DTO has often been described as the largest and most powerful drug trafficking organisation in the Western Hemisphere.

The history of 'drug-trafficking' in Sinaloa, however, dates back to the early 1900s, when Chinese opium trade reached the Pacific coasts of the American continent. The demand from America increased after the Second World War, which led to a significant increase of marijuana and opium cultivation in the highlands of Sinaloa.⁶

In the 1970s, the strategy of a joint anti-drug operation between Mexico and US, known as *Operacion Condor* was to eradicate illicit crops growing in the so-called 'Golden Triangle' – a region of the Sierra Madre mountain range in the states of Sinaloa, Durango and Chihuahua known for extensive drug cultivation. Ten thousand soldiers were deployed to execute this operation.

The authorities at the time lauded *Operacion Condor* as a success. However, the destruction of large extensions of cultivations in the highlands severely affected the local farming communities. Official accounts excluded the human rights abuses committed by army personnel in the zone. The aftermath destroyed entire communities; they were impoverished, displaced, acutely marginalised and left without any means to survive.⁷

This engendered some of the first 'legendary' Mexican cartel leaders. Following the operation, out of necessity, many families and their children went back to work in the cultivation and trade of illicit crops. One of them was Joaquín Guzmán alias 'El Chapo', the infamous leader of the so-called Sinaloa Cartel.

⁶ Lizarraga A., Lizarraga E., & Velasco, G.A.J., 'Sinaloa: pobreza, narcotráfico, violencia y migración', Asociacion Mexicana de Ciencias, para el Desarrollo Regional, 2009

⁷ Ibid



For more than a decade, Sinaloa was the undisputed territory of the Sinaloa Cartel. It became a global enterprise, operating in more than 50 countries under the leadership of El Chapo. Guzman was re-apprehended in his home state in January 2016 and extradited a year later to the United States where he awaits trial in a New York prison. Prior to his extradition, he escaped twice from Mexican maximum-security federal prisons, raising serious concerns about corruption at the highest levels of Mexico's federal government.

El Chapo's arrest did not end the Sinaloa Cartel, but marked the beginning of yet another violent episode in the state's history. The removal of the leader has prompted internal fights and reignited disputes between rival DTOs. Army presence has been reinforced in the state, and rural communities have been displaced exponentially due to increasing violence.

Impact of Organized Crime on Sinaloa's Communities

Although no comprehensive studies have assessed the impact of organized crime at the community level in Sinaloa, the effects are visible everywhere. Drug-trafficking and related behaviour have become a part of its culture. This subculture, commonly known as the *narco* culture,⁸ is increasingly becoming mainstream.

This influence is evidenced, for example, in the popularity of *narcocorridos* – songs glorifying the exploits of drug traffickers, despite being banned in radio stations. Moreover, the flamboyant décor of the drug culture aesthetic and lifestyle of conspicuous consumption has become fashionable too. A particular beauty standard for women has originated within this subculture, reflected in the immense popularity of plastic surgeries in Sinaloa.

Even religion has not been spared. The *Malverde* saint⁹ known to be the patron saint of drug traffickers, has his own temple in Culiacan where outlaws are known to venerate him.

Jesus Malverde

The story of Malverde is a tale of justice for the poor and marginalised victims of the corrupt government. Oral tradition says that Jesus Malverde was a Robin Hood-type bandit/hero, around the time of the Mexican Revolution of 1910, who used to take from the rich to give to the poor. He was an outlaw, so the government found him and hanged him. People then started throwing rocks at the place where he was hanged as an act of remembrance. The memorial was turned into a chapel by a devotee and is now known to welcome present-day outlaws desperate for miracles without judgement. In its shrines people offer prayers, candles, music or even money to the priest, in exchange for holy protection.



The number of children and youth joining the ranks of organized crime are increasing at an alarming rate. Drug-traffickers have become role models for the youth, especially in impoverished communities.¹⁰ Although the main cities of Sinaloa have pockets of socio-economic development and affluence, a large number of rural and marginalised urban communities are inflicted with poverty and lack access to welfare services. Therefore, not only is the government perceived to be corrupt, the cartel leaders are perceived by some sections of the society – especially in marginalised groups – as powerful heroes. This was especially evident during the protests in Sinaloa against the re-apprehension of its foremost drug lord, El Chapo in 2014.

8 Secretaría De Seguridad Publica, 'Jóvenes_y_Narcocultura', 2010

9 Malverde is not a saint according to any official religion, but a cult with thousands of followers all over Mexico.

10 A recent report by National Commission for Human Rights (Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos de Mexico – CNDH) highlighted the role of socio-economic conditions and the desire to imitate the lifestyle of the criminals: Adolescents: Vulnerability and Violence' http://www.cndh.org.mx/sites/all/doc/Informes/Especiales/Informe_adolescentes_20170118.pdf

The youth – men and women – of Sinaloa are becoming increasingly drawn to the DTOs for employment, due to the lack of adequate employment or educational opportunities. The increasing supply of drugs in the state has created new job openings in illicit industries, while increasing drug consumption and addiction levels. Cocaine and methamphetamine consumption levels in Sinaloa are indeed higher than the national average, according to official statistics.¹¹

The number of women targeted by violence and the rates of femicide have been increasing as well, not only due to their rising participation in criminal activities, but also as a by-product of the narco culture that exacerbates the ‘machismo’ and objectifies women’s bodies.¹²

Drug-related violence has caused large populations to be displaced. More than 30 000 people in the state have unwillingly fled their homes largely on account of drug-related violence.¹³ More than 2 000 people¹⁴ have disappeared in the last ten years, many of them presumed either kidnapped or killed by local or state police who are complicit in organized crime groups.

Furthermore, Sinaloa has consistently been among the top five states in Mexico with the highest number of homicides in the last decade.¹⁵ According to the most recent official health and mortality indicators, homicide is the most common cause of death in the state for the population aged 15 to 64. Homicides account for 44 per cent of the annual death count in Sinaloa, well above diabetes and heart disease, which are at 14 and 13 per cent respectively.¹⁶

Activism and journalism has suffered incredibly as well. News organisations and reporters have been repeatedly harassed, intimidated and attacked with impunity. At the time of writing this report, on 15 May 2017, Javier Valdez, one of Mexico most prominent journalists covering organized crime, was shot 13 times in broad daylight, outside the newspaper he co-founded in Culiacan, capital of Sinaloa.

Valdez¹⁷ was known for his insightful coverage and investigations of drug-trafficking operations in the state. The journalist had been writing about the power struggles within the Sinaloa DTO post El Chapo’s extradition at the time he was killed.

Overview of Federal Government Responses to Organized Crime in Mexico

In 2006, then President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) launched a militarised campaign aimed at weakening the influence of the dominant DTOs. His campaign strategy involved the deployment of thousands of troops¹⁸ on the streets of Mexico in order to improve security and curb the drug-trafficking industry. The strategy proved to be insufficient and was violently resisted by the DTOs. His successor, President Enrique Peña (2012-2018) continued along a similar line of highly militarised strategy.

