



**WOMEN WHO DON'T STAY HOME,  
DON'T WASH THEIR HANDS  
AND DON'T EVEN COVER THEIR MOUTHS**

**Covid-19 and Community Philanthropy in Latin America**

*By Florencia Roitstein and Andrés Thompson*

A production of

ellas.

With the support of



Colonia, Uruguay, October 2020

© ELLAS - Women and Philanthropy [www.ellasfilantropia.org](http://www.ellasfilantropia.org) and Global Fund for Community Foundations <https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/> , 2020

*At the end of April, residents of Villa 31, one of Buenos Aires' largest informal settlements, started reporting a loss of running water. A couple of weeks later, Ramona Medina, a resident of Villa 31, recorded and released a video from her bathroom denouncing the lack of running water. She focused her camera on a waterless faucet, asking Diego Santilli, the vice-chief of the Buenos Aires city government, "How, after eight days without running water, are we supposed to wash our hands, maintain hygiene, wear masks, or not leave our homes when every day I have to leave my home to go buy water?"*

*On May 13, Medina was hospitalized and placed on a ventilator to treat complications from Covid-19. Four days later, she passed away.*

*Ramona Medina was one of the millions of Buenos Aires residents living in crisis prior to the Covid-19 outbreak. A mother of two disabled children and a community activist with La Poderosa, a villa-led community organization and news outlet, Medina was part of a new national feminist movement that combats the effects of the pandemic and ongoing economic crisis. Originating as a youth program in the Villa Zavaleta of Buenos Aires, La Poderosa is now an autonomous, consensus-based, self-funded organization with 114 assemblies throughout Argentina, and 12 assemblies throughout Latin America.*

*Eva Zulema Mango, a member of La Poderosa in the city of Tandil, described Medina's dedication to her community: "Ramona was a feminista villera (a villa feminist). As feministas villeras we have been, and will always be, at the frontlines of any crisis demanding our rights, creating the ollas populares (informal soup kitchens), and making sure that everyone is fed."*

## Content

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	6
The old normal: was it normal?	8
The "generous" in the old normal	10
A bomb dropped: Covid-19	14
The voices of communities: a gender look	23
The "new normal": certainties and uncertainties	43
Conclusions: plague and day after	51

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*A separate chapter of the global battle against COVID-19 is being played in Latin America, which is testing national and regional capacities to meet a challenge that goes far beyond a health crisis. The different responses of public administrations call into question regional coordination capacity and expose the fragility of institutions, infrastructure, the social model of development and the capacities of collaboration and cross-sectoral articulation in the general interest.*

*A common denominator that continues to go through the decisions of the vast majority of public authorities in the region is the confusion at the top of government power (presidents and ministers), the contradictory messages they convey to the population, and the absence of proactive practices to contain contagion. In addition to this, a paternalistic vision and its consequence appear; the curtailment of public freedoms. Also, the total lack of articulation with civil society organizations and locally based organizations.*

*In this context and during the months of May and June 2020 we researched and talked with women community leaders from several countries in the region to learn about the impact of the development of the COVID-19 pandemic on their communities and on their own personal lives. Their reflections focus on the following dimensions:*

- *Questioning the idea of "new normality", based on criticism of "old normality": less confidence, doubts about reciprocity, greater solidarity;*
- *The weakening of participatory democracy in the region;*
- *The economic consequences of the pandemic on people's quality of life, particularly in terms of employment and work and own resources;*
- *The awareness of the impact of digital divide in inequality;*
- *The low participation of civil society as a major player in public policies in the face of the impact of covid;*
- *Solidarity, as a temporary and reactive phenomenon;*
- *The importance of women's role.*

*Faced with this landscape once again marked by inequality and social inequity, women had to organize and reinvent themselves, create networks of hope and support platforms between them, give themselves public visibility (as they are invisible) and transform the need into an opportunity for care and survival.*

*Women who "talk" in this text, and who represent many thousands more **did not stay in their homes** because they were unable to do so. These same women also **did not wash their hands**, do not dettach from their surroundings, did not take refuge in their individualities, or intend to save themselves. Trust in their communities became their most*

important resource. **They also did not cover their mouths,** but despite their masks they went out publicly to denounce domestic violence resulting from confinement, to demand the help of the absent state, to weave alliances, to reinvent their lives, their jobs and their communities.

They had to set up community banks in Ecuador to resolve the lack of access to economic resources for women in the community; invented new ways of exchanging products and services in Chile so that all women in the community can earn income and bring food to their homes; developed technology courses in Argentina to reduce the giant digital divide that leaves nearly half of the population completely isolated; implemented an emergency fund to help sex workers; they created a digital platform to enable Ecuador's artisans that their products can continue to market and secure their economic resources to survive. They invented a food bank in Mexico and make sure members of their community don't go hungry.

