**GLOBAL
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AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME

RETHINKING RESILIENCE

The role of women in community responses to organized crime

**RESILIENCE
FUND**

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SUMMARY

The role of women in resilience responses to organized crime is generally unexplored, and this paper is intended as the beginning of a narrative that seeks to deepen understanding of this dynamic. This brief explores the roles women play in community resilience to organized crime, the socio-economic factors shaping these roles and the challenges associated with them, highlighting typologies of how women act as change-makers in driving resistance to organized crime and criminal governance. Better understanding these dynamics helps inform successful interventions without merely placing additional burdens on women in contexts where the state has failed to provide protection and basic services. While recognizing gender as non-binary, and that the lived experiences of members of the LGBTQI community will shape how they are affected by organized crime, this paper focuses on women because they have been particularly highlighted through the work of the GI-TOC's Resilience Fund to date.

Key points

- Lacking a voice within traditional power structures – including state institutions and criminal culture – women are driven to act outside the 'system', shaping their role as community resilience actors.
- Women change-makers often act by interrupting entrenched cycles of violence, and reclaiming physical spaces from criminal governance in their resilience responses to organized crime.
- When supporting change-makers, it is key to enshrine their agency, mitigating the risk of instrumentalizing women and reinforcing existing gender inequalities.
- Empowering women's community-resilience organizations to negotiate and partner with government and local authorities is crucial to sustainable initiatives.
- Donors and international partners should resource and support peer-to-peer networks among resilience actors to empower their collective voice.

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A mural-painting session during the Oaxaca Resilience Dialogues, bringing together families of the disappeared. Mexico, April 2019.

INTRODUCTION

Responses to organized crime have largely focused on state or interstate cooperation to address the dynamics of illicit economies. The under-representation of women in positions of power or leadership within formal state systems, however, means they are repeatedly overlooked as change agents or figureheads in the dialogue – even where their efforts are manifest at the community level. This perpetuates systems of female invisibility and patriarchal power structures.

Although there is recognized value to state-centric approaches in addressing transnational organized crime, when pursued in isolation they deprioritize local contexts, disenfranchise communities and ignore the role communities can and must play in countering organized crime. Such approaches too often boil down to 'war on crime' rhetoric, which can exacerbate violence without sustainably reducing illicit activities.[1]

To avoid the consequences of such a myopic approach, it is key to complement existing state-centric approaches with community-based, demand-led response frameworks that challenge criminal governance at a local level. These can recognize that the paucity of women represented in formal structures is not merely a natural state of how things are. Programming that supports community movements capitalizes on initiatives that have already gained momentum, embodying grassroots approaches and complementing existing initiatives in the community where there is a high representation of women.

It is widely recognized that men and women are affected by organized crime in different ways and that their reactions to organized crime are also different.[2] There has been less focus on the foundational factors and institutions that have shaped these differing responses. A better understanding of the gendered aspects of resilience to organized crime can enhance the effectiveness of support provided to community organizations. Failing to take into account gender considerations in community resilience programming can expose women to greater risks and vulnerabilities, and perpetuate or exacerbate inequalities.

In line with intersectional approaches, women from different socio-economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds will experience organized crime – and their role in resilience responses to it – in different ways. In this paper, we seek to draw out these differences; however, it does not purport to be an exhaustive account of such experiences.

Identifying the role of women in resilience programmes

The GI-TOC has repeatedly identified and explored the role of women in crafting and implementing responses to organized crime. Its focus on community-resilience approaches to countering organized crime was formalized in 2015. The objective was to give voice to those most affected and incorporate their perspectives into the global development dialogue. The #GIResilience project was designed as a result of engaging with local communities in Sinaloa, Mexico. Conceived as a global project to engage local communities, it documents community responses to organized crime that are successful and can be replicated or adapted in other communities. The aim is to build a sustainable network of resilient communities that can collaborate and sustain one another. The project has grown in geographic scope to include partners in Africa, South America, South and South East Asia, and Europe.

Building on lessons learned since the start of the project, the GI-TOC launched the Civil Society Resilience Fund Against Organized Crime in May 2019. The fund acts as an incubator, providing financial aid, capacity building and other support for a range of local and grassroots actors. Through the fund, the GI-TOC has been building the evidence base for what makes communities resilient when faced with criminal governance, and deepening the understanding of the role played by women in such resilience.

Through the Resilience Fund's work, it has become increasingly clear, across jurisdictions and cultures, that women are repeatedly at the forefront of building community resilience to organized crime.

WOMEN AT THE FOREFONT OF RESILIENCE

In Mexico, groups of women have taken the lead in looking for disappeared relatives.
© Herika Martinez/AFP via Getty Images

In Tanzania, Resilience Fund grantees are supporting women who use drugs and creating safe spaces for use and rehabilitation.

In Guatemala, women's groups are fighting to raise awareness about the effects of extortion on women.
© John Moore/Getty Images

In the Philippines, women are taking back the streets in the face of a wave of extrajudicial killings due to the government's 'war on drugs'. © Jes Aznar/Getty Images

Although broadly seeking to gain gender-equitable participation as part of a gender mainstreaming approach, the Resilience Fund did not specify gender in the selection criteria for grantees. Despite this, nine of the 13 individual grantees to date are women. This demonstrates the high representation of women in community-resilience roles, highlighting the need for further analysis of women's roles in addressing the effects of organized crime.[3]

In order to analyze lessons learned from the GI-TOC's work in community resilience, our team engaged with researchers at the Graduate Institute of Geneva to consider the following questions: what do we know about building community resilience, and how can this improve our capacity to build resilience in places affected by criminal governance?

To consider this question, the team adopted a three-phase methodology:

- A literature review on how the term 'resilience' is applied in different fields.
- Resilience-actor mapping, identifying relevant stakeholders for engagement. This drew on the work of the Resilience Fund, together with additional interviews and desktop research.
- 38 semi-structured interviews with key informants from international organizations, national institutions, governments, non-governmental organizations and local community actors.

We drew on our relationships with a wide network of women resilience actors in communities across the world characterized by high levels of criminal governance, built through years of partnership and collaboration. We have placed their experiences and voices at the centre of this analysis. One example is that of Colectivo Artesana in Guatemala.

Colectivo Artesana

'In 2007, an indigenous Quiché woman from Guatemala was arrested for growing marijuana plants. That night, in the police cells, she was raped. In her first appearance before a judge, she denounced the sexual violence she had suffered. ... Supporting her in her fight for justice, and in the face of rejection by her community for having been abused ... led to our focus on the rights of women who lose their liberty.'[4]

These are the words of Andrea Barrios, co-founder of Colectivo Artesana, a woman-led, civil-society organization working with imprisoned women in Guatemala, who cites this incident as pivotal in shaping their work. Andrea, who was born and grew up in Guatemala City, was inspired by her grandmother, a social worker who supported teenage orphans who had grown up in violent contexts. Andrea said that the desire to 'make visible' these women's situation drives Colectivo's work, even 'without the support of state institutions'.[5]

Ana Ingrid Zelada, a member of Colectivo, draws from her own experience of the criminal-justice system in her work with the organization: 'I was imprisoned [for] 15 years for kidnapping. I was a woman who studied, paid my taxes, and I was never given an opportunity.' In prison, Ana realized that there were many women like her, who were 'good women, loving mothers, responsible, helpful. They only made one mistake ...' and faced lengthy jail terms. Ana now works to give these women an opportunity, a chance to 'start over.'[6]

Women are forming an ever-larger proportion of inmates in Guatemala. In 2009, the country held just 591 women in prison. As of May 2020, according to government figures, there were over 2 900.[7] The vast majority are imprisoned for crimes relating to extortion, predominantly linked to their male relatives or partners. Many face long sentences for

crimes such as sharing bank details with a boyfriend, or giving money transferred to their own bank account to their son. Since penalties were increased in 2009, extortion carries a minimum penalty of six years, and a maximum of 12.

'I always say that the proof of love used to be sex, but now the proof of love is to commit crimes with your beloved, and the problem is that they abandon these women automatically [upon arrest],'[8] said Andrea. 'When I discovered the situation of women in prison, deprived of their liberty, for me it was another shackle of the violence against women and it is not recognized as such,' said Ana, noting that this structural and systemic violence drives her to continue fighting.[9]

Colectivo have adopted collective-action approaches with significant success, creating networks nationally and internationally. Achievements include the development of a database of imprisoned women and their families, operating as a central partner in the process of penitentiary reform, and acting as an inter-institutional coordinator of care for women deprived of their liberty and their families in Guatemala.