11 Consejo de Integración Juvenil, ‘Sinaloa’, 2017 <http://www.cij.gob.mx/patronatosCJ/pdf/Sinaloa.pdf>

12 UN Women, ‘Análisis de la Violencia Femicida 1985 – 2014’, Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, 2013

13 Interview with Oscar Loza, Comisión Estatal de Defensa de Los Derechos Humanos

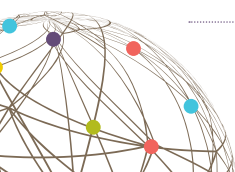
14 Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, ‘Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas’, 2016, <http://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/acciones-y-programas/registro-nacional-de-datos-de-personas-extraviadas-o-desaparecidas-rnped>

15 Centro de Estudios Sociales y de Opinión Pública, ‘La Inseguridad Pública En México’, Cámara de Diputados, 2016, http://www5.diputados.gob.mx/index.php/esl/content/download/40542/202844/file/Carpeta-48_Inseguridad_Publica.pdf&usq=AFOjCNERHDcOpQR8V127EZKN7z9KPSExFA&sig2=2WnSM9BIHlq0Xe0sUKipHg

16 Sinaloa En Numeros, ‘Main causes of unnatural death of population’, 2011 <http://sinaloaennumeros.com/indicadores-sociales/>

17 In 2011 Valdez received the Press Freedom Award from the Committee to Protect Journalists. He wrote six books that won him national recognition. His latest book, published in September 2016, was entitled Narco periodismo (narco journalism), which sold 5000 copies in the first three months.

18 According to SEDENA, 48 750 soldiers in average per month, http://www.sedena.gob.mx/leytrans/rescomin/resol_inex/2010/julio/R.R._50774_6F.pdf



In the last ten years of military action, over 200 000 people have been killed in the country,¹⁹ and 280 000 people have been internally displaced,²⁰ largely because of the violence related to military interventions and the war between rival cartels.

The number of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions has also increased at the same time,²¹ with more than 28 000 people officially missing.²² It must be noted that the high rate of impunity in Mexico interferes in acquiring accurate numbers. It is quite likely that the numbers in reality are higher.

Furthermore, the current government strategy appears to be quite inconsequential to the crux of the problem. Since its inception in 2006, the Mexican DTOs have not only increased their synthetic drug production,²³ but also heroin production and opium cultivation.²⁴

Although the government's militarised approach has brought some high-profile criminals to justice, the main criminal organisations persist. Existing DTOs have reshuffled their strategies and leaderships, while new drug trafficking organisations have emerged and further consolidated.²⁵

As a result of the rising and spread of violence, vigilante style responses and 'self-defence' groups – armed community militias – have emerged in different states. This is one of the many expressions of resilience in the territories most affected by organized crime. In addition, a vast number of community initiatives that address organized crime in Sinaloa as well as the rest of Mexico have been gaining momentum and significance over the last ten years. These initiatives come from a wide range of actors, from victims' organisations to business associations. Citizen-led observatories of crime and violence, and citizen counsels for peace and security have been established throughout Mexico in recent years.

This growing interest in civic participation has been reflected in Mexico's most recent security policies. At the end of his presidency, Calderon issued the General Law for the Social Prevention of Violence and Crime that included schemes to increase civic participation in anti-crime strategies, as well as the creation of the National Centre for Crime Prevention and Citizen Participation.

However, the implementation of these measures has been restrained by institutional deficiencies and inadequate policies. Furthermore, it appears that the National Programme for Crime Prevention, which emanated from this law, will soon be non-functional due to lack of funding.²⁶

19 A disproportionate number of these homicides are due to drug trafficking. Real homicide numbers could be much higher. They are difficult to access due to the critical levels of impunity and irregular official reporting. According to the UNOHCHR, more than 100 000 homicides were recorded during Calderon's tenure (2006–2012).

20 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 'Country Information 2015: Mexico', 2015, <http://internal-displacement.org/database/country/?iso3=MEX>

21 OAS, 'Preliminary Observations on the IACHR visit to Mexico', (Press Release), October 2, 2015 http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2015/112A.asp

22 Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, 'Registro Nacional de Datos de Personas Extraviadas o Desaparecidas, RNPED', June 1, 2017, <http://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/acciones-y-programas/registro-nacional-de-datos-de-personas-extraviadas-o-desaparecidas-rnped>

23 International Narcotics Control Board, 'Report 2016', Report, March 2, 2017, https://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/AnnualReports/AR2016/English/AR2016_E_ebook.pdf

24 Congressional Research Service, 'US-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Merida Initiative', Report, January 8, 2017, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41349.pdf>

25 The Global Initiative, 'The Jalisco Cartel: Mexico's New Menace', Analyzing Organized Crime, May 28, 2015, <http://globalinitiative.net/the-cartel-jalisco-nueva-generacion-mexicos-new-menace/>

26 Congressional Research Service, 'US-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Merida Initiative', 2017, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41349.pdf>
Koloffon C.L., & Ley S., 'Prevención del delito en México: ¿cuáles son las prioridades?' Mexico Evalua, June 2016, <http://mexicoevalua.org/2015/06/16/prevencion-del-delito-en-mexico-cuales-son-las-prioridades/>
—, '¿Qué política de prevención del delito queremos para México?', June 24, 2015, Animal Político, <http://www.animalpolitico.com/blogeros-el-blog-de-mexico-evalua/2015/06/24/que-politica-de-prevencion-del-delito-queremos-para-mexico/>



Resilience in the Mexican Agenda

The notion of community resilience was first applied to organized crime in 2008 through the Merida initiative under the framework of the US-Mexico bilateral agreement. Community resilience became one of the four pillars of the 'Beyond Merida' strategy, a reformulation of the initial strategy designed to introduce community-based programmes in cities with high levels of criminality.

Under the Merida Initiative, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been supporting a number of crime-prevention community-based activities such as the creation of Municipal Crime and Violence Prevention Committees in the cities of Tijuana, Monterey and Ciudad Juarez. These committees were created to unite the key community stakeholders in developing and overseeing the municipal prevention initiatives (USAID 2017).

These efforts are being replicated and lauded as success cases of community-led interventions. However, little concerted efforts have been made to evaluate the results of community resilience under the Merida Initiative.²⁷ The US Congress has reduced support for the initiative due to human rights concerns. And, the future of the initiative remains uncertain, as the cooperation between Mexico and the United States enters a new phase under the new American federal administration.

At the regional level, the concept of resilience was highlighted in the Scenarios for Drug Problem in the Americas 2013-2025, published by the Organization of American States in their 2013 Drug Report. Resilience appeared as one of the four hypothetical scenarios or approaches that were proposed to tackle drug trafficking in the region. While the document did not endorse any of the scenarios, it showed the growing interest of member states to consider non-traditional approaches to organized crime and responses at the community level.

27 Shirk, A.D., Wood, D., Olson, E., eds., Building Resilient Communities in Mexico: Civic responses to Crime and Violence, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, 26 de marzo, 2014





Action is the only seed.

VII. Community Responses to Organized Crime in Sinaloa

This report has selected five cases that reflect community responses and resilient capacities to organized crime in Sinaloa. These cases were analysed through the Global Initiative framework that considers the vulnerability context of the people in Sinaloa set against the backdrop of organized crime and the militarised federal government policy to tackle it. Each case was found to express one or all of the three capacities in the GI framework.