They created and recovered a "communitarian us" (nosotros comunitario) as hundreds of thousands of other women in the region do, co-creating comprehensive response models to the epidemic that allowed members of their communities not only to protect themselves from contagion with covid 19 but to continue to imagine a possible future. They know the ecosystem and the context in which the epidemic develops in their own communities and put, as they always do, their skills and their relationships of trust to create in conjunction with other women sustainable solutions that allow members of their communities to be sustained in these uncertain times.

Faced with the discourse of the "war" against the coronavirus embodied above all in ruling men, women in communities bring to light their greatest degree of empathy, solidarity and instinct for collaboration and protection. The dilemmas of the "day after" and the possibilities of "build back better" will depend to a large extent on how tensions between, on the one hand, fear, disintegration and social anomia are resolved and, on the other hand, the efforts of integration, cooperation and care. In this game, women-led community philanthropy will play an undisputed starring role.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

During 2019 we conducted an exploratory study on women's leadership in mobilizing local resources in the communities where they live and operate in Latin America. It concluded in the publication of a book: *The Rebellion of the Everyday. Generous women who change Latin America*. In it, we analyze in depth the cases of twenty-three women in the region who in different ways do philanthropy: mobilizing and donating resources, giving how much or little they have, offering their own spaces for libraries or shelters for beaten women, putting their bodies and minds at the service of social justice. That's why we called them "the generous ones."

Their stories were touching as they permanently put at stake the essential values of what we call "community philanthropy": reciprocity, solidarity, transparency, commitment to the common good and trust. All of them, with their organizations, work around the three axes identified by various international entities: resource generation, capacity building and community influence, and trust building. To this, without a doubt, they add their gender perspective highlighting the differential role of women in their communities and the relevance of their own agenda: sexual and reproductive health, violence of all kinds, patriarchal practices and visions of power, inequity in income and development opportunities.<sup>1</sup>

While their struggles were uneven and difficult, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic was, according to one of them, an "atomic bomb" that fell on the community. Imagining the many challenges they would be forced to face, we set out to return to them to accompany and inquire on how they were impacted, what reactions they were having at the personal and community level, what their governments were doing for their communities, and also how they saw the future once the pandemic ended, if that ever happens. Thus, during the month of June, July and August we interviewed them remotely (thanks zoom!) and talked to them and other community leaders in the region. And again we are amazed and shocked by their audacities, their freedoms and their generosity. On the pages that follow, we try to show and share as faithfully the results of that research and our own reflections that derived from it.

Clearly, we have not intended to cover all the realities of the vast territory of Latin America but to be able to illustrate this complex panorama from some paradigmatic examples.

---

<sup>1</sup> [The argument for community philanthropy: How practice creates resources, capacity, and trust at the local level and why it is important](https://www.issuelab.org/resource/the-case-for-community-philanthropy-how-the-practice-builds-local-assets-capacity-and-trust-and-why-it-matters.html). Joint publication of the Aga Khan Foundation in the United States, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Global Fund for Community Foundations and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Available in: <https://www.issuelab.org/resource/the-case-for-community-philanthropy-how-the-practice-builds-local-assets-capacity-and-trust-and-why-it-matters.html>



## 2. THE OLD NORMAL: WAS IT NORMAL?

### Latin American pandemics before COVID-19

Inequality is a historical and structural feature of Latin American and Caribbean societies, and it has remained and reproduced even in periods when the region enjoyed economic prosperity. Inequality in access to health, education and development is an obstacle to poverty eradication, sustainable development and the guarantee of people's rights. Undoubtedly, this inequality that has been lived for generations in Latin America is the consequence of an undiversified and environmental service-based productive matrix on the one hand and a culture of the privilege of a few elites, on the other. This strong web that breeds from generation to generation fosters a vicious cycle in which the reproduction of inequalities of socio-economic origin intersects with gender, territorial, ethnic, racial and generational inequalities.

The result is a region of 650 million inhabitants (CELADE, 2019) that has an upward trend in poverty and extreme poverty levels. In 2018, 30.1% of the region's population was under the poverty line, while 10.7% lived in extreme poverty, rates that increased to 30.8% and 11.5%, respectively, in 2019, according to ECLAC projections. Inequality in income distribution, expressed in the Gini index, is the highest on the planet. Finally, while central governments' social spending has increased from 10.3% to 11.3% of GDP between 2011 and 2018, reaching 52.5% of total public spending, those countries facing the greatest challenges in meeting the 2030 Agenda targets have lower levels of spending and social investment.<sup>2</sup>

In short, the Latin American region was in a very weak position to be able to deal effectively and socially fairly with the multiple health, social, economic and political dimensions of the pandemic. Most governments were unable to prevent the expansion of COVID-19 and its devastating impact on society.