Colectivo also inspires women in prison, motivating them to aspire to a better life. Some join the organization once they are released, stepping up to become resilience actors themselves. 'A young woman in Cobán … was motivated to leave prison and work with Colectivo. She was freed, she took a little time to address some family concerns, and [was] ready to start working with Colectivo Artesana.'[10]

Workshop run by Colectivo Artesana with incarcerated women and inmates' relatives in a preventive centre for women in Guatemala. *© Josue Decavele*

DEFINING 'COMMUNITY RESILIENCE'

'Community resilience' has become a catchphrase for development practitioners. Adapting such approaches to combating organized crime is a less established framework, one that seeks to bridge the divide between development and law-enforcement practice.

The concept of resilience first emerged in development discourse in the early 2000s and was quickly lifted from climate and emergency-response contexts to the fields of peacebuilding, urban planning, preventing violent extremism and, later, combating organized crime, among others.[11] The role of women in resilience has been identified across a number of these fields of research – from peacekeeping to disaster management – particularly regarding women's role as enablers of social cohesion.[12]

Broadly, community resilience refers to the ability of a group of people to respond to stress or shock while maintaining the group's basic functionalities.[13] In the contexts of organized crime, 'shocks' include assassinations or kidnappings, while stress refers to the erosion of good governance by criminal influence.

The GI-TOC's working definition of community resilience, conceived in the context of resilience to organized crime, is a community's ability to respond to organized crime while retaining its functional capacities. It refers to the collective capacity of a community to absorb change, transform and seize opportunities to improve conditions.[14]

Resilience of communities is to a large extent determined by social capital, formed through the links, shared values and understandings that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and work together. Women's social capital is often built across different networks from those of men, and in some contexts in separate, often domestic rather than public, spaces. These formal and informal networks tend to become drivers of resilience in times of crisis.[15]

Creating an alternative vision of what society can be

Building relationships, so individuals can stand strong together outside criminal structures

Supporting victims of violence at the hands of organized crime

Resisting the revenues, livelihoods and lifestyles offered by organized crime

Creating safe spaces, both physically and ideologically

Calling out criminal injustices and ending the culture of impunity

Standing together, so that people's voices can be heard as a collective

Engaging with criminal actors and believing in their ability to change

FIGURE 1 Ways resilience can be expressed in a context of criminality.

Source: Kim Thomas and Roegchanda Pascoe, Being resilient: Learning from community responses to gangs in Cape Town, GI-TOC, 2018.

DEFINING THREE RESILIENCE CAPACITIES

The three capacities of community resilience to organized crime analyzed through the GI-TOC's approach are:

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 threats.

TRANSFORMATIVE CAPACITIES – These apply when the community movement is able to influence changes in external structures, or identity or create new ones.

The granular components of resilience are then determined by the specific actor or community whose resilience is being built, and the organized crime manifestation they are facing. However, typically, resilience is:

■ A multi-level concept that begins with the individual and continues to the family, community and even to the national level. Resilience programmes typically target a particular 'level' (such as individuals, cities, vulnerable groups, etc.) but seek also to have a perspective on catalyzing sustainable systemic change. Gender and societal norms also exist at different 'levels' and it is important to consider how they intersect and shape resilience at each (particularly as enhancing resilience at one level may undermine it at another).

■ A process-centred narrative, tying together the short-term responses to crime-related shocks – such as outbreaks of intense violence, disappearances or assassinations – as well as the long-term stresses created by illicit economies, extortion practices, continuous gang wars and corruption.

■ Contextually defined and demand-led, supporting existing resources and projects embedded in the local context rather than imposing new interventions.[16]

Community resilience refers to the collective capacity of a community to absorb change, transform and seize opportunities to improve conditions. *© Andrew Aitchison/In pictures via Getty Images*

Resilience and the role of the state

In some approaches, the role of the state is key to building long-term resilience, and the state and community can and should work hand in hand to build resilience. While such cooperation is often fraught with difficulties, it can prove an even greater challenge when working with gender-blind state institutions where, typically, women have less social capital.

Law enforcement is a particularly visible, and often heavy-handed, limb of the state in its response to organized crime. Policing institutions can, however, in some contexts, also be part of building community resilience. Police in contexts as varied as Italy and Honduras have argued for a role to be played by community resilience in the sequence of events catalyzed by successful law-enforcement action against organized crime. In other words, community resilience can occupy the spaces that law enforcement agencies have cleared, preventing crime from reoccupying them.

However, in many contexts, where the state is failed or corruption has undermined the role of law enforcement, resilience can indicate resistance to the activities of the state that are perceived to be criminal. Where governments have effectively fused with criminal organizations, characterized as the 'mafia state', the state becomes an element of what resilience is built against, rather than with.[17]

And in the context of women resilience actors, engagement with the state can be extremely difficult, particularly where criminal-justice structures and policymaking practices discriminate against, or exclude, women.

However, the state is not a monolith, and in some cases trust in one arm of the state can exist in parallel to antipathy towards another. For example, Las Buscadoras del Fuerte, a group of women in Sinaloa, Mexico, who search for the bodies of relatives disappeared in the context of the war on drugs, reached out to authorities from other provinces for support, distrusting their own provincial authorities because of the women's experience of previous failed interactions with them.[18]

In some contexts, it is the vacuum created by state absence, or resistance to state corruption and violence, that engenders community resilience action. In Mexico, a prolonged state of violence and distrust in institutions has led to a proliferation of self-organized community groups. Partly as a response to the lack of voice for women within formal structures, over the last ten years many of the groups that emerged have been women-led.[19]

For some, the role of the state is to some extent antagonistic, and resilience means 'to not be afraid of standing up to a corrupt system'.[20] However, in our engagement with civil-society actors in the context of the Resilience Fund and more widely, there was an emphasis on bridging the gap between state and community, seen as essential to the sustainability of community responses.

WOMEN: FROM REARGUARD TO THE FOREFRONT

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Development narratives first considered gender through the lens of social inclusion or 'not leaving women behind' in programming structures. Mirroring this, in crime and security studies, traditionally women have primarily been conceived either as the victims of organized crime or as the accessories of male perpetrators.[21] This narrows and simplifies women's complex involvement in the organized-crime landscape, shackling women in passive roles and robbing them of agency.

More recently, it is the role of women as change agents and a renewed scrutiny of their positions within the value chain that has emerged in seeking to respond to development challenges, including those posed by organized crime. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women, noting that 'systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective into the implementation of the agenda is crucial'.[22]

Research and debate surrounding the role of women in resilience to shocks and stresses followed a similar pattern, first focusing on the socio-economically constructed vulnerabilities of women to such shocks, and more recently exploring women's active participation in resilience to them.[23]

Community activists working to address organized-crime dominance repeatedly emphasize the importance of recognizing the multifaceted role played by women in both countering and perpetrating organized crime, in 'recognition that some women are not passive bystanders in organized crime activities but play roles as agents'.[24]

'Good girls don't join gangs … good girls don't live on the Cape Flats.'

FROM 'GOOD GIRLS'
BY RONELDA KAMFER,
SOUTH AFRICAN
SPOKEN WORD POET

The GI-TOC supports this second wave of research and programming that sites women as key figureheads in building community resilience, enabling social cohesion and driving transformation, particularly in contexts heavily affected by violence and organized crime.[25]

It is key to recognize that gender inequality, a grim and slow-changing reality in most societies, curtails the rights and resources of women and girls, while often multiplying their responsibilities, ultimately eroding their resilience capacities. Detractors 'make us out as noisy women that just want to fight and argue,' notes Roegchanda Pascoe, a South African community activist and gang mediator in the Cape Flats area of Cape Town. 'There is also a stigma that goes with being loud as a woman.'[26]

Consequently, while analyzing how to leverage women's roles to disrupt the organized-crime supply chain, it is also important to consider whether resilience frameworks entrench existing inequalities and create layered burdens on women.

There is a significant risk that development partners can 'support' women in a way that makes them passive recipients of new rights, opportunities or resources, which could also be perceived as additional burdens heightening inequality. The current narrative among development partners commonly views women as 'change-makers'. Although a positive concept, if not applied through a demand-driven approach, this heightens the risk of 'supporting' women in a way that creates more burdens. Grassroots, demand-led approaches are central to mitigating this risk.

Our research produced a matrix of factors that start to explain the informal and formal rules of society that position women at the forefront of many community-resilience responses to organized crime.

Survivors of organized crime and counter-crime responses

In many contexts of high crime governance, men are commonly absent from family and community dynamics. This is because men are either involved in or become victims of organized crime activities, have been imprisoned or have migrated away from the community in search of employment.