The case study analysis allowed us to identify resilient actors and actions, which also comprise the social capital of Sinaloa's society. Their perceptions, knowledge and actions inform us about the vulnerabilities faced at the local level and how their organisation, processes and actions serve to address the threats, violence and repression by the forces of organized crime and corrupt government officials.

1. Recuper-Arte

Background

In 2012, a group of people who met during the demonstrations to protest against the election of Enrique Peña Nieto as the next president of Mexico decided to get together to discuss ways to take their discontent beyond protesting. A group of citizens with experiences in different civic causes then formed a collective to channel their political frustrations into constructive actions for their communities in Sinaloa. The collective was later named 'Recuper-Arte'.²⁸

Recuper-Arte is a collective mainly of artists, but small business owners, social workers, journalists, teachers and students also participate in its activities. They realised that the immediate and ominous influence of organized crime in the local culture and overall climate of insecurity and violence in the state was a priority requiring urgent attention.

²⁸ Culiacan has a population of 80 000 and is the hub of Sinaloa's commercial, political and communication activities. It is also considered to have one of the highest rates of homicide in the world.





Therefore, the group decided to focus their collective efforts on children through art and informal education. They planned to re-appropriate public spaces through artistic interventions and organising cultural and educational programmes for children.

In December 2012, the group started working on abandoned police stations around some of Culiacan's most troubled urban vicinities. The security posts were set up around the city more than a decade ago to increase police presence in the neighbourhoods. The posts were abandoned quite soon, when that security strategy failed to control the violence. The vacant buildings became, in most cases, a meeting place for drug addicts and/or criminals.

Recuper-Arte began by organising cleaning brigades to make these spaces accessible to the local communities. They brightened the walls with murals and inaugurated the spaces with a festival followed by a series of weekly workshops. These activities have been generally well received in the concerned communities. The neighbours have willingly taken over the maintenance of these spaces, and children use the facilities during the weekends.

"Our purpose is to recover those abandoned forgotten spaces. We, as citizens have the obligation to be in charge of our city. It is here where we live, where we were born. Our intention is to give back to the world a little of what we do and like. So the energy continues to flow, and other people can follow the same actions in other places."

– Recuper-Arte (translated from Spanish, available on Facebook page)

Vulnerabilities and Resilience Response Analysis

The work of Recuper-Arte addresses the issue of the so-called *narco* culture. *Narco* culture is by definition illicit, as it expresses the apology of crime. Members of the collective are concerned about the normalisation of criminal lifestyles and violence. Hence, Recuper-Arte's interventions expand cultural exposure and address the weak public education system through multiple workshops, music, films, theatre and other cultural manifestations. They are meant to provide new roles models and opportunities for the youth, outside drug trafficking. Furthermore, they directly tackle the issue of neighbourhood insecurity by rehabilitating abandoned and neglected spaces that were facilitating criminal activity.

Resilient Actors and Roles

- **Artists:** They are key players in the sustainability of this initiative, using their own resources and networks to fund the different activities. Furthermore, artists are a source of inspiration for the neighbourhoods' communities. They are perceived as trustworthy and become reliable power brokers in the neighbourhoods.

- **Cultural promoters and youth educators:** The project has attracted a powerful pool of citizens. The more consistent participants of Recuper-Arte have been professionals involved in cultural and educational activities from the private and public sector, thus offering opportunities to bridge inter-institutional partnerships.
- **Women:** In a large majority of cases, women become leaders of the networks created or reignited in the neighbourhood after a Recuper-Arte intervention. The mothers, grandmothers and other female caretakers are usually the ones to join the children in the communal space and accompany them on study trips and other Recuper-Arte activities. The collective has been able to capitalize on the social capital of women in the neighbourhoods to achieve consensus about activities and gain the communities' trust, thus ensuring the sustainability of different projects.

Resilient Actions and Processes

- **Organising beyond protesting.** The group is a result of the social interactions that occurred during street protests. The members of the group knew that protesting alone would not yield any long-term results. Hence, they decided to take concerted actions towards sustainable solutions to the city's problems.
- **Neighbourhood networks and resources.** The actions of Recuper-Arte have facilitated the creation of new social interactions and new communication networks. Their activities give neighbours a chance to reconnect and discuss, urging them to exchange resources for the maintenance of the newly acquired spaces. They also serve as cathartic experiences for participants who have suffered violence. In one of the police stations, for example, a mural was erected, which was dedicated to Genoveva Rogers, a 21-year-old paramedic killed in 2010 during a shootout at the local Red Cross hospital. The mural had become a communal place of mourning and a reminder of the violence inflicting their community. Recuper-Arte's latest art project is dedicated to the memory of slain journalist Javier Valdez.
- **Cultural and educational activities.** Recuper-Arte's core activities were art festivals, workshops for youth and children and other learning activities. These activities proved to be ideal for social interactions and exposure. They became agents that countered narco culture by exposing the participants to experiences that are otherwise not accessible. The workshops would include a range of activities such as puppetry, painting, journalism, English, guitar and cooking lessons, gardening, hip-hop rhyming, folk dances, etc.
- **Appropriation of public space.** The collective has organized a variety of cultural activities in different venues, but the rehabilitation of abandoned police stations is the strongest symbol of the movement. People of Recuper-Arte have turned spaces associated with criminality and weak governance into colourful community centres, where children can play and learn in peace.

Adaptations and Resources for Sustainability

During the first discussions, members of the collective – artists, cultural promoters, youth educators – realised that stand-alone interventions usually had minimum impact and festivals were too ephemeral to substantially tackle any issues within the communities. However, after the festivals, they observed, people would become more trusting, open and willing to engage in discussions affecting their communities. They found that the effervescence of the music and shows made people want to participate and get involved in organising similar events in the future.

The group eventually phases its presence out of the neighbourhoods. Then, the neighbours become the 'owners' of the project in their communities. They maintain and use the spaces according to their needs.

The entire group is not involved in every activity and any member may assume a temporary leadership role for different projects. The loose structure of the organisation encourages participation of people with different levels of commitment.



The flexibility and inclusivity of the movement has allowed the group to grow organically. Since it is not a formalised aggrupation, but only a network of people, it offers the potential to evolve into a different kind of structure in the future.

Challenges and Barriers in the Implementation of Resilient Strategies

- **Social cohesion.** The group explained that community members were not always enthusiastic about working together or cooperating with the project. However, following Recuper-Arte's interventions, members became more trusting towards each other. Through the festivals, Recuper-Arte presented opportunities to reintroduce neighbours to each other in a peaceful environment for cooperation.
- **Funding.** Recuper-Arte is not a formally registered non-governmental organisation. It neither has any financial mechanism for their activities nor formal leadership. Although, Recuper-Arte's initiatives have captured the interest of international organisations, its informal structure poses challenges to channel funds and other forms of external support.
- **Relationships with authorities.** The work of Recuper-Arte forced the local authorities to act. When the collective initiated the rehabilitation of an abandoned open theatre inside a municipal park, authorities supported the cleaning operations.