### The situation of Women in LAC before COVID-19

According to ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), the Latin American and Caribbean region (LAC) has made significant progress in recent years in some dimensions of equality between women and men, which were achieved at different speeds, in accordance with the deep heterogeneity that exists between the countries of the region. In recent times, however, progress has found limits, already to sustain itself, already to expand. Overrepresentation of women among people in poverty, lack of own and sufficient income, over-paid labour, gaps in economic participation, and unemployment rates

---

<sup>2</sup> CELADE - ECLAC Population Division. Review 2019 and United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. <https://www.cepal.org/en/notes/celade-population-division-eclac-pleased-present-its-readers-2019-edition-demographic>

consistently higher than men show that significant challenges remain to be faced for men and women to live on a level playing field and equity and to fully enjoy their rights.

The uneven distribution of income increased sharply from the early 1980s to the year 2000 and then continued to increase, but more slightly. Economic autonomy is a fundamental pillar of women's autonomy and, by definition, requires women to receive income to overcome poverty and have their time freely to train, access the labour market, develop professionally and personally, actively participate in social and political life, and dedicate themselves to their loved ones without becoming a barrier to achieving their own aspirations. Monetary income and time are finite and often scarce resources. Women have less access to money and other productive resources such as land, training and technologies. In turn, they have less of their own time to devote themselves to the daily care and well-being of their family members. This undermines their autonomy and does not allow for distributional equality in homes or society as a whole. The notion of citizenship is also present in the debate of women's economic autonomy, as it is rescued as one of the approaches to addressing gender poverty in the region and making women's empowerment and participation visible in the decision-making and economic processes of society.

However, in the case of women, having incomes is often a basis, but it does not necessarily mean exercising full autonomy from an economic point of view, as their incomes are so low and their jobs so informal that they do not allow them to exceed the poverty line, whether individual or from their homes. Nor because of the informality of their occupations, project a possible future for them.

Women are in a vicious cycle, in a social trap that does not provide them with access to the necessary education that would allow them to be able to insert themselves more competitively into the formal labour market in order to be able to guarantee stability, health and income for themselves and their families. And in that context, to be able to recover their rights and their citizen autonomy.

### 3. THE "GENEROUS" IN THE OLD NORMAL



*We won't go back to normal because normal was the problem*

The "old normality" in Latin America, although today it produces nostalgia in many, was not a rose garden, as described in the introduction of this document. Moreover, this "old normality" could be attributed to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of environmental deterioration, uncontrolled globalization and consumption, global warming, and genetic mutations resulting from interventions in nature and its life cycles.

The lives of the women we discussed in *Rebellion of the Everyday*, beyond their geographical and cultural diversity, they had common <sup>3</sup>aspirations and struggles: such as free access to sexual and reproductive health for all, equal access to credit to enable them to develop

---

<sup>3</sup> Roitstein, Florencia and Thompson, Andres. [The rebellion of the everyday. Generous women who change Latin America \(in Spanish\)](#), Editorial Biblos, Buenos Aires, 2020.

economically, equal pay for the same responsibility as men, access to positions of responsibility and decision-making in the private and public sector, quotas to demand women's active participation in political parties and on board of directors, and more.

In their stories, "They speak of love and anger. They talk about how difficult it is to work in their communities where there is sometimes no water or electricity. From their confrontations with the leaders, with the politicians, with the officials, with the traffickers of people, with the narcos, with those who do not listen, with which they wait for exaggerated times. They tell how they protect themselves, how they strive to improve, to study and train. They tell us about the good life, their school, their ward, their husbands and children, abortion, femicides, the authorities, what they believed and no longer believe, of their convictions. They tell us it's not about them, it's about the whole thing. They dream of their dreams and those of the next generations. They talk about loneliness and collectives. They talk about men who aren't there. They talk about not throwing in the towel. They talk about paradoxes and perplexities. They also say that they are seen in their African or indigenous ancestralities, in the land that gives us life, and gives us fungi and wild fruits that help us live better lives."

Their struggles run through a broad spinel: to clarify the enforced disappearances of people in the hands of narcos and traffickers; generating sources of income and self-esteem for Afro-descendant women and Andean indigenous populations; create new looks and practices on ecology and food sovereignty; use the art of theatre to show gender inequities; obtain basic services for community development; rescuing neighborhood identities through photography; politically impact on the advancement of sexual and reproductive rights; literacy by promoting reading; generate a new awareness of sexualities in youth movements; defend the right to body, land and territory; opening up new avenues for women's insertion into the workforce; improve the legal status of Latino immigrants in the United States; protect the environment and natural resources; preserve the biocultural heritage of native peoples; advance the rights of sex workers; ethically manage industrial waste; create women's community enterprises; reintegrating inmates into a new life; promote fair trade, the solidarity economy and responsible consumption; denounce and address gender-based violence and femicides.

They create new organizations where there are no, or where those that are do not fulfill their function; march and protest in the streets; they travel through the territories raising awareness; provide services, guide, assist; visit prisons, ministries and courts; climb the mountains and hills in search of fungi, wild fruits or missing relatives; travel long distances to be present, reach out and listen; they always listen, and they also tell their truths; knock on government doors; organize fairs and exhibitions to show the fruit of their work; create new businesses; they use word, hands, mind, and grace; organize meetings, train, teach, write, create.