In El Salvador, where many areas are characterized by high levels of gang violence, the number of women-led households has been steadily increasing in absolute terms.[27] In Sinaloa, as in much of Mexico, entire rural communities have been almost completely emptied of their male occupants, who have either joined organized-crime groups, fallen victim to them or left seeking economic opportunities in bigger cities or the US.[28]

In Mexico, the significant number of 'missing men' in community structures is not only due to the casualties of organized crime, but also those of the state's 'war on drugs.'[29] Community organizations like Sabuesos Guerreras (warrior hounds) have sprung up to search for the bodies of those who are 'disappeared'. Like Sabuesos Guerreras, the majority of these organizations are female-led and female-dominated in their membership.

Similarly, since the election of Rodrigo Duterte as president of the Philippines in 2016, the government's 'war on drugs', has claimed between 6 000 (official figures)[30] and 30 000 (estimates by human-rights organizations) lives.[31] The war is characterized by a shoot-to-kill policy and extrajudicial killings by both state and non-state vigilante actors.

Although the data regarding the disappearances is not gender disaggregated, research to date, corroborated by local analysts working with communities heavily impacted by the war on drugs, is clear that extrajudicial killings have targeted predominantly men – the breadwinners in most Filipino families – leaving women behind to pick up the pieces.[32]

Further, men constitute around 80 per cent of those imprisoned in the Philippines.[33] This not only shapes those who are left and able to take roles of fighting for change, but also shapes the 'change actors' whom organizations seeking to respond to extrajudicial killings engage with.

In the community organizations resisting the impacts of the war on drugs in the Philippines that the Resilience Fund supports, women are particularly visible, integral and active resilience actors in community responses.[34] Indeed, women, particularly in their roles as mothers and widows, typically spearhead community-resilience responses, more focused here on responding to the violent war undertaken by the state against communities than against organized-crime networks.

A number of interdependent factors are prerequisites for resilience, including social cohesion, trust and communication. It is precisely these factors that the state's militarized response to drug trafficking, with its emphasis on neighbourhood-watch reporting schemes, has eroded. Despite this significant obstacle, community organizations have forged such ties in order to continue operating – and women have been pivotal in maintaining these connections.

Many civil-society organizations in communities heavily affected by forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings focus on telling the stories of those who cannot tell their own, as well as protecting their communities. The gendered aspect of the disappearances in both Mexico and the Philippines is one facet explaining the prominent role of women in telling these stories. Women-led organizations in the Philippines have spoken at local levels and at multilateral events to gather support from international human-rights mechanisms. And they have leveraged social media to tell their story. Using art to remember the disappeared, the members of Sabuesos Guerreras paint the faces of their missing loved ones on murals to ensure they are not forgotten.

LUPA, a crime and corruption reporting network working on the development of investigative journalism in Montenegro, highlights the underlying norms shaping criminal behaviour, noting that in 'criminal circles … female casualties' are more rare. Although some women have been pivotal in uncovering 'important cases of corruption and organized crime,' and are at the forefront of community-resilience mechanisms, LUPA cites a lack of cases of 'mob killings in which women have been victimized in Montenegro'.[35] Where these dynamics are predominant, it is often women survivors who are positioned to seek justice for those they have lost.

Maria Isabel Cruz Bernal, Sabuesos Guerreras

Community members protest against the disappearance of their loved ones in a march organized by Sabuesos Guerreras. Culiacán, Mexico, September 2020.

On 26 January 2017, Reyes Yosimar Garcia Cruz disappeared in Culiacán, the capital of Mexico's Sinaloa state. Maria Isabel, Reyes's mother, sought the help of the authorities to find her son. Yet help was not forthcoming, and Maria Isabel realized that her son's disappearance had been at the hands of Mexican law enforcement. Reyes is one of thousands who have disappeared in the Mexican state's war on drugs.

Unable to gain any support from the authorities and determined to find her son, Maria Isabel started searching for him herself. Realizing that many women live with the 'daily torture of not knowing where and how' their relatives are, she decided to co-found Colectivo de Búsqueda Sabuesos Guerreras, an independent women's collective whose sole purpose is to find their disappeared relatives.[36]

Unsupported by the state, the women of Sabuesos Guerreras have 'together lifted their voices', specializing in forensics, investigation techniques, how to identify clandestine graves, victim support and digitalization of the case files they are investigating. The group continually search for the disappeared, raising awareness about this issue locally and nationally. 'The state needs to understand that we are victims, but we are also people fighting from a position of love, who in the face of a lack of responses are doing the job of the state,' says Maria Isabel.[37]

Sabuesos Guerreras partners with other civil society groups, creating networks and mobilizing the community to improve access to justice, resist corruption and pierce the veil of impunity shielding perpetrators from justice.

Informal institutions: Community and family

Customary rules based on gender expectations within family structures, which are often very powerful among communities affected by high levels of crime governance, mean that women can be 'uniquely placed' to advocate for change.[38] Women gain significant social capital from their roles within family structures – particularly as mothers and, to a lesser extent, wives – which can then be leveraged in responses to organized crime.

Women are able to wield this social capital to build their communities' resilience to organized crime. For example, they may document, narrate or uncover atrocities committed against their loved ones, thereby piercing the culture of silence that often prevails, or work with youth to break the chain of violence and de-escalate conflict, creating spaces for dialogue. In Haiti, women were identified as holding together 'the social fabric of communities'.[39]

There is, however, a tension between the role of women within the family structure, which predominantly relegates them to the domestic setting, and their role as a public voice for change. Women resilience actors continually manage these tensions, often facing significant aggression for 'stepping out of place', where the 'right' place is considered to be the home.

MathMoms, a civil-society organization working with women to counter the effects of criminal gang governance in the Cape Flats, emphasizes that many of those tempted into organized crime have been rendered 'invisible by the injustices of our society'. Individuals seek belonging in gangs, which, according to the NGO, 'can feel like a safe haven or a space of acceptance'. MathMoms has chosen to work with women in recreating safe havens in non-criminal spaces. This is based on an understanding that women are particularly well placed to render these vulnerable individuals visible, and provide comfort and safety, loosening their ties to gangs and other criminal organizations.[40]

Pascoe, in reference to gang interventions in the Cape Flats, said that, in South Africa, 'mothers are seen as nurturers and you must have the utmost respect for them'.[41] This role constitutes an entry point for Pascoe in much of her work mediating with gang members, leveraging the cultural respect shown to mothers to foster dialogue in contexts where violence has become the norm as a medium for 'communication'.

Women's role in the family, together with societal expectations surrounding it, often means women cannot 'move on' after being affected by organized crime (or violence perpetrated by the state). This gendered memory shapes incentives and behaviour, in many cases driving women to become relentless voices calling for change.

This was highlighted during resilience dialogues held by the GI-TOC in Mexico between 2015 and 2019, where women said that they are often driven into taking the lead in community-resilience movements because they do not have the option of remarrying or leaving children with a relative and starting anew, as many of their male counterparts who have lost loved ones do. Instead, women seek justice not only for those they have lost, but also to implement change for their children and protect the survival of the family.

Women's ties to the family structure endure even through imprisonment, which repeatedly severs such ties between male inmates and their children or wives. Recent research undertaken by Nobox, an organization that supports communities in enhancing their resilience to the war on drugs in the Philippines, engaged with women incarcerated for drug offences. Nobox found that the prison experience among women was very different from that of men. Men tended to be supported by networks outside prison or severed family ties during their time in prison. In a number of cases, they remarried.[42] In contrast, it was common for women to seek income-generating activities and send resources back to their families while in prison, and they remained closely connected to children and families. Similarly, Colectivo Artesana found that, once imprisoned, women are 'immediately abandoned' by their male partners.[43]

The centrality of women's role in family structures and the impact this has on women's positions in resilience initiatives was repeated in responses to the survey conducted by the GI-TOC among its partners in the Resilience Fund. Respondents in contexts as varied as Cambodia and Guinea-Bissau noted that in community structures, women are key in maintaining the family's livelihood and are the main income generators. Where organized crime thwarts livelihood options or removes the male breadwinners, women drive the survival of family structures through resilience approaches. It is women's role as mothers and their concern for their children that were particularly highlighted as their key motive for taking on leading resilience roles.

Outside traditional power structures: Squeezed out by multiple systems

Across society, privileged groups have dictated the rules of the game, shaping societal norms and decision-making structures to their benefit.[44] Although these rules of privilege vary between contexts, they typically empower the rich, the able-bodied, heterosexuals and men (together with other characteristics associated with the relevant 'dominant class', such as race).

Consequently, in many contexts suffering from high levels of criminal governance, women experience dual vulnerabilities: they are part of a marginalized or disempowered socio-economic group (rendered particularly vulnerable to organized crime and under-served by state structures), and then further marginalized and disempowered within that group. Losing trust in the system, it is no surprise when women are forced to turn elsewhere.