This particular rehabilitation project was a proud achievement for the group. In the nineties, the theatre hosted free large-scale concerts and nationally acclaimed plays, until the authorities cut the funding. After the Recuper-Arte intervention, city officials and members of the collective started making plans to bring back the big acts.

Instead, the Mexican Navy established a base in the park surroundings, driving people away from the space. Finally, in June 2016 members of the Navy extended their base taking over the stage of the theatre.²⁹ Since then, Recuper-Arte has appeared to be dormant, but members of the group have recently been organising events to protest the killing of journalist, Javier Valdez, who was a supporter of the project.

2. Las Buscadoras

'Levantones' or Enforced Disappearances

An enforced or involuntary disappearance, as defined by the United Nations, particularly involves the authorities at any level of government or organized crime groups involved with the authorities, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the person's fate and whereabouts, placing the victim outside the protection of the law. *

In the federal statistics on missing people in Mexico more than half of the victims are males between 15 and 39 years of age, and most cases are located in the states dominated by the most powerful DTOs. It is believed that many missing men were kidnapped and killed either by the DTOs or the police agencies. ** These disappearances are not clearly classified in criminal laws, and hence, are generally neither investigated nor tried in court. ***

There are no official records for enforced disappearances, but the increasing number of missing people and findings of clandestine mass graves, evidence that we are talking about one of Mexico's present and most pressing challenges. According to UN reports, the country's problem is similar to countries that have experienced armed conflicts like Syria or Pakistan. ****

29 Interview with Alejandro Lopez, co- founder of Recuper-arte.



*UNHCR, International Convention for Protection of All Persons, 2006

** Web review available at: <http://www.senado.gob.mx/ibd/content/productos/reporte/reporte32.pdf>

***Organization of American States, http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2015/112A.asp

****Reporte Instituto belisario Dominguez of the Mexican Senate on enforced disappearances 2016

Background

Abductions in Sinaloa are so frequent that they have come to be known as 'levantones' in the local colloquial language. There are indications that most cases have been concentrated in the capital of Culiacan and Ahome,³⁰ a municipality in the north of Sinaloa where local media and human rights organisations have documented the participation of local police in the kidnappings of missing people.³¹ This small municipality served as a haven for 'El Chapo' when he was last captured in 2016.³² Ahome is also where the search group known as Las Buscadoras operates.

Las Buscadoras (the searchers) is comprised mostly of mothers of missing people. It began in 2014 with Mirna Medina, a retired schoolteacher whose twenty-one year old son Roberto Juarez was abducted from the gas station where he worked. Medina went to file a police report but didn't receive any help and decided to find her son through other means.

She began by seeking other women whose children were missing and had suffered the same police negligence as her. The group soon started to grow as the mothers used social media networks to circulate photos of their missing relatives, and more mothers with similar stories reached out to them. In two months, the group gathered more than thirty women. Together, they started collecting digging tools to begin searching in clandestine burials.

On one hot summer day, the group boarded Medina's old car and went to dig at a location following a tip by an anonymous caller. They did not find anything that day, but a few days later they started to uncover human remains disposed along the corn growing fields in Ahome. The news of their work spread, bringing more people to Las Buscadoras who seek their help even before filing a police report.

As the number of bodies discovered by Las Buscadoras increased, the local and state officials could not ignore Medina's demands for support. They have been providing forensic services, digging machines and sniffer dogs to aid their weekly searches. The authorities have also given the group an office space, which enabled them to increase their caseload.

Las Buscadoras found 49 bodies between 2014 and June 2016. They currently have more than 200 missing people on their search list. Medina says that the police are involved in 90 per cent of the cases. However, she has repeatedly emphasised that Las Buscadoras is not in conflict with the criminals or the authorities. 'We are not looking for those who committed the crimes, we just want to find our children.'³³

Vulnerabilities and Resilience Response Analysis

The grave human rights violations that exist in Mexico, such as forced disappearances and extrajudicial executions, cannot be attributed only to a specific government administration. These are practices allowed by generalised institutional weaknesses and a systemic disregard for the rights of victims of crime.

30 Located in the north of the state, and has less than half the population of Culiacan.

31 Najera, F.L, 'Protestan en Los Mochis por desapariciones forzadas de policías municipales', Riodoce, April 5, 2016, <http://riodoce.mx/noticias/policiaca/protestan-en-los-mochis-por-desapariciones-forzadas-de-policias-municipales>; Valenzuela J., 'NUESTRO AYOTZI: Los más de mil desaparecidos en Sinaloa que nadie busca', Riodoce, November 30, 2014, <http://riodoce.mx/reportaje/nuestro-ayotzi-los-mas-de-mil-desaparecidos-en-sinaloa-que-nadie-busca>

32 The previous governor of Sinaloa was from this área. He was allegedly protecting El Chapo.

33 Interview with Mirna Medina, founder of Las Buscadoras.





Mothers of Las Buscadoras dig the earth under the scorching sun.

Missing persons may be often linked to illicit activities, and even if the missing person is innocent, he or she is still condemned for 'hanging out with the wrong crowd'. This form of victim stigmatisation directly affects those desperate to know the whereabouts of their loved ones.

Murders or kidnappings of young men tend to be minimised by authorities and quickly dismissed as problems among the DTOs. Officials often blame the victims portraying them as criminals without proper investigations. When mothers of missing youth attempt to file a police report, they are usually re-victimised and humiliated. This discourages the women from seeking justice or even approaching other state services.

Moreover, the women who approach Las Buscadoras are extremely vulnerable. They are generally from marginalised communities with low levels of education. Their families have suffered domestic violence, drug addiction and/or extreme poverty. Most have received anonymous death threats after they started looking for their children and all have been harassed, abused or humiliated in one way or another.³⁴

The group accompanies these women throughout their arduous endeavours, providing a safe platform for legal and moral support. They share their experiences and resources to file police reports as well as follow up on investigations. They also offer to help with funeral arrangements and grieve with families through the burial process. Las Buscadoras fills the big void left by an ineffective justice system where relatives of victims of crime are re-victimised in their search for answers.

Resilient Actors and Roles

- **Mothers:** A large number of victims of organized crime are the youth. As mothers, they are faced with the challenge of keeping their children safe in an unpredictable environment. When their sons and daughters are taken, the women become relentless in finding their children or their bodies. They replace the authorities, who are often irresponsible, to organize themselves and take matters into their own hands. The task of 'searching' requires a whole set of capacities that reinforces social capital.