They are primary caregivers of children and the elderly; those who accompany young women to decide on their pregnancies and abortions; those who care for their homes and

organize the family economy when their peers (when there are) work "out there" to bring a resource to the home; those who patiently converse with the youth who have broken the law. They are entrepreneurs when it comes to imagining new ways of doing old things; when they organize a self-care network against domestic violence through the use of cell phones; those who create companies with their eyes on social good rather than monetary; those who use art in its various forms as an instrument of social inclusion. They are the educators when they teach how to make a homemade sweet, how to detect sexist violence, how to identify the properties of the fruits of the earth and preserve them for times of scarcity. They are educators when they set up libraries in their own home and recruit the children in the ward to read; when they make cards about sexual and reproductive health; when they make sure their children travel huge distances to attend school; when they pass on their ancestral knowledge to the new generations; when they build and reinforce community identities. They are rural workers, construction workers, sociologists, journalists, activists, militants, teachers, entrepreneurs.

They tell us that generosity is reciprocal, that it is the same as solidarity, that it gives them shyness to think so. They tell us about the lack of resources to do what they do, but they still sooner or later get them because someone in the community joins in. They think that without the generosity of many people they couldn't do what they do. They talk about giving, delivering, listening, transmitting knowledge, being attentive. They know how to mobilize resources in, to and from the community: everything goes, the time, the effort, the ideas, the moneys they collect between all, the volunteer hours, the contributions of specialists from outside, the meals they prepare for meetings, the tears they keep hidden in their pillows. They do not know very well what community philanthropy is, but they exercise it daily and at all hours."

### **Community philanthropy**

Why do we call their activities "community philanthropy"? For some of the several reasons already pointed out by Doan:<sup>4</sup>

- Their initiatives and the action of their **organizations are easily integrated into the social** environment as they arise from there. Although some do not have a well-defined geographic basis, they are aware of local codes, existing resources, and how best to leverage them;
- The **relationships they establish are a priority** for any type of initiative as they generate the necessary basis of trust for the mobilization of local social capital;
- Although they may have emerged as "women's movements for survival" it is usually the first step<sup>5</sup> **in paying attention to the root causes and needs** of their

---

<sup>4</sup> What is community philanthropy? — A guide to understanding and applying community philanthropy Dana R.H. Doan In <https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/WhatIsCommunityPhilanthropy.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Moon, Lola, *Women's movements in Latin America and the renewal of history*, Creativity feminista.org, Mexico (2004)

communities, incorporating a feminist dimension. Thus "community participation has been the possibility that many women have found to face the daily challenge of ensuring the daily reproduction of their family";<sup>6</sup>

- They also exercise the **capacity to convene and facilitate** community processes in an open and honest manner seeking to articulate their initiatives with multiple private and public actors;
- As they organize, these women greatly **expand their capacity to mobilize material, symbolic and human resources** for the benefit of their communities;
- They all exercise responsible **leadership in** their organizations, thus building trust in their membership, building a culture of dialogue and consensus that allows them to empower themselves and talk equally to those who hold power.

---

<sup>6</sup> Pereyra, Brenda. "Gender, poverty and power. The participation of women at the community level", in Pena, Muria et al. *Development and women's rights. Participation and leadership in community organizations*, Ed. Ciccus 2013, Buenos Aires.

## 4. A BOMB DROPPED: COVID-19

### **Health, economic, social and political crises: reactions and governance**

A separate chapter of the global battle against COVID-19 is being played in Latin America, testing national and regional capacities to meet a challenge that goes far beyond a health-only crisis. The different responses of the public administrations that have been given so far call into question the capacity for regional coordination and expose the fragility of the institutions, the social model and the capacities of collaboration and cross-sectoral articulation.

It has been less than three months since COVID-19 arrived in Latin America since it was detected in December 2019 in China's Wuhan Province, ground zero of the first crisis. From Asia he jumped to Europe, with an epicenter in Italy and Spain, extending to France, Germany and the rest of the European territory. Within weeks, the United States, faced with the passivity of the Trump administration, and the world's surprise, became the first focus with the largest number of contagions, significantly outpervising China. This rate of spread has set off alarms across the continent. The reaction, however, has not been the same everywhere. Some countries, drawing policies and practices by public authorities in Asia and Europe, decided to take the same drastic measures. This is the case in Argentina, for example, where a rapid reaction was made by the newly assumed president Alberto Fernández, who was backed by the opposition and who led the 55 million inhabitants to total confinement. Chilean President Sebastián Piñera, who was going through his lowest hours of popularity in March 2020, decided to declare the "state of catastrophe and siege" for 90 days, causing the plebiscite to be postponed to October on the amendment of the constitution planned in April and militarizing the streets throughout the country. Parliamentary and presidential elections in Bolivia were also postponed. Other presidents of the region have also taken radical measures such as Martín Vizcarra of Peru, Iván Duque de Colombia, Mario Abdo Benítez in Paraguay, the controversial Nayib Bukele of El Salvador, Alejandro Giammattei of Guatemala or Laurentino Cortizo of Panama.