In line with intersectionality-aware approaches, it is key to recognize that indigenous female leaders and other women from marginalized ethnicities experience additional layers of vulnerabilities. In Mexico, the gender wage gap has been found to increase for women from other disadvantaged groups, with indigenous women experiencing the highest wage differential of all.[45]

Similarly referring to these layers of marginalization, Gerson Nozea of Rapha International Haiti, an organization working to end the trafficking and sexual exploitation of children in that country, noted that the combination of Haiti's 'male-dominated culture' and the vast 'income disparity between social classes' means there is an 'added burden to women of lower social status', and hence 'women's voices get silenced'.[46]

Barrios gave the example of Nicaraguan women in Guatemala to illustrate these intersecting layers of vulnerability: '… they work as prostitutes until they are old … They are left forgotten. They are people with low levels of education who will accept little. They come cheap to organized crime.' She said that they are often used as drug mules and to carry money for criminal groups. Once arrested, 'the structures that used them [abandon] them … Losing them is cheaper than hiring a lawyer because they are disposable. They use them once. And their own state also abandons them.'[47]

This 'lack of voice' within formal structures drives women to seek empowerment outside existing systems. In the context of organized crime, these systems are both the formal institutions broadly termed 'the state' and the criminal counterculture, or the culturally accepted norms and practices of criminal groups. In both spheres, the rules of privilege favour men, meaning women are squeezed out of both power structures.

State structures

As discussed above, community resilience can be channelled through state structures. However, more often it exists in the space created by state absence or in opposition to violent state practices. In many contexts where the support provided by the state is scarce, women are particularly under-served by state structures, and left out.[48]

Many women reported abuse – physical, sexual or verbal – at the hands of the state. In Mexico, impunity for criminal violence is widespread and nobody has a particularly grounded basis for trusting

the criminal-justice system. However, even in this context, women experience additional barriers from accessing justice. Las Buscadoras told of women being mocked by criminal-justice agents or ordered to go home by the police when they sought to file missing persons reports for their relatives.

The specific needs and circumstances of women who come into contact with the criminal-justice system have been recognized by the UN and repeatedly emphasized in resolutions of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice relating to gender mainstreaming in efforts to combat transnational organized crime. Yet too often these needs go unmet,[49] making women disengage from formal structures and, in some cases, seek leadership roles outside 'the system'.

'Women do not face the criminal-justice system in the same way as men do. Judges are severe, abusive and rude ... the public prosecution service has a very harsh and severe attitude towards women,' said Zelada. In prison, women face 'structural violence', as prisons are not designed for women, or to be visited by children.[50]

Women gang members in Cape Town repeatedly highlighted that their attempts to report violence to the police result in mockery, disdain and sexual abuse by law-enforcement officers.[51] Many women in the Philippines, particularly those from disadvantaged socio-economic groups, reported experiencing sexual harassment when seeking to report crimes, or being asked for sexual favours in return for filing criminal reports.[52]

Women's social capital within the formal institutional structures is lower than that of their male counterparts. Institutional frameworks often employ few women, and even fewer in positions of power. Policies are usually crafted and implemented by men. Although the state often fails men in these contexts, particularly those of low socio-economic status, it fails women even more.

Aware that state support is unavailable, women affected by organized crime are forced to create, and tap into, non-state support structures, which have repeatedly taken the form of community-resilience organizations. When they do so, they are then inadequately protected by state institutions, as highlighted by LUPA in Montenegro:

We believe that women active in the fight against organized crime and corruption in Montenegro are not sufficiently protected from the institutions of the system. Security authorities are conducting ineffective investigations into cases involving women victims who were recognized in society as active participants in the fight against crime. Such practices should be changed and the public should be aware of the problems such women face.[53]

Organized-crime culture

In contexts of organized crime, machismo culture is often rife, with its partner characteristics of misogyny and violence against women. The rhetoric of the cartel culture in Mexico is premised on strong male figures, with women predominantly portrayed as spoils of success. There is widespread dissemination of criminal culture across many sections of society, evident in *narcocorridos*, a genre of music glorifying violence and the lifestyle of drug traffickers. Far from being confined to just gang culture, such music is deeply entrenched.

In 2018, a video of a 15-year-old girl play-acting being attacked by hitmen and then rescued at her lavish birthday celebration to the backdrop of a *narcocorrido* prompted social-media outrage.[54] Although some analysts suggest *narcocorridos* should be interpreted as a social critique on the 'war on drugs',[55] the prevalent view notes the glamorization of criminal activities.

The microcultures surrounding organized crime in areas of high criminal governance also leave little space for women's agency. Although stakeholders commenting on power dynamics in gangs across Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and South Africa point to the changing role of women within gang structures, where women increasingly occupy leadership positions, power remains predominantly in male hands, with many women disempowered within gangs and criminal-network structures.[56]

Rendered voiceless by state and criminal structures alike, women are driven to create new spaces in which to voice their concerns and regain agency: many of these can be characterized as community-resilience movements.

Relatives and friends of victims of extra-judicial killings mourn their deceased kin in a bid to call for a stop to the killings of activists in the country. Manila, the Philippinnes, August 2019. *© Jes Aznar/Getty Images*

WHAT MAKES WOMEN KEY CHANGE-MAKERS?

Having explored the informal rules that enable women to step forwards in crafting resilience responses to organized crime, we examine the cultural constructs that empower women to act as pivotal change agents in disrupting criminal governance. We focus on two key approaches taken by community-resilience actors engaged as part of the Resilience Fund and that are prevalent in the broader resilience literature.

Women as interrupters of violence

Women frequently act to interrupt violence. As noted above, many contexts of high criminal governance are characterized by chauvinistic cultures that enshrine the role of the male as dominant. Aggression and violence become accepted and respected elements of the male repertoire; by contrast, they are often not recognized as acceptable from a woman. That is not to say that women cannot, and indeed do not, act as perpetrators of violence; however, it is less frequently seen.

This gendered perception of violence empowers women, particularly in their role as mothers, to break the chain of violence in certain criminal contexts. In South Africa, Pascoe commented that 'it is easier for us as women leaders to lead non-violent processes and show that there is a different way. As [mothers] we can break the chain and cycle of violence developed over time in our children.'[57]

Similarly, Nozea noted that, in Haiti, 'women's activism efforts in gang-ruled communities do not feel as threatening to gang members as male activism efforts would. That gives women-led efforts a leverage to be more effective.'[58]

Within many criminal structures, the role of woman as caregiver is also pervasive. For example, in El Salvador, traditionally women have adopted caregiving roles within gangs, and often served as the nexus between gangs and the external world (although, as noted above, this is reportedly changing to some extent, with more women holding positions of violence perpetration). However, the bridging role played by women in certain criminal contexts also leaves the door ajar for engagement by women in community-activist roles.

Many women-led organizations take an explicitly non-combative approach, crafting their activities within their roles as mothers or wives. For example, the leader of Las Buscadoras del Fuerte, Mirna Medina, said that they were not looking for those who committed the crimes – they just wanted to find their children.[59] This can in itself act as a form of resilience, suggesting operations in parallel, rather than counter to, the state and organized crime, which can operate in the limited spaces left for civilian activism in contexts of high criminal governance or predatory state behaviour.

Learning by numbers

In the Cape Flats, an urban area with among the highest murder rates in the world, among daily shootouts between notorious and violent gangs, a group of women are showing children a different path for the future. In these neighbourhoods, as gangs compete for territorial control and power, these women are helping children with their homework, teaching maths through play, even during COVID-19, offering them a safe space off the streets.

The 'Math Moms'[60] are stepping into roles of responsibility, creating havens amid high levels of criminal governance. They are driven by the need to protect their children, to tell a different story from the prevailing narrative of gangsterism and violence, to show that there is real potential in these crime-blighted communities. They can do this in part because they have a different view of the communities they live in and are able to build on relationships that are often hidden from view for outsiders.

Sonja Cilliers founded MathMoms in 2016, a civil-society organization working with women to counter the effects of criminal gang governance in the Cape Flats. Judy-Ann Cilliers quickly joined Sonja, and has been working with MathMoms ever since. The group seek to empower the women who live in the community to help these children. Fathers are often not around – they have left to find work elsewhere, or pursue livelihoods in the gangs.

MathMoms recruits women, mostly unemployed mothers, in cooperation with the local schools. Once recruited, the women undertake a three-month course to equip them with the tools to address trauma experienced in their own lives without passing it onto the children they work with, thus breaking the chain of trauma transmission. 'Many women react to trauma through the "tend or befriend" response,' noted Sonja Cilliers, drawing on her personal experience. 'We build on this, empowering women to build networks of support rather than reacting in the "fight or flight" binary.'