34 Interview with members of Las Buscadoras.

Resilient Actions and Processes

- **Investigations and data collection.** Government statistics on disappearances and executions have been severely inadequate as well as incomplete.³⁵ The group, incidentally, has been acquiring realistic data of missing persons in their region including previously undocumented cases of victims. Each case is filed individually, which also helps them identify commonalities, trends or patterns that could lead them to new information. Medina says that after they find a missing person, they gather more information about the details of the disappearance and the surroundings to explore links to other cases. 'Usually the operators from a particular criminal group use the same places to dump bodies around a certain time', she explained.
- **Self-organized searches.** The founding members reacted to the lack of capacity or will of the local police to find the missing victims. It became obvious to them since the beginning that they had to investigate and search by themselves since they had null institutional support. Eventually, the authorities had no choice but to support Las Buscadoras by increasing the resources allocated to the search of missing people. They gather their own resources (shovels, forks, spades or any piece of metal or wood that could scratch and dig the earth) and act on tips provided by their growing network of contacts. They are undeterred by weather conditions and work through storms and heat waves.
- **Media Relationships.** The organisation has successfully established strong relationships with local journalists. By reporting their discoveries to the media, their cause is amplified inspiring others in the community to denounce disappearances and executions. This exposure has also encouraged the participation of volunteers and donations to support the work of the group. Media exposure has also allowed the organisation to interact with similar organisations and participate in relevant forums. The group now lobbies the government to provide proper assistance to the relatives of missing people.
- **Group support.** The women of Las Buscadoras are highly vulnerable, given their marginalisation and personal histories. Most of them are not fit or healthy, and the laborious nature of the work tends to exacerbate their health. Moreover, they don't have the resources to avail proper legal, medical or psychological aids. In Las Buscadoras, the women have found a safety net that functions as a support group to vent the pain and angst of their ordeals, as well as find hope and motivation. They hold each other, pray and cry together when human remains are found. In fact, they are able to continue looking for their children because of each other.

Adaptation and Resources for Sustainability

Las Buscadoras, Medina maintained, is apolitical and goal oriented. The group's agenda is focused on finding human remains to be identified and given proper burial. It has taken the collective agony of these women and turned it into a solidarity network for the families of missing persons in northern Sinaloa.

A number of search groups mainly comprising mothers have emerged in the last few years, particularly in those states controlled by DTOs where the numbers of missing persons are the highest. There are at least two other groups in Sinaloa and 15 more in the rest of Mexico.³⁶ The groups have started to establish contact with each other with the aim of sharing knowledge and resources, and gaining broader support for their cause³⁷.

Challenges And Barriers In the Implementation Of Resilient Strategies

- **Leadership Dependence.** The organisation of Las Buscadoras is quite heavily reliant on its leader Mirna N. Medina. She is also the face of the organisation, the one responsible for shaping its network and lobbying the authorities. She galvanises the entire group and makes most of its decisions. Therefore, it is of some

35 OAS, 'Preliminary Observations', Press Release, 2015, http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2015/112A.asp

36 In places such as Tamaulipas, Veracruz

37 Interview with Mirna Medina, founder of Las Buscadoras



concern that the group may not survive if for any reason Medina could not continue her role at Las Buscadoras. Medina has received death threats and is aware of her over-exposed condition. However, she affirms that she is training other group members to carry out her work in case she can't continue it.

- **Security of Members.** Authorities have offered protection and sent officials to accompany them in their searches. However, the women of Las Buscadoras have expressed profound distrust in the justice system, and suspect the local police in many of the cases. The group has, therefore, pressurised authorities from different levels to get involved. They've reached out to officials outside their municipality whom they are able to trust more than their local officials.

The distrust of authorities and fear may be well founded. Sandra Luz Hernandez, another mother looking for her missing son was assassinated in broad day light in Culiacan after a meeting with the authorities in May 2014. Recently, in the state of Tamaulipas, Miriam Rodriguez, who had found her daughter's body in a mass grave and imprisoned her daughter's murderers was shot dead on 10 May 2017. The women of Las Buscadoras seem resolved to act even in the face of terror. The phrase 'We won't stop, until we find them,' has become the group's mantra.

3. Riodoce

Background

'They hit us in the heart,' read the title of the editorial in the newspaper Riodoce on 15 May 2017, after one of its founders was assassinated outside the offices in broad daylight. Javier Valdez co-founded the weekly publication Riodoce in 2002 with a small group of investigative journalists from Sinaloa to cover the big stories of corruption and drug trafficking from one of the most lethal places for the media in the world.

Riodoce soon became a game-changer in the field of Mexican journalism. When most newspapers in Mexico stopped investigating and reporting on organized crime, Riodoce gained a reputation for its fierce coverage of the Sinaloa DTO and its links with local governments.

Despite the high level of risk, Riodoce's founders were aware that articles related to drug trafficking meant an immediate increase in sales. The paper sought to move beyond the sensational coverage of drug trafficking and offer an alternative to the conventional body-counting accounts that dominate the coverage of drug related violence.

Javier Valdez focused mainly on the voices of the victims. In his column 'Malayerba' (literal translation is bad herb, alluding to marijuana), Valdez captured the most tragic stories in a beautiful, almost fictionalized and poetic way. He was the author of six books and his unique prose had won him national and international acclaim.

It appears, just like in the recent string of journalist murders in Mexico that it was his work that got him killed. Valdez had been writing about the power shuffles within the Sinaloa DTO, after the extradition of El Chapo. The team of Riodoce has made clear publicly that Javier Valdez was killed because of his reporting on drug trafficking.

In 2009, Riodoce's offices in Sinaloa were attacked with a grenade, resulting only in minor property damage. However, due to limited financial capacity, the paper was unable to enforce any formalised security protocols. The authorities, too, didn't offer adequate protection. For 14 years, Riodoce survived – and even thrived – despite the threats and harassment from criminals and corrupt government officials.

The resilience processes of Riodoce were being documented for this report at the time of Valdez murder. His death is a painful reminder of the state of emergency of journalism in Mexico where six journalists have already been killed this year.

'...We always knew this could happen, Javier knew it, we all at Riodoce knew it. We have been reporting with fear all these years,' said the post-mortem editorial. Despite the risks, Riodoce managed to provide readers with a critical report on organized crime, while minimising danger to their collaborators.



Vulnerabilities And Resilience Response Analysis

Article 19 has documented more than 106 killings of journalists since 2000 possibly in relation to their work. The last 33 have been murdered during the present Pena administration. Furthermore, between 2009 and 2013, one in every three attacks was committed by law enforcement agents.³⁸

Independent news agencies such as Riodoce, seeking to maintain autonomy and critical news coverage have to adapt to stressors from actors of organized crime as well as government actions. Nevertheless, Riodoce insists on covering the violence of organized crime taking into account its sources and amplifying the voices of the victims.

Mainstream coverage on organized crime violence in Sinaloa is overall negligible. It is often limited to paraphrased official press releases and sensational story telling with morbid details of the gruesome violence at the crime scene. The reporting style of Riodoce breaks away from conventional narratives and provides analyses related to drug trafficking violence. According to the founder and editor-in-chief, Ismael Bojorquez, Riodoce has become a reference point for journalists, security analysts, politicians and even the drug-traffickers. Its stories are continuously replicated in national media

However, it is evident that the resilient media outlets like Riodoce are being left unprotected by governmental institutions. After protests erupted in different cities in Mexico to demand justice for Javier Valdez and the other murdered and disappeared reporters, President Enrique Pena responded with an announcement to increase the federal budget and strengthen the existing mechanisms to protect journalists.