A common denominator that has gone through the decisions of the vast majority of public authorities in the region is the confusion at the top of government power (presidents and ministers), the contradictory messages they convey to the population, and the absence of proactive practices to contain contagion. In addition to this, a paternalistic vision and its consequence appear; the curtailment of public freedoms. Also, the total lack of articulation with civil society organizations and locally based organizations.

Drastic confinement measures, however, have not produced the expected results and the level of contagion has continued to grow in all countries in the region, with the exception of Uruguay (until the time of writing).

After the first months of the epidemic and in the absence of public responses to the most immediate consequences of confinement (lack of economic income), people began to leave for the purpose of doing some kind of work that would allow them to generate minimal

resources to take home. For example, the director of the National Institute of Health and Colombia's highest epidemiological authority, Martha Ospina, has recently stated in several forums that Colombia does not have the "financial muscle" necessary to maintain strict and general quarantines on an ongoing basis. This implies that the effect of restrictions on the economic passing of the most vulnerable households without another source of income than day-to-day life is too strong, and therefore the norm ends up not being able to be respected. This limit is actually common to all of Latin America, and the main reason why confinement failed to suppress contagion at the levels it did in Europe (at the time of writing): regardless of what the rule said, deep confinement is less sustainable in societies with high levels of poverty and informality and no public unemployment infrastructure and unemployment insurance which is the prevailing situation in the vast majority of countries in the region.



Other presidents in the region have been more reluctant to implement drastic measures such as quarantine, and even some still doubt the seriousness of the events. Leaders ideologically as distant as Brazilian Jair Bolsonaro and Mexico's Andrés Manuel López Obrador have been criticized for their lack of reflexes in analyzing the challenge. The first, in his follow-up strategy in Washington, initially called the pandemic "gripecita" and has continued to campaign against quarantine measures autonomously decreed by some governors of states, such as Joao Doria in Sao Paulo or Wilson Witzel in Rio de Janeiro. Bolsonaro's anti-quarantine campaign, which reads "Brazil cannot stop," led Judge Laura Bastos Carvalho of Rio de Janeiro to order the Brazilian government to "refrain" from promoting attitudes of rejection of confinement measures.

In Mexico, the president rejected the confinement measures and only after approaching thousands of infections did he recommend staying home. Both Bolsonaro and López Obrador have experienced significant declines in public approval rates and what happens in the coming months can have consequences for their political future, especially for the Brazilian who can see his re-election possibilities dissipated. Case aside is Nicaragua, where the presidential couple, formed by Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo, have refused to take action and promoted a demonstration of support with the slogan "Love in COVID-19 times".

This country, which has been in a political crisis for years, with accusations of violent repression of the opposition, has barely reported a fortnight of imported *suspected* cases and a coronavirus death, but there are doubts about this data over the lack of transparency and access to information.

The coronavirus crisis threatens the precarious stability of Latin America, a region crossed by entrenched conflicts and waves of protests, and which the pandemic caused them to be postponed, although they will no doubt resurface at the end of the alarm. Distance measures and fear of contagion temporarily demobilized the population, but the causes of the protests not only did not go away, but even worsened given the impact the epidemic is having on the population, both in the medical and economic and social areas. Although with great differences, in most Latin America access to quality health care is very unequal. Public services are often in deficit and the middle classes are mostly served by a private sector that is inaccessible to much of the population. According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the proportion of health spending is well below optimal – only 3.7% of GDP – although it should be at least 6%. The number of health workers is also below, with the exception of Cuba, which has once again asserted its health capacity to provide support, not only in Latin America, but also in China, Italy or Spain. According to PAHO, 30% of the region's population does not have adequate access to medical care due to economic deficiencies.



The economic consequences are also devastating. Most countries in the region are characterized by selling environmental services and value-added commodities. The vast majority were just coming out of the crisis and initiating timid recovery processes that will be truncated with the cessation of activities and the collapse of commodity prices. There is also Argentina's delicate economic situation and the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. In the first case, its relative better health structure is limited by the scarcity of financial resources. In the case of Venezuela, large-scale humanitarian aid will become essential and

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michele Bachelet has already called for an analysis of the effects of international sanctions on the population.

In addition to the consequences on the region's public finances, it is difficult to venture the damage of this situation to the incomes of informal sector workers, which in many countries exceed 50% of the labour market and are unprotected. Some governments have announced minimum income aid, but it has not been easy to make these aid operational immediately and resources are limited and well below the economic needs to cover the family basket.