Many of the 'Math Moms' have dropped out of school, experienced emotional neglect or sexual violence, or used drugs from a young age. Giving women the tools to address the shocks and

stresses experienced by living in areas of high violence empowers them to channel the anger fuelled by their own experiences towards creating change, breaking the chains of violence. In turn, these women show their students alternatives to violence as a way of reacting to the trauma many have already experienced. 'We show the children that you can respond to a threat by building relationships to enhance your stability,' said Sonja.

Many women have leveraged the opportunity offered by MathMoms to catalyze change in their own lives, graduating from the programme to achieve educational success and permanent employment, and to overcome personal battles. One 'mom' who had been using drugs from the age of 16, has been clean for two years thanks to the support of her peers. Sonja attributes this to the fact that 'for the first time in her life she belonged somewhere'.[61]

MathMoms pursue an intergenerational approach to building community resilience, fostering networks between the children, the mothers and mentors for the mothers – most of them retired schoolteachers. Relationship building creates spaces to foster collective action among these women, empowering them to challenge prevalent socio-cultural norms and heal communities ravaged by violence from within.

In 2020, a man became a math 'Mom' for the first time. MathMoms welcome this, highlighting the heroic status of the programme's young male interns among the children and the importance of defining masculinity outside of a context of violence. 'Children want to see a different masculinity than the one they see in the streets or at home,' said Sonja. 'We see the "Math Moms" as lighthouses in the community – not only because they provide a safe space, but hopefully because this is contagious,' says Judy-Ann, encouraging other households to become similar havens.[62]

Mentors and participants of the MathMoms programme, supporting women's empowerment and safe spaces for children in Cape Town, South Africa. *© MathMoms*

Reclaiming space

The reclamation of physical space, typically in urban settings, is a core element of community-resilience movements and activism. Urban-space appropriation has played a central role in shaping the political practices of women's collective action. It has been noted that the fight for inclusion or space to continue providing for families has been gained through 'concerted social struggle, demanding the right to be seen, to be heard and to directly influence state and society'.[63]

In countries as varied as India, where women napped in parks as a reclamation of public spaces perceived to be dominated by men and threatening to women, and the UK, where Save the Night annual marches in London reclaim the streets for women in protest of rape, the appropriation of urban space, perceived as male and dangerous, has been key to gendered struggle.

This dynamic can be seen in various resilience movements working to challenge criminal governance. Many movements have sought to reclaim public spaces that have become the territories of criminal networks and gangs, asserting the community's right to safety in what have often become spaces of 'maleness' and criminal territories.[64] More metaphorically, the reclamation of space is also relevant to the re-appropriation of the female body, repeatedly perceived as territory to be controlled by criminal networks.

In many of the community-led initiatives with which the GI-TOC has worked in the context of the Resilience Fund, women have been instrumental in efforts to re-appropriate space, either in the first wave of re-appropriation or in the case of female members of the community who follow in the footsteps of the activist group and maintain the reclaimed space. The goal is to make the spaces safe for women and inclusive of all society. Creating a physical safe space also means establishing a secure space for lobbying, dissent and the call for change. It empowers and enables collective action, reinforcing social capital as women and men are able to gather together to lobby for change to criminal and state structures, as the case studies below illustrate.

'It is vital that more women are in the room and actively participate in the conceptualization and writing of policies ... This holds especially for policies that directly concern women's lives – such policymaking especially should be led by women and informed by their lived experiences. Spaces should be created in which women feel supported, respected and safe to raise their voices. Policy should be shaped and implemented in such a way that women feel that they have agency over their own lives and bodies – that they can take responsibility and have access to meaningful opportunities.'

MATH MOMS, SOUTH AFRICA

Taking back the streets

The Manenberg township in the Cape Flats, South Africa. Manenberg is home to some of Cape Town's most **violent gangs.** *© Shaun Swingler*

Around the world, groups of women have been reclaiming streets captured by violence. These are examples from South Africa, the Philippines and Mexico.

Faheema Hassiem, one of the Math Moms working in the Cape Flats, recounts a recent experience: 'The community I stay in has been riddled with organized crime for many, many years. Recently a group of elderly ladies, between ages 50 and 70, decided to have their voice heard. They organized themselves and started patrolling the streets. They were joined by a very few men and eventually the local police decided to join them.

'These ladies were just fed up with the power that the drug lords and gangsters were exerting in the communities. They were tired of going to bed at night just to be woken up during the night to hear the sound of gunfire. Those ladies had to get up early the morning to send their grandchildren to school.

'These ladies are part of a community where people know each other. They grew up in the community and have gone to school together. Their children know the gangsters and drug lords, and have also become part of those menacing others. And that is why these group of seniors decided to build resilience among their people and started patrolling the streets. It's not easy but they had to take a stand.'[65]

In the urban sprawl that is Metro Manila, which has been ravaged by extrajudicial killings in the state's 'war on drugs', in one marginalized community, a group of mothers and grandmothers dubbed 'the bonnet gang' formed a nightly patrol. The bonnet gang marched through the streets to disrupt killing patterns. While seeking to discourage the killings from happening at all, the group recognized this aim had its limitations, but also highlighted that, by patrolling, they were also able to ensure there were witnesses to attacks that did occur, and in some cases were able to call the emergency services.[66] Women involved in the patrols said that they were far less likely to be caught in situations of conflict during their patrols than their male counterparts.

The Sinaloa region is the home state of the infamous Sinaloa Cartel and one of five states of Mexico that has seen consistently high numbers of homicides over the last decade.[67] Crime groups have co-opted legitimate institutions through corruption and direct participation in democratic processes.[68] Culiacán is a key city in the area where, in 2008 community-resilience activists started cycling through the streets at night, reclaiming the space. A women-majority group, Mujeres en Bici (women on bikes) organized weekly night rides to re-appropriate space and familiarize women with safer cycling routes. Sara Verdugo, founder of Mujeres en Bici, said: 'To recover a city from organized crime, first you have to make it yours … In the same way the narcos fight to hold on to their territories, we are here to claim what is ours. If the public space is not accessible to us, we will make it our own.'[69]

KEY CHALLENGES TO RESILIENCE PROGRAMMING

▲ Anti-corruption activists at a memorial for journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia in Bidnija, Malta. *© Joanna Demarco/Getty Images*

Instrumentalizing versus empowering women

Enhancing resilience at one level can undermine it at another. Meanwhile, certain resilience factors, like social cohesion, can simultaneously exclude marginalized groups. Many community-resilience programmes focus on changing habits and dynamics at the individual level, working at the relational level between community members. Yet, at the same time it is crucial to consider a macro perspective, to ensure programming drives the macro agenda of empowerment, rather than leaving the latter unchanged, or worse, reinforced.

From a gendered perspective, it is important to consider whether resilience initiatives widen or narrow gender inequalities. This can be explained as the difference between instrumentalizing the role of women in society to drive change and empowering women as change agents.

The former risks multiplying the burden on women, ascribing more responsibilities without rights or other protections, in part as a way of replacing failed state institutions that cannot provide services. For example, in responses that support women's initiatives that have stepped into the void left by ineffective law enforcement, this could add to the existing pressures of providing for the family while increasing safety risks. Research exploring the role of women in community resilience to natural disasters found that, after the disaster, 'women were required to take on additional roles', meaning women's workload 'effectively doubled' while men's workload remained largely unchanged.[70]

In positive cases, empowering women as change agents could also trigger more long-term or systemic change by enhancing the voices of women in spaces from which they are typically excluded. In the worst-case scenario, such approaches can reinforce power relations that systematically exclude and harm women. On the other hand, supporting women as change-makers can be empowering and could translate into amplifying their voices.

In distinguishing between these two dynamics – instrumentalization versus empowerment – it is important to consider whether response frameworks are driving systemic change and empowering women in macro structures, and not only whether they achieve specific project objectives . The risk is that gendered programming can work to reinforce gendered stereotypes that themselves reflect social inequities and can act as obstacles to equality. Seeking to ensure all programming is gender aware, rather than necessarily gender focused, is key to mitigating such risks.

Vulnerability in visibility

The goals of empowering women, of giving them a voice, are corollaries of resilience programming with women figureheads. However, this also makes these women more visible. In the context of responses to organized crime, enhanced visibility translates into increased vulnerability to attacks by organized crime or the state.