The federal government has always publicly promised to do more to protect the lives of media workers, especially following a high profile assassination like Valdez's. However, all 'efforts' so far have proven to be inefficient and insufficient. Since the creation of the special attorney's office to investigate the crimes against freedom of speech and journalists in 2010, 48 homicide cases have been filed and only three have resulted in a sentence.

Resilient Actors and Roles

- **Journalists:** Journalism and freedom of speech and press are markers of democracy and good governance, but Mexico is rated as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists and media workers. Hence, journalists that continue to cover and report on subjects such as organized crime and corruption of the offices is a direct demonstration of resilience.

Resilient Actions and Processes

- **Self-censorship.** The newspaper toes the line between self-censorship and freedom of expression. The executives have developed a set of guidelines for the coverage of drug cartels. For example, they do not report on the private lives of the cartel leaders or divulge the addresses of their properties and disclose any trafficking routes. As one of the reporters has declared, they publish only 60 per cent of what they know.
- **Autonomous journalism.** Most media houses in Mexico are financed either by other businesses, wealthy families or institutional advertising deals. Riodoce has faced numerous hardships in order to remain independent from corporate and political influences. According to the founder of Riodoce, even the state government has made deliberate attempts to stifle them through campaigns to boycott institutional advertising on it. In addition, their hard editorial line has intimidated potential advertisers from the private sector. Nevertheless, Riodoce has taken advantage of this to build a strong brand around independent journalism. The founding editorial team owns the majority of the newspaper. The rest of the shareholders

38 Artículo 19, Silencio forzado, 'El Estado, complice de la violencia contra la prensa en México', March 21, 2012, Informe, 2011, <https://issuu.com/articlexix/docs/informe>



are mainly friends and acquaintances of the editors who bought into the project and offered financial support for the launch. Bojorquez provided most of the seed funding from his personal savings and he remains the managing editor and administrator.

- **Competence and professionalism.** Riodoce's success and reputation is directly owed to its founders and the professionalism of their beat reporters. Its newsroom is balanced with almost equal gender representation and includes seasoned award-winning reporters as well as fresh graduates.

Adaptation and Resources for Sustainability

The founders of Riodoce understand the importance of their role in the fight against organized crime in Sinaloa. They are committed to investigating the complex relationships between businesses, authorities and the DTOs to denounce the abuses of police, army and criminals and cover the pledges of their victims.

Riodoce's founders believe that the ethical and journalistic standards observed in their journalism have and will sustain the news publication. Incidentally, their practice is engendering a new generation of journalists. The Riodoce newsroom encourages learning, cooperation and mentorship, and continuously collaborates with other media outside Sinaloa on different projects.

Challenges and Barriers in the Implementation of the Resilient Strategies

- **Security.** It is evident that security of personnel is the main challenge for the newspaper. Last year, founders admitted that they did not have the financial capacity to improve their security as much as they would like. However, they have adopted practices that allowed them to secure and report potentially dangerous information. But there is very little to do to protect human lives in Sinaloa, apparently. The security protocol of a small newspaper cannot match the power and resources of criminal organisations.

4. Cyclist Movements in Culiacan, the Capital of Sinaloa

Background

'*Carros buchones*' or *narco* cars in the local slang refer to the large vehicles, such as SUVs, with tinted windows playing loud music and racing each other dangerously through the streets of Culiacan. The locals tend to associate these cars with DTOS and criminal activity as they represent the all-too-common violent exchanges of bullets between rival gangs in public.

In May 2008, a rival DTO killed one of El Chapo Guzman's sons in the parking lot of a shopping centre in Culiacan. Fear and paranoia overcame the population as the threat of relentless violence loomed in the city. This was also at the height of Calderon's militarised anti-narcotic strategy, but the presence of numerous military checkpoints and vehicles on the city streets did not attenuate the tension.

In that environment began its activities *Ciclos Urbanos* (Urban Cycles), a civil association aiming to promote the use of bicycles in the city. Carlos Rojo, a former professor at the Autonomous State University who is now heading the Municipal Urban Institute was one of the founders. 'Instead of protesting what we did not like', Rojo explained, 'we wanted to approach the issues of our community from the aspect of mobility and accessibility to public space.'³⁹

Their main programme was *Ciclo-noches*, which consisted of organized weekly night rides through the city's main streets. It became so popular on social media that at one point, they had 1400 participants for one ride. This, according to Rojo, was when their group reached a 'critical mass'. The large numbers of cyclists that turned up to cycle through the city when it was experiencing a spike in violence, demonstrated the civilian society's collective intention to reclaim their streets peacefully.

39 Interview with Carlos Rojo, currently head of Municipal Urban Institute, Sinaloa.





The night-rides organized by Mujeres En Bici.

Ciclo-noches lasted three years but many personal and collective relationships sustained. Cyclists regrouped according to age or common interests and continued organising collective rides through Culiacan. Currently, one of the most active bicycle collectives is *Mujeres en Bici* (translated as women on bicycles), dedicated to empowering women to use bicycles as their main mode of transportation.

Founder, Sarah Elizabeth Verdugo was a regular in the *Ciclo-noches* programme. However, the newly formed cycling associations, she realised, were mostly formed by men. This inspired her to start a collective focused on encouraging more women to use their bicycles.

Mujeres en Bici organizes weekly evening rides so that women participants can familiarize themselves with the safer routes throughout the city. The group has 20 active members with new women joining every week. Most participate only temporarily, until they gain confidence to start riding on their own.

Mujeres en Bici, *Ciclos Urbanos* and other cycling collectives in Culiacan have recently come together as a lobby group known as *Prociudad*. It was formed in 2016 as a civilian response to the reorganisation of traffic in the city's downtown – a controversial measure of the local government to improve car mobility⁴⁰. The group also includes academics, business owners, students and citizens from all walks of life who have been pressuring authorities to be part of the urban planning decisions.

Vulnerabilities and Resilience Response Analysis

Bicycles are becoming increasingly visible in many big cities around the world. Different cities in Mexico too have started introducing cycling lanes and public bicycles in the last few years. However, the cycling movements in Culiacan take place in a unique climate, one that is influenced by organized crime and violence.

'The day will come when cyclists stop feeling brave to start feeling safe. That day will be a great achievement for the women and men in this city.'

– Mujeres en Bici's Facebook Page

⁴⁰ Authorities redistributed car traffic around the commercial centre of Culiacan causing grievances amongst local businesses and users of public transportation.



These movements highlight the issues of restricted mobility within a public space occupied primarily by authorities and criminals. In addition to the overwhelming presence of army and police on the streets, a large number of luxury SUV-type vehicles and pick-up trucks with darkened windows characterise Culiacan's mobility culture.

These vehicles partly reflect the dominant agricultural and drug trafficking economies that require powerful all-terrain cars. They also reflect the sumptuous consumption habits related to *narco* culture.⁴¹ The emerging bicycle culture in Culiacan challenges this attribute of narco culture and presents a peaceful and sustainable transportation alternative.

These cycling activists have managed to come together and claim the streets for the public working in multiple levels. Through their collective actions they are instrumental in transforming the paradigms of the city's mobility culture.