In most countries in the region, the pandemic has been triggering the first setback in human development indicators since 1990. It is projected that 30 million people will fall into poverty, the number of unemployed will increase to more than 44 million, the drop in productivity and the economic decline will be so deep that it is estimated that it will be until 2023 when activity levels recover to 2019 levels. The IMF (International Monetary Fund) estimated the drop in productivity in the region three times greater than in other emerging regions. Moreover, the acute health crisis will be accompanied by an uncompensating economic and social decline in the developing world.

This health crisis is also a crisis of national and regional governance, which calls into question the leadership's ability to articulate transparent policies that help control the pandemic. Regional crisis management instruments are lacking at times like this. CELAC, led by a hesitant López Obrador, has been unable to react to the challenges of the pandemic. PAHO has technical answers, but lacks political and financial operability. It cannot be said that the arrival of COVID-19 in Latin America was a surprise. It was an announced visit, but there was no anticipation and the reaction is limited by structural deficiencies that are based on weak institutions and inequitable and dependent growth models.

The coronavirus will pass, but will leave in sight new scars of endemic inequality in the region. While there may be a vaccine or medical treatment that will offer individual solutions, the impacts of the crisis and the social problems generated related to policy and governance will persist in various dimensions.

First, the bad political decisions that were made without an in-depth analysis of the reality and context in which ordinary citizens live. From the slogan "stay at home" to millions of people who do not have a house but a rug on the side of the routes, to "wash your hands" to 30% who do not have access to drinking water, to "social distancing" for 28% of the population of the region living overcrowded in rudimentary squares shared among several families with children. Rulers have overacted, running in ways without building effective measures to control the spread of the virus and massive contagions in entire neighborhoods.

Second, party divisions and the fragility of politics to generate consensual agendas and programmatic articulations between sectors that facilitate the assembly of lines of action for health and citizenship care.

Third, chronic investment in public health is not only fueled by political ideologies on what the role of the state is, but above all by the deep levels of corruption in the public health care system that did not even cease during the pandemic.

Fourth, the rules of collusion between the state and the market that have chronically and systematically expanded the divide between the poor and the rich, by left-wing or right-wing ideologies, and which have made this region the one with the most difference between the poor and the rich.<sup>7</sup>

In Latin America, citizens devote a lot of attention to how governments behave, respond, and provide solutions. Whether at the municipal, provincial and/or national level. The deep failure that is currently being lived in the region has taken rulers to the lowest levels of positive image in history. For most societies, it is no longer a question of reactivation or recovery, but of rebuilding a social fabric, of a deep debt that today like never before can no longer be hidden.

The pandemic has once again demonstrated the improvisation of rulers and the inability to create responses tailored to the real needs of citizens. There is no in-depth analysis of the current scenario and not even a plan tailored to the real post-pandemic needs. The "new normal" is still invented by grassroots social organizations, including those led by women. Hundreds of thousands of women in Ecuador, Guatemala, Chile, who took advantage of their skills, resources and social mobilization capabilities and put the future in their hands, and together with others put chains of care, health, food and child education.

The time has come for women to be the focus of new governance, because they have long changed the rules of the game to reduce grotesque inequality and create equal opportunities for their families, their neighbors, their communities, and their network of allied organizations. The good news is that in Latin America and the Caribbean the population is seeing them on the streets, in the houses, in the media, in parliaments and seeing them united and organized, they support, accompany and join them. Those are the stories of the "generous."

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/40668-la-matriz-la-desigualdad-social-america-latina>



### **The impact of the pandemic to communities and women in particular**

The COVID-19 pandemic, it has already been said, highlighted in Latin America other previously existing "pandemics" such as hunger and poverty, femicides and other forms of violence against women, deficits in sexual and reproductive health policies, and environmental deterioration.