Pascoe noted that, in the past, community-resilience initiatives in South Africa were predominantly led by men. However, many of these men, in positions of high visibility, were killed, leaving behind women to continue mobilizing communities and resisting the effects of organized crime. Pascoe said that, since 2018, more women in community-resilience positions have been targeted, forcing those who continue their activities to increasingly adopt a low profile.[71]

The cost for those that continue to speak out, and allow themselves to be visible, is great, and many resilience actors report changing their lifestyles dramatically so as to avoid crowds, unnecessary socializing and keeping their exposure in public places to a minimum. 'I don't believe in the international protections for activists,' said Andrea Barrios, co-founder of Colectivo Artesana. 'I have submitted thousands of crime reports [to the police] and nothing has resolved the problems that we face.'[72]

Regardless of gender, resilience actors in areas of criminal control are vulnerable and targeted. Awareness of these risks should shape programming around community resilience. The GI-TOC takes a range of practical measures to mitigate this risk, providing security training, advice and support to resilience actors, including by consulting with security experts.

The fragility of resilience

Resilience can seem fragile in the face of violence perpetrated by organized crime and the state. Siria Gastélum Félix, director of the Resilience Programme at the GI-TOC, said that she became aware of this fragility when she began working in resilience programming following the murder of Javier Valdez, a high-profile journalist in Mexico, in 2017.

'First, I felt resilience was pointless – there is no resilience against guns,' said Gastélum Félix. Resilience movements felt weak as a response to the influx of weapons from the US and spiralling homicide rates. 'We used resilience in discourse to give hope – but it can be a fragile thing.'

Every time a resilience leader is murdered, much of their work can disappear, at least temporarily, as fear silences protest. (However, such murders also often spark counter-reactions, as can be seen in the revival of Recuper-arte, a community-resilience project that gained momentum in Mexico following the murder of Valdez.)[73]

Financial resilience and vulnerability

Financial inclusion is core to the overarching resilience of individuals and organizations. Women-led grassroots organizations and women activists working to enhance community resilience to organized crime often face significant challenges when it comes to accessing finance. This can erode their financial resilience and make them less capable of responding to the shocks and stresses catalyzed by organized crime.

Women-led organizations and individuals may not only lack collateral, which is often needed to obtain loans, or financial histories, which make them more credit-worthy, but are in many cases dependent on foreign funding and short project cycles. These characteristics make such stakeholders vulnerable to regulations implemented to counter terrorist financing, which involve complex compliance requirements, favour established organizations, and in many cases delay or block international transfers.[74]

Ever more stringent international regulatory frameworks designed to counter the risks of money laundering and terrorist financing, many promulgated by the US, have driven financial institutions to increasingly adopt 'de-risking' approaches.[75] This has a knock-on effect on the operations of civil society, posing yet another obstacle to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.[76]

Many community resilience projects working to counter organized crime operate in areas of high criminal control – often areas identified as posing a high risk of money laundering and terrorist financing. Notably, even large third-sector organizations working in high-risk jurisdictions have faced almost overwhelming challenges in effecting financial transactions to support their work.[77] Further, the thematic areas in which such actors work may create an additional level of risk for financial institutions.

Community resilience organizations led by women (or individual female resilience advocates) working to respond to organized crime are therefore often perceived by financial institutions as low-profit, high-risk. This can have the effect of having to deal with burdensome administrative compliance or, at worst, to total exclusion from the formal financial sector.[78]

Many stakeholders excluded from the formal financial system revert to informal financing, including cash-carrying practices, which poses significant safety concerns. Engagement with women-led organizations and women resilience actors must be sensitive to the challenges posed by engagement with the formal financial system to ensure that erosion of financial resilience is mitigated, and that risk, at the operational and personal level, is recognized and addressed.

Resilience programming in the context of 'mafia states'

As mentioned above, the boundary between organized crime and the state can be blurred. It can be challenging to support resilience actors where it is difficult to define the forms of organized crime they are mobilizing the community against. In some contexts, criminal capture of elements of the state is conspicuous. This is often the case where particular officials or state organs are known to be colluding with, or the same as, criminal organizations. In others, such as the Venezuelan government, the context is more complicated and the state as a whole is impossible to delineate with clarity from organized crime.

Where crime and politics intersect, resistance can be overtly political and therefore more difficult to navigate and support. For example, in Colombia, many drug-trafficking organizations have become political movements, while political actors are co-opted by the profits of the drugs trade. The complexity in identifying the aggressor can mean many resilience responses become overtly politicized.

As identified above, supporting one community structure can entail the marginalization of another disenfranchised or disempowered group. These risks escalate where community movements become highly politicized and the risk of silencing dissenting voices is increased. It is crucial that resilience programming takes into account local power dynamics. For example, in contexts where central government appears co-opted by organized crime, it may be possible to engage with regional authorities to the extent that they retain a degree of independence.

Gendered resilience programming in contexts of low women emancipation

In contexts where women are disenfranchised, it can be a difficult task to empower women within resilience frameworks given that this bottom-up approach is entirely dependent on the conditions on the ground.

In Zuwara, Libya, for example, women resilience actors said that although the role of women in responding to organized crime was key, it was restricted to certain spaces – both physically and thematically.

Physically, appropriate spaces for women were largely limited to the home. Actors emphasized the importance of the role played by women in sensitizing families to the issues of organized crime and in isolating children from criminal networks. However, engaging with these women in public spaces would be taboo and could be dangerous for the women involved.

Thematically, in the context of Zuwara, the engagement of women in the fight against prostitution, petty crime, drug consumption or alcohol trafficking were all seen as laudable. However, their engagement in responses to economies such as human smuggling or fuel smuggling, which are linked to the livelihoods of many in Zuwara, was taboo. Women resilience actors emphasized the importance of capitalising on the strengths and power of women, while operating within 'cultural boundaries'.[79]

Engagement within such contexts needs to be highly nuanced so as to avoid endangering women by spotlighting their role in dialogues that are culturally taboo for women, while taking care at the same time to avoid disempowering them.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

There are tremendous challenges in incorporating a gender perspective to addressing organized crime. Our understanding of the gender-differentiated effects of crime is limited. Our understanding of the informal rules shaping the role of women in community-resilience responses to organized crime is arguably even more nascent.

Participation of women in designing policies that affect them is very limited, particularly in contexts where violence related to organized crime is at its worst. A key tenet of gender-aware, community-resilience programming should, to the extent feasible within cultural constraints, ensure that women are involved and empowered within policymaking and programming processes.

We set out here a number of entry points when considering how to enhance the gender awareness of community-resilience responses, empowering women in the contexts in which they operate. We continue to learn from our partners in the GI-TOC resilience programme and will continue to inform and shape interventions to benefit from their insights.

Encourage gender-aware and participatory resilience programming.

It is important to recognize the role of gender in communities' criminal-governance paradigms when addressing organized crime. In order to build state capacity to implement resilience-based approaches and empower non-state actors to develop community-resilience programmes, the wider environment in which criminal culture is entrenched must be taken to account in shaping interventions. This includes recognizing, and challenging, the asymmetrical power relationships between men and women, and identifying that crime affects men and women in different ways.

From a practical perspective, gender-aware programming should ensure it is easy and practical for women to become involved in community-resilience initiatives. Women should be supported with provisions for childcare and through flexibility in working hours to enable them to take time off needed for community involvement.[80]

Community-resilience approaches recognize the power of bottom-up methods and the importance of working within contextual realities. To complement these, top-down approaches from international or bilateral development actors are essential to simultaneously open space for women to have a greater role in policymaking, enabling grassroots approaches to capitalize on momentum built. Too often, programming stops at recognizing the important role played by women in resilience to different shocks, without then including them in policymaking processes focused on shock recovery.[81]

Avoid symbolic gender mainstreaming and use gender awareness and intersectionality to inform interventions.

Gender inequalities undermine the resilience of communities. The resilience approach must take these inequalities into consideration and aim to reduce them by including gender-sensitive programmes, policies and interventions. In this, it is key to recognize where women are not at the centre of community-resilience programming and not artificially highlight their roles to pay lip-service to gender mainstreaming. In line with this, it is key to recognize the value of community-resilience projects that work across, rather than strictly within, cultural gender norms.

Embed intersectionality into resilience approaches.

An intersectional perspective that acknowledges diversity within communities is necessary to strengthen social capital – a key aspect of resilience. Recognizing the layers of vulnerability created through intersectionality and the differing experience of individuals from indigenous or other marginalized communities will help avoid reinforcing existing social structures that increase marginalization. Programming should consider the political economy features that lead to the ongoing disempowerment of certain groups and seek to weaken these while working within cultural frameworks.[82]

Enshrine the agency of community-resilience actors.