Resilient Actors and Roles

- **Mobility Activists:** By taking on a mission to influence the mobility culture of Culiacan that was filled with large cars, military presence and violence, these activists effectively instilled a notion of public security and civilian ownership of public spaces. Their transformative capacity is reflected in their ability to influence urban planning to introduce cycling lanes.
- **Women:** In a predominantly patriarchal society, the act of some women coming together and claiming public spaces empower others to do the same. To see women cycling through the city has huge psychological benefits to others – women and men – as it proffers a whole new level of safety and security. This reinforces social capital, as the women and other cyclists were able to organize themselves and turn their collective strength to lobby the authorities.

Resilient Actions and Processes

- **Collective night bicycle rides.** The cycling nights granted the citizens a new forum to socialise and engage in issues affecting their city. People from all ages and socio-economic backgrounds have come together in these events, despite the perceived climate of violence. These associations also function as new communication networks adding to the city's social capital by strengthening community bonds and facilitating interactions among people.
- **Lobbying mobility agenda.** The strength of the associations and the motivation to improve the city has fostered a cohesive and consistent participation of different sectors of society in the municipal mobility agenda. On the insistence of Culiacan's cycling community, local authorities have had to engage with citizens to include them in the on-going urban planning discussions. These groups are also working to increase their own capacity to promote their objectives by sharing knowledge and information through workshops and other networking events.
- **Empowering women.** The young women from Mujeres en Bici are not intimidated by the hostile criminal climate. In fact, Verdugo believes that it is the citizen's responsibility to get involved in the solutions: 'To recover a city from organized crime, first you have to make it yours...The same way the *narco*s fight to hold on to their territories, we are here to get what is ours. If the public space is not accessible to us, we will make it our own.'⁴²

Adaptations and Resources for Sustainability

Mujeres en Bici and other cycling groups realised that their cause would benefit from increased visibility and collaborative effort. Prociudad is an example of the concerted efforts of different stakeholders to achieve a common goal. Through this organisation, cyclists and mobility activists are linking with other networks in Mexico with similar

41 See <http://www.ssp.gob.mx/portalWebApp/ShowBinary?nodeId=/BEA%20Repository/1214169/archivo>

42 Interview with Sarah Verdugo, founder of Mujeres en Bici



interests. They are organising workshops with authorities and other members of civil society to promote their mobility agenda and raise awareness.

Undoubtedly, this case study offers new avenues of research to explore how mobility and alternative models of transportation can play a role in the global anti-organized crime strategies. This is quite imminent as these discussions become part of the larger development agenda on urban security.

Challenges and Barriers in the Implementation of Resilient Strategies

- **Lack of adequate mobility policies.** Despite the efforts of Mujeres en Bici and other groups in promoting the use of bicycles, the prevailing poor road safety can easily dissuade new cyclists to take to the streets. However, the groups have been actively lobbying authorities to design and implement policies that prioritise the security of cyclists and pedestrians. The new urban planning roadmap for the city has considered several concerns of the cycling communities. The implementation of the promising agenda will be key to develop trusting relationships between local authorities and the civil society stakeholders.
- **Increasing violence.** This year has been particularly violent. Drug-related homicides appear to be on the rise as well as other crimes such as car theft and kidnappings. Although the cyclists seemed to be undeterred by the recent spike in violence with the women from Mujeres en Bici continuing to organize their nightly rides, it remains a great risk to their lives.

5. Bosque A Salvo

Background

In 2010, five small and medium business owners from Culiacan formed an organisation to protect the biodiversity of Sinaloa. The organisation was called Bosque A Salvo and was officially registered as '(an) institution of private assistance', a modality for charity-based foundations. The organisation works in the forest ecosystems of Sinaloa's southern highlands, which hosts a large variety of endangered flora and fauna such as wild fruit trees, jaguars and a number of rare birds.⁴³

Due to its climate and remote location, the area has traditionally been used to grow illicit crops such as marijuana, and continued to grow it even as it became less profitable. 'It is like a tradition', explained Rosendo Castro, founder and operational director of Bosque A Salvo.

A few years ago, violence intensified, as the DTOs had established synthetic drug laboratories in the region increasing patrols and raids from federal forces. The laboratories eventually relocated out of this region, which decreased the violence but left a lot of young men unemployed, thus increasing migration to the nearby cities. Since most of the men work or live outside the rural communities, Bosque A Salvo's programmes target mostly women and children.⁴⁴

The initial aim of the organisation was to raise awareness among the locals about the impact of wildlife trafficking and deforestation through scientific projects for the conservation of natural ecosystems and by supporting other regional conservation projects.

However, the members of Bosque A Salvo soon realised that the locals would not stop cutting trees and hunting wild animals as their survival depended on those resources. Therefore, the organisation began to incorporate alternative livelihoods programmes into its agenda, including the development of an ecotourism project.

These communities live close to an archaeological zone, which is managed by the federal government and open to tourism. Smaller archaeological sites are scattered around the area wherein locals have found artefacts from indigenous cultures. Bosque A Salvo assisted in developing a community-owned museum of all these objects. It is

⁴³ Bosque A salvo works next to a national bio-reserve known as Meseta de Cacaxtla.

⁴⁴ Interview with Rosendo Castro, co- founder of Bosque A Salvo.





Girls participating in one of the journalism workshops taking place in a former police station.

being managed and maintained by the women of the community, while the local children offer tours.

Bosque A Salvo sponsors study trips and workshops for the all-women community museum managers. It also funds science camps in the capital city of Culiacan for the communities' children and offers scholarships to local children who want to continue their studies. Furthermore, the organisation has successfully cooperated with the main higher education institutions of the state, thus promoting research on the communities' natural and social resources.

Vulnerabilities and Resilience Response Analysis

According to a study by the Center for International and Environmental Law (CIEL), Latin America is the 'most dangerous region in the world' for land and water defenders. The presence of organized crime, the corrupt corporate and governmental interests, together with the high levels of impunity, have made environment protection a hazardous job in Mexico. In January 2017, a Mexican indigenous environmentalist, Isidro Baldenegro, known for his work to stop illegal logging and deforestation, was killed in the northern state of Chihuahua.

Bosque A Salvo's programmes work to empower communities to manage and protect their own natural resources. Bosque A Salvo has approached these environmental issues by addressing the socio-economic conditions of the communities living in these areas. The organisation's projects focus on nine rural communities in the municipality of San Ignacio, which has one of the most socio-economically marginalised populations in Sinaloa.⁴⁵

Formal education in these areas is negligible, and scholar desertion and teenage pregnancies are common. In addition to extreme poverty, the villages and ranches around this area have suffered drug-related violence and internal displacement.