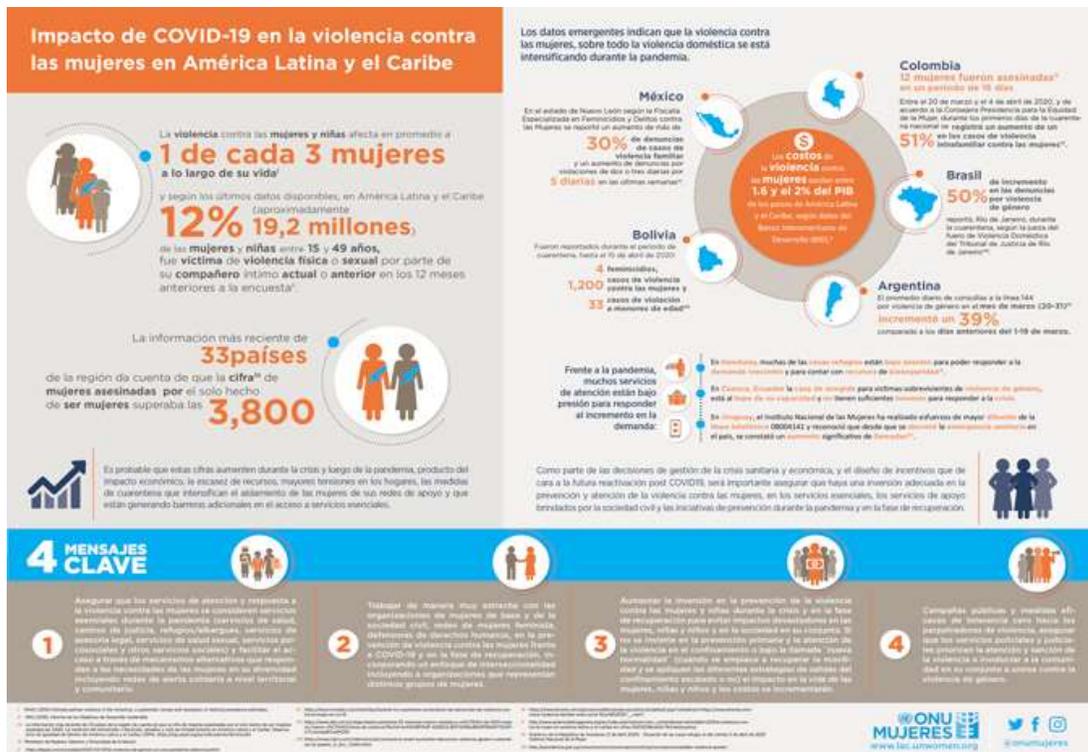
The region has been a pioneer in the world for the accelerator measures of equality in politics, with the adoption of quota laws and parity laws. Despite the efforts, women remain underrepresented in power, in all state institutions (on regional averages: 30.6% parliamentary, 28.5% in ministerial cabinets, 15.5% mayors and 32.1% in the highest court of justice), which is why States should have redoubled efforts to ensure women's equal participation in crisis response mechanisms , what didn't happen. Among OAS Member States, only 8 countries have Health Ministers, they make up 70% of the workforce in the health sector, but account for only 25% of leadership positions. WHO notes that "women provide health and men lead it" and has estimated that achieving gender equality in the health sector will take 202 years.<sup>8</sup>

According to various government and intergovernmental sources, the main effects of the pandemic on women have been:

---

<sup>8</sup> COVID-19 in women's lives. Reasons to Recognize Differentiated Impacts, Inter-American Commission on Women, 2020. Viewed at: <http://www.oas.org/es/cim/docs/ArgumentarioCOVID-19-ES.pdf>

- **Confinement forces women to be locked up with their abusers.** Considering that the home is the most dangerous place for women, lockdown increases the risk of violence against them as the time of coexistence increases; conflicts arise around domestic and family issues; violence continues without being interrupted and a perception of the aggressor's safety and impunity is generated. As an illustration, the table below shows the evolution of cases of violence against women during the pandemic in some countries.



- **Locking up girls leads to increased sexual violence against them and increased complications to stay in schooling processes.** Confinement makes girls more exposed to abuse and violence, adding to the risk of post-pandemic drop-out and exclusion.
- **Increased violence against women and girls on the internet (cyberviolence).** Technology is at this time of emergency and isolation a fundamental tool for access to information, education, work and even facilitates access to services for women victims of violence, but it also opens new paths for perpetrators. This leads to increased exposure of victims in networks and activates the network of sexual predators.
- **Violent attacks and harassment against health workers** - a collective of a majority of women - in homes and in means of transport. Given that health workers are made up mostly of women, these violent manifestations take specific forms against women and have differentiated impacts.

- **Reporting is difficult on the grounds of gender.** Women have a huge fear of breaking quarantine orders and health and circulation restrictions, which is exacerbated by their roles in care and protection.
- **Women's violence care and protection services are not designed to respond to situations** arising from the COVID-19 emergency..
- **Confinement exacerbates the care crisis**, increasing women's overall workload. According to the ILO (International Labour Organization), women are in charge of 76.2% of all hours of unpaid care work (more than three times as many as men), and they are the ones who have double or triple working hours, a situation that has been aggravated by confinement measures, particularly in families with preschool children or who cannot self-assume distance education. The current situation has also worsened in families where a member suffers from a chronic illness or is in charge of dependent older adults, both risk groups for coronavirus. This increased workload negatively impacts paid work and women's health, especially in the absence of institutionalized care systems.
- **In times of economic crisis, the risk to poor women** increases. In 2017, for every 100 men living in poor households in the region, there were 113 women in similar situations. On the other hand, around 2017, the percentage of women without own income reached a regional average of 29.4% while for men the figure was 10.7%. In other words, nearly one-third of women in the region are economically dependent, a condition that exposed them to greater vulnerability.
- **Domestic workers are more exposed to job losses** in conditions than condemn them to poverty. In Latin America, 11.2% of women work as domestic workers, the lowest-income sector in the economy, and little or no protection. Domestic workers face the double risk of contagion from continuing to work, or poverty for quitting work in informal situations where they do not have access to paid leave.
- **Migrant workers are experiencing serious economic and health** consequences. In particular, migrant women engaged in care and domestic work are experiencing serious economic and health consequences as a result of the crisis. Travel restrictions can prevent women from coming to work or can be abandoned because of health risk, while the irregularity of migrant workers can impact their access to health services and other resources. Migrant women, including refugee women and displaced by conflict and other emergencies, can also face particular challenges, especially lack of access to health services. By March 2020, more than 4.9 million people had left Venezuela, mainly reaching other South American countries. In addition to a shortage of essential supplies and health services, migrant care centres, shelters or immigration detention centres may present overcrowded conditions that create increased risks of infection.
- **Afro-descendant and indigenous women face greater** risks. This is due to socioeconomic inequality and other associated factors such as lack of drinking water