Many of the risks surrounding community-resilience programming in the context of organized crime responses can be mitigated, but they cannot be eliminated. This includes the risk of instrumentalizing women and reinforcing existing gender inequalities. It is therefore crucial to ensure that programming respects the agency and decision-making power of community-resilience actors. This includes recognizing any societal or informal norms, including of indigenous communities, that drive behaviour and ensuring that actors have the space to make their own, well-informed decisions regarding participation in resilience activities.

Empower women's community-resilience organizations to negotiate and partner with government and local authorities.

In contexts where engagement with the state is feasible, it is important to empower women to engage with state structures in order to regain agency within the 'formal systems'. This seeks to position women not only at the centre of community-resilience programming but of policymaking more broadly. This may take the form of developing local platforms and partnerships that create new spaces for dialogue and engagement between women resilience actors and local authorities, eroding the systemic invisibility of women in formal structures.

Resource and support peer-to-peer networks among resilience actors.

At the core of demand-led, community-resilience approaches is a drive to empower resilience actors to take their work forward and strengthen their voices. By enabling women resilience actors to dialogue and connect with one another, regionally and internationally, resilience programming can harness the power of collective voices, creating safe spaces for learning and empowerment. In many contexts, donors and international partners can support this by leveraging their convening power to facilitate and empower community actors. Isolation erodes social networks and is an obstacle to collective action. Resilience programming should therefore look for opportunities to nurture social networking between women.

Embed security awareness in resilience programming.

Given the enhanced vulnerability that accompanies visibility and the fragility of community-resilience actors in the face of organized crime, security awareness and preparedness must be key components of resilience programming. Better protection mechanisms are required for community leaders at the local and international level. It is not possible to build sustainable resilience if its actors are not adequately protected from retribution.

Adopt flexible and tailored approaches to financial support to resilience actors.

Gender-aware resilience programming should engage from an early stage with the specific challenges faced by resilience actors to ensure that financial transactions are structured to avoid delays and obstacles. Where necessary and feasible, there should be support given to resilience actors to help them navigate compliance requirements and avoid transaction structures that are likely to trigger compliance concerns.

Financial support should be flexible and tailored to the needs of the resilience actor, while enshrining compliance with donor-accountability requirements. In some contexts, it may be necessary to use the services of international transfer companies rather than mainstream banking institutions; engage third-party trusted intermediaries to act as primary recipients of international transactions that then pass on the funding to the relevant actors; or otherwise restructure support to ensure it is accessible, and enhances rather than diminishes the financial resilience of stakeholders.

Support engagement between resilience actors and formal financial institutions.

In contexts where resilience actors have faced significant challenges in accessing finance through the formal financial system, international actors may be well positioned to leverage their convening power to enhance dialogue between financial institutions and resilience actors. This can include workshops, discussion groups or awareness-raising sessions, which facilitate interaction, empower resilience actors to better navigate compliance requirements and ensure that financial institutions are sensitized to the work of resilience actors.

NOTES

1   Tuesday Reitano, Lucia Bird Ruiz-Benitez de Lugo, Sasha Jesperson (eds), *Militarised Responses to Transnational Organised Crime: The War on Crime*, 2018, Palgrave Macmillan.

2   See, for example, UNODC, Gender mainstreaming in the work of UNODC, 2013, https://www.unodc.org/documents/Gender/UNODC-GuidanceNote-GenderMainstreaming.pdf.

3   Contrasting this to the number of woman-led organisations which are supported by the fund – 6 out of 22 as at January 2021 – also highlights the structural barriers which limit women's participation in more formal organisations, and the risk of limiting engagement with women where only formal structures are supported.

4   Interview with Andrea Barrios and Ana Ingrid Zelada, Colectivo Artesana, 13 January 2020 and 9 March 2020.

5   Ibid.

6   Ibid.

7   World Prison Brief, Guatemala, https://www.prisonstudies.org/country/guatemala.

8   Interview with Colectivo Artesana, August 2018.

9   Ibid.

10   Interviews with Colectivo Artesana, 13 January 2020 and 9 March 2020.

11   It was not until 2008 that the notion of community resilience was first officially applied to organized crime 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 has supported 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 community stakeholders in developing and overseeing the municipal prevention initiatives. See Siria Gastelum Felix, Resilience in Sinaloa: Community responses to organized crime, GI-TOC, 2017, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Resilience-in-Sinaloa-community-responses-to-OC.pdf (citing Congressional Research Service, 'US-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Merida Initiative', Report, 8 January 2017, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/ row/R41349.pdf.)

12   Julie Drolet et al, Women rebuilding lives post-disaster: innovative community practices for building resilience and promoting sustainable development, *Gender and Development*, 23, 3, 433–448, 2015.

13   Department for International Development, Defining disaster resilience: A DFID approach paper, UK Aid, 2011.

14   In this context, a community refers to a form of social organization that can exist at various levels, from large group affiliations such as the international community to neighbourhood groupings. It is defined in this approach through the perspective of its members and their shared sense of belonging, that enables cohesion and the possibility for common goals. Guided by: David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis, Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory, *Journal of Community Psychology*, Volume 14, 6-20, January 1986

15   The GI-TOC's community resilience approach focuses on social capital at the local level, which it aims to identify, support and strengthen. Siria Gastélum Félix, Resilience in Sinaloa: Community responses to organized crime, GI-TOC, 2017, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Resilience-in-Sinaloa-community-responses-to-OC.pdf.

16   For example, the first step in launching a community resilience programme in Zuwara, a town in Libya key in human- and fuel-smuggling dynamics, was bringing together community actors to define resilience for that community, including engaging with women in resilience roles (such as journalists) to build a gender-aware understanding of resilience in this context. This is key to adherence to the 'do no harm' principle, particularly where operating in volatile contexts of high criminal governance.

17   Moisés Naím, Mafia states: organized crime takes office, *Foreign Affairs*, 91, 2012.

18   Siria Gastélum Félix, Resilience in Sinaloa: Community responses to organized crime, GI-TOC, 2017, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Resilience-in-Sinaloa-community-responses-to-OC.pdf.

19   Ibid.

20   Interview with Andrea Barrios and Ana Ingrid Zelada, Colectivo Artesana, 13 January 2020 and 9 March 2020.

21   The gender bias is widely researched in justice systems in observations of laws and social responses to various crimes. Isabel Aguilar Umaña and Jeanne Rikkers, Violent women and violence against women: Gender relations in the *maras* and other street gangs of Central America's Northern Triangle region, Interpeace, April 2012, https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/2012_09_18_IfP_EW_Women_In_Gangs.pdf; Marguerite Cawley, The mara women: Gender roles in CentAm street gangs, InSight Crime, 5 September 2013, https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/centam-street-gangs-reject-rely-on-women-study/.

22   United Nations, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld.

23   Audrey Anderson, Resilience in action: Gender equity and social inclusion, produced by Mercy Corps as part of the Resilience Evaluation, Analysis and Learning (REAL) Associate Award, 2018, https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/REAL_Resilience_in_Action.pdf.

24   Centre for Natural Resource Governance, Zimbabwe, response to GI-TOC survey, April 2020.

25   Julie Drolet et al, Women rebuilding lives post-disaster: innovative community practices for building resilience and promoting sustainable development, *Gender and Development*, 23, 3, 433–448, 2015.

26   Telephone interview with Roegchanda Pascoe, 31 March 2020.

27   This is not to suggest that violence meted out by organized crime is more targeted at men in this context. El Salvador experiences the highest rate of femicide in the world, with one woman murdered by a man every 24 hours according to official figures, which are widely recognized to fall far below real-time incidents, in part due to reporting failures by law enforcement. According to the Observatory on Gender Violence, femicide rates more than doubled between 2013 and 2017 – this growth is in part due to gang and narco violence, which commoditizes the body of women, treating it as territory for revenge and power play. Although it is key to note that gang culture is not solely responsible for the wave of femicides in El Salvador, as the government has been keen to suggest thereby exculpating itself of responsibility. Observatorio de violencia de género contra las mujeres, May 2018, http://observatoriodeviolencia.ormusa.org/boletinas/2018-0506_BOLETINA_VG.pdf; Ciara Nugent, Violence against women in El Salvador is driving them to suicide – or to the US border, Time, 14 May 2019, time.com/5582894/gender-violence-women-el-salvador/; Elsa Ramos, *Causas y condiciones del incremento de la migración de mujeres salvadoreñas*, Colección de Investigaciones, Universidad Tecnológica de El Salvador, 2017, http://www.utec.edu.sv/media/publicaciones/flips/coleccionInvestigaciones/2017/migracion_mujeres_salvadorenas/files/publication.pdf..