⁴⁵ According to latest available data: Thirty per cent of the households lack sewage or sanitary facilities and 12 per cent of the adult population is illiterate. 'Sinaloa en Numeros' with information from CONAPO, national population counsel, 2005, <http://sinaloaennumeros.com/indicadores-sociales/>

Bosque A Salvo observed that the locals in the southern highlands of Sinaloa engaged in deforestation to turn their land into agricultural plots, in order to avail federal incentives for small-scale farming.⁴⁶ However, people see these short-term incentives as government handouts that are not lucrative and quickly abandon farming. They instead turn the wood from the cleared land into charcoal, sell wild parrots or grow marijuana.⁴⁷

Resilient Actors and Roles

- **Women:** It is the women from the indigenous communities that are invested in the initiatives of Bosque A Salvo. They are the preservers of the programme and the strongest proponents of Bosque A Salvo's cause. The programmes offer the women alternate ways of livelihood, giving them, their children and the community more choices.
- **Business Owners:** Business owners that support Bosque A Salvo act as a bridge between the rural and the urban communities. Their initiative was to protect the environment, while supporting the communities that inhabit the areas. These communities, due to their remote locations and lack of opportunities are highly susceptible to participating in illicit trade and economy. Business owners, in this way, are providing socio-economic development and educational opportunities that hadn't reached them thus far.

Resilient Actions and Processes

- **Alternative livelihoods.** The organisation identified that the local communities depended on licit and illicit economic activities, which undermine natural resources such as wildlife and drug trafficking. Hence, Bosque A Salvo is currently working on a project that would diversify the livelihoods of the communities. By promoting sustainable tourism in the area, the organisation aims to introduce new models for the local economy, along with a new set of community capacities to safeguard their natural resources.
- **Supporting female leaderships.** Bosque A Salvo's projects focus on the role of women in sustaining the community. The organisation works with key female leaders who play a prominent role in the development and implementation of their programmes. Through them, the women of the communities are able to acquire new skills and potentially diversify their sources of income. These women help build consensus about the communal priorities and rally support for the programmes of Bosque A Salvo.
- **Business and academic networks and partnerships.** Bosque A Salvo has capitalised on its business community networks to fund and diversify its activities. In fact, most of the organisation's activities are enabled by personal connections and in-kind contributions from Bosque A Salvo's network of donors. Furthermore, local homes often host professors, researchers and students. They, in exchange, develop different projects to benefit the community. For example, a group of private school students created a mobile phone application in English for tourists, while researchers from the State Autonomous University have documented the wildlife activity of the area.
- **Outreach to influence local and state authority.** Bosque A Salvo has been collaborating with other conservation organisations and local farming associations to implement larger projects focused on protecting the natural resources of the region. They are currently lobbying authorities to reformulate a dam building project that could potentially contaminate the water resources of the communities in the region.

Adaptations and Resources for Sustainability

These areas are influenced by ancestral community practices of land ownership and social organisation. In addition to private land, communities have communal land that they use and distribute in a consensual manner. These pre-

⁴⁶ The federal government through the ministry of agriculture offers a variety of programmes with subsidies and incentives to those who want to initiate or continue small-scale agricultural projects. The ministry also offers support for commercialisation of products and technical support for first-time farmers.

⁴⁷ Interview with Rosendo Castro, co-founder of Bosque A Salvo



existing societal structures have been an asset in the implementation of Bosque A Salvo's community-led initiatives.⁴⁸

Through these practices the organisation has effectively involved the locals in the development of the programmes. The organisation acts as a facilitator for dialogue in the communities and the residents decide on the kind of activities they want to implement. Bosque A Salvo is capitalising on the communities' social resources to build their capacity to switch from illicit crops and deforestation to sustainable scientific tourism projects.

The organisation has successfully built a network of supporters across the private and academic sectors of Sinaloa to develop inclusive community led interventions. The initial aim was the conservation of flora and fauna of the area, but the project has evolved organically into a holistic approach that improves community livelihoods and their natural resources.

Challenges and Barriers in the Implementation of the Objectives

- **Immediate earnings of deforestation and wildlife trafficking.** The wood obtained from the forest is quite easily commercialised and sold as charcoal in the cities. Selling wild birds can also provide immediate income to families in desperate need of money. The alternative livelihood projects of Bosque A Salvo are still at an early stage and hence, the locals haven't seen significant earnings yet. The group has approached this challenge by providing families with basic social services, such as stipends to families involved in their projects and subsidising some of their children's education and health expenses. They also organize events in Culiacan to promote and commercialise products made by the women of the communities.
- **The 'dangerous' reputation of the area.** The criminal activities in the area may be an obstacle to tourism development projects. The nearby resort town of Mazatlan used to be a popular destination for North American tourists. Crime and violence increased substantially in recent years, which pushed back tourism from the town. The violence is expected to continue and even intensify, as rivals of the Sinaloa Federation are engaged in the struggle for power after El Chapo was captured. Nevertheless, Bosque A Salvo's ecotourism project focuses on alternative tourism models such as educational and scientific tours, which would engage local and regional tourism. They hope that exploring niche tourism markets can set the foundations for successful sustainable practices.
- **Lack of technical capacity.** As the goals of Bosque A Salvo expand, the need for technical capacity to deploy its programmes becomes more pressing. So far, the organisation is not formally staffed and most of the work is done by Castro, founder/director, who also has familial ties in the community. The organisation relies mainly on the expertise of volunteers from the partnering schools. But, as the scope of work increases, the project will benefit greatly from a systematic implementation and evaluation of its programmes.

⁴⁸ This communal ownership scheme is inherent in these communities. It has been a key element to effective conservation efforts in other parts of the country. Moreover, social structures of indigenous populations in Latin America have been observed to play a central role in successful community-led interventions against the presence of organized crime groups.





VIII. Building Resilience in Sinaloa and Beyond

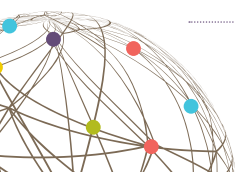
These case studies are a preliminary assessment of community resilience to organized crime in Sinaloa. The purpose of the assessment is three fold. First, through the case studies, local stakeholders, key actors and actions, which are usually precluded in conventional security-centred approaches, are identified. An important aim, therefore, is to bring these new perspectives to the foreground as the basis for policy innovation, where the local people and their communities are viewed as the first respondents to organized crime.

The next step is to facilitate a dialogue among the resilient actors identified in this report. The GI Resilience Dialogues will be held in Culiacan in August 2017 with the goal of identifying, building and supporting resilient capacities by working with the community leaders. These dialogues are meant to strengthen existing social capital through the dissemination of community data and fostering cooperation and collaboration to sustain and potentiate current responses, while mitigating risks and dangers to the actors and members.

The third objective is to gather, evaluate and process knowledge on resilient communities at the local level to develop tools and make recommendations at the global level.

The second phase of the #Giresilience Project seeks to expand this work to two other continents, focusing on cities where violence and organized crime are often an under-reported facet of ordinary people's lives.

Insights from Sinaloa will be presented in Cape Town and Manila to begin local assessments and dialogues in those cities.



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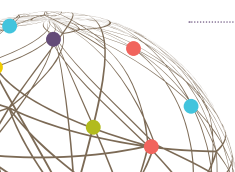
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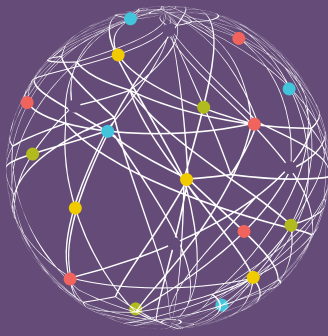
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