and malnutrition. In addition to facing increased risk of contagion, they may face less access to health and health resources. Several indigenous peoples in the region have made the decision to isolate themselves voluntarily, to try to avoid the risk of infection. In general, Afro-descendant populations do not have this option, as they live more in urban areas in overcrowded conditions and lack of basic health infrastructure.

- **Women have less access to technology.** Globally, there are 200 million more men than women with Internet access, and women are 21% less likely to have a mobile phone, a key resource in developing countries where phones provide access to security, containment and organization networks, early warning systems, mobile health care, and money transfers. In the context of COVID-19, this digital gender gap has crucial implications for women's access to health information and services, public news on isolation and quarantine measures.

## 5. THE VOICES OF COMMUNITIES: A GENDER LENS

Throughout the interviews we conducted, we have been able to see in practice the different dimensions of the impact that the development of the COVID-19 pandemic has had on women, their communities and their own personal lives.

Regardless of the various public policies adopted by governments in the region, there were three common messages - derived from international knowledge regarding the pandemic - that were issued and largely summarize the titles of impacts.



"Staying at home" had several parallel messages to raise awareness of its importance: caring for their families, preventing the spread of the virus, saving lives, confining themselves. The message did not take into account the difficulties of all kinds that meant for millions of people in the region to do so.

First of all, because of the lack of something that can be called "home". The data presented in the first section clearly illustrate the situation of overcrowding and lack of a house for millions of losses.

Secondly, the house is not a safe place for many women as data shows that most femicides and situations of violence against women take place at home.

Third, the slogan of "staying at home" meant significantly increasing women's time spent free of charge on care.

Fourth, almost half of the Latin American population does not have access to the internet, so staying at home meant disconnection with the outside world, thus creating a greater gap in access to others, information, opportunities, insurance, jobs, etc.

Fifth, though perhaps unthined, in fact, provoked social demobilization and a paralysis of civil society in its claims of social justice.

As said by Marcos Aguila, professor at UAM Xochimilco, **"For those downstairs, staying home is hell, and leaving home a leap into the void."**<sup>9</sup>

### **Reinventing themselves and their organizations**

"Staying at home" therefore had expected implications and others not so much. Saskia Niño de Rivera, director of Mexico's Inserta civil association, working on assistance and defending the human rights of the prison population, said: *"First I entered a survival mode, thinking about how to reinvent myself and the organization. We couldn't get into prisons because they're tremendous pockets of infection. There are twice as many cases as the national average. We couldn't expose our team that way. It was our turn to understand how to be present without physical presence, which is what inmates need most. We are a territory organization by definition."*

On a more personal level, Saskia states that *"I have had to confront myself, I have had to reinvent myself and make personal decisions. And my handling of emotions is not the best thing about me. Motherhood feels very strong when you're locked up, you're home and you don't play with me, my daughter tells me. I felt guilty about working at home. This is a feeling I have to control. I brought a girl into the world: what world was I wondering? I didn't choose this, I wouldn't have brought my daughter into this world, without being able to be with other children, or be free."* But before long, I reacted and said, **"I'm not going to stay in my house watching people starve."**

By contrast, Ana Arocena, entrepreneur and co-founder of Triex in Montevideo, Uruguay, did not stay at home. *"We, as we are a waste management activity, and do not stop, were never quarantined. We've been doing ordinary life since day one. Our duties couldn't stop. It was weird: the message was "stay home" but we were still on the street working, although that didn't prevent the anguish of going against the current and the fear of getting sick."*

From the place of owner of a company, Ana points out that they had to invest heavily in new conversations with their value chain (employees, suppliers, investors). In their company they have not had any positive cases of COVID-19, but the vast majority of their employees preferred not to go to work and stay at home. They came to an agreement that anyone who did not go to work would not be sanctioned, but would not receive the pay. This led to significant growth in absenteeism. *"We had to manage fear and not disease,"* Ana concludes.

*"Normality was violent, it was poverty,"* says