28   Siria Gastélum Félix, Resilience in Sinaloa: Community Responses to Organized Crime, GI-TOC, 2017, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Resilience-in-Sinaloa-community-responses-to-OC.pdf; Emilio Godoy, Mexico: Rural poverty has a woman's face, Inter Press Service News Agency, 5 October 2009, http://www.ipsnews.net/2009/10/mexico-rural-poverty-has-a-woman39s-face/.

29   According to official figures, women constitute around a quarter of the almost 62 000 forced disappearances in Mexico's drug war since 2006. Ian Collier, Mexico drug war: Almost 62,000 people have disappeared since 2006, Sky News, 7 January 2020, https://news.sky.com/story/mexico-drug-war-almost-62-000-people-have-disappeared-since-2006-11902736; Laura Carlsen, Disappearances of women rise in Mexico's senseless drug war, Americas Program, 11 March 2019, https://www.americas.org/disappearances-of-women-rise-in-mexicos-senseless-drug-war/.

30   'Real Numbers Philippines', collated by the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, https://www.facebook.com/realnumbersph/photos/a.1363934583788076/1363935180454683/?type=3&theater.

31   Rappler, In numbers: The Philippines' 'war on drugs', 13 September 2016, http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/145814-numbers-statistics-philippines-war-drugs.

32   Siria Gastélum Félix, Resilience in Sinaloa: Community Responses to Organized Crime, GI-TOC, 2017, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Resilience-in-Sinaloa-community-responses-to-OC.pdf; Maria Carmen Fernandez et al, Examining the effects of drug-related killings on Philippine Conditional Cash Transfer beneficiaries in Metro Manila, 2016–2017, 2019.

33   Interestingly, although the total numbers of women imprisoned are far lower, the proportion of women arrested for drug offences – circa 50 per cent – is significantly higher. Telephone interview with Nobox, 2 April 2020.

34   These organizations operate in Metro Manila, Bulacan (in Central Luzon), Cebu (Visayas), and Davao (Mindanao).

35   LUPA, response to GI-TOC survey, April 2020.

36   Facebook post by Sabuesos Guerreras, 3 May 2019, reproduced with consent of Maria Isabel in email exchange in July 2020, https://www.facebook.com/1234sabuesosguerreras/posts/mi-nombre-es-maria-isabel-cruz-bernal-presidente-del-colectivo-de-busqueda-sabue/664101534003916/.

37   Ibid.

38   Math Moms, response to GI-TOC survey, April 2020.

39   Rapha International response to GI-TOC survey, April 2020.

40   Math Moms, response to GI-TOC survey, April 2020.

41   Telephone interview with Roegchanda Pascoe, 31 March 2020.

42   Telephone interview with Nobox, 2 April 2020.

43   Interviews with Andrea Barrios, 13 January 2020 and 9 March 2020.

44   Rebecca Haines and Tam O'Neil, Putting gender in political economy analysis: Why it matters and how to do it, Gender and Development Network, 2018, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/5af2c7721ae6cfb413502ac9/1525860213046/GADN+Briefing_PuttingGenderInPEA_FinalMay2018.pdf.

45   Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación, National survey on discrimination 2017, https://www.conapred.org.mx/userfiles/files/Pt- cionENADIS2017_08.pdf.

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47   Interviews with Andrea Barrios, 13 January 2020 and 9 March 2020.

48   Judie Kaberia, Resilience Fund Fellow, Kenya, response to GI-TOC survey, April 2020.

49   UNODC, Mainstreaming a gender perspective into crime prevention and criminal justice policies and programmes and into efforts to prevent and combat transnational organized crime, Res 26/3, The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.

50   Interview with Ana Ingrid Zelada and Andrea Barrios, Colectivo Artesana, August 2018.

51   Mark Shaw and Luke Lee Skywalker, Gangs, violence and the role of women and girls: Emerging themes and policy and programme options drawn from interviews with female gang members in Cape Town, GI-TOC, 2017, https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/gangs-violence-and-the-role-of-women-and-girls-cape-town/.

52   Telephone interview with Nobox, 2 April 2020.

53   LUPA response to GI-TOC survey, April 2020.

54   Parker Asmann, Mexico's narcocorridos: A case of misunderstanding?, InSight Crime, 24 April 209, https://www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/mexicos-narcocorridos-case-of-misunderstanding/.

55   Ibid.

56   Telephone interview with Roegchanda Pascoe, 31 March 2020. Law enforcement in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala speaking at a webinar organized by the GI-TOC, April 2020.

57   Ibid.

58   Rapha International response to GI-TOC survey, April 2020.

59   Interview with Mirna Medina, founder of Las Buscadoras, cited in Siria Gastélum Félix, Resilience in Sinaloa: Community responses to organized crime, GI-TOC, 2017, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Resilience-in-Sinaloa-community-responses-to-OC.pdf.

60   Interviews in this case study were conducted by telephone with Sonja Cilliers and Judy-Anne Cilliers, 9 July 2020.

61   Telephone interview with Sonja Cilliers and Judy-Anne Cilliers, 9 July 2020.

62   Ibid.

63   Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. New York: Guilford Press, 2003.

64   Robert Henry, Social spaces of maleness: The role of street gangs in practising indigenous masculinities, in Robert Alexander Innes and Kim Anderson, *Indigenous Men and Masculinities: Legacies, Identities Regeneration*, University of Manitoba Press, 2015.

65   Math Moms, response to GI-TOC survey, April 2020.

66   Martin Petty and Eloisa Lopez, Death squad disrupters: Filipina patrols help keep drug killings at bay, ABS-CBN News, 17 February 2020, https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/multimedia/slideshow/02/17/20/death-squad-disrupters-filipina-patrols-help-keep-drug-killings-at-bay.

67   Siria Gastélum Félix, Resilience in Sinaloa: Community Responses to Organized Crime, GI-TOC, 2017, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Resilience-in-Sinaloa-community-responses-to-OC.pdf.

68   For example, during the last elections in July 2018, armed groups in Sinaloa appeared at polling booths, ordering people not to vote for the opposition candidates. They threatened and intimidated journalists as well. In the end, wherever those incidents took place, the party in power, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional won the majority of votes, contrary to the national trend where the leftist coalition Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional swept 90 per cent of voting districts in Mexico. See Siria Gastélum Félix, Why change matters in Mexico, GI-TOC, 5 July 2018, http://globalinitiative.net/mexico_election/.

69   Interview with Sarah Verdugo, founder of Mujeres en Bici, cited in Siria Gastélum Félix, Resilience in Sinaloa: Community Responses to Organized Crime, GI-TOC, 2017, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Resilience-in-Sinaloa-community-responses-to-OC.pdf.

70   Julie Drolet et al, Women rebuilding lives post-disaster: innovative community practices for building resilience and promoting sustainable development, *Gender and Development*, 23:3, 433-448, 2015.

71   In parallel to the increased visibility of women in resilience initiatives in South Africa, they have also been increasingly targeted by organized crime. According to Pascoe, the reported shift towards more women holding powerful positions in gangs has also resulted in an increase in targeted killings of these women.

72   Interviews with Andrea Barrios & Ana Ingrid Zelada, 13 January 2020 and 9 March 2020.

73   Siria Gastélum Félix, Resilience in Sinaloa: Community responses to organized crime, GI-TOC, 2017, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Resilience-in-Sinaloa-community-responses-to-OC.pdf.

74   Duke Law International Human Rights Clinic and Women Peacemakers Program, Tightening the purse strings: What countering terrorism financing costs gender equality and security, 2017, https://web.law.duke.edu/sites/default/files/humanrights/tighteningpursestrings.pdf.

75   De-risking refers to approaches that decrease financial institutions' exposure to risk, and in practice typically involves the restriction of financial services to certain geographic areas or sectors perceived as higher risk.

76   Duke Law International Human Rights Clinic and Women Peacemakers Program, Tightening the purse strings: What countering terrorism financing costs gender equality and security, 2017, https://web.law.duke.edu/sites/default/files/humanrights/tighteningpursestrings.pdf.

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79   Telephone interview with Raouf Farrah, lead of the GI-TOC's resilience programming work in Zuwara, Libya, 26 March 2020.

80   Iona Bauer, director of eLiberare and Resilience Fund Fellow, response to GI-TOC survey, April 2020.

81   This has, for example, been tracked in disaster-recovery programming. Julie Drolet et al, Women rebuilding lives post-disaster: innovative community practices for building resilience and promoting sustainable development, *Gender and Development*, 23:3, 433-448, 2015.

82   UNODC, Mainstreaming a gender perspective into crime prevention and criminal justice policies and programmes and into efforts to prevent and combat transnational organized crime, Resolution 26/3, The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CCPCJ/CCPCJ_Sessions/CCPCJ_26/CCCPJ_Res_Dec/CCPCJ-RES-26-3.pdf.

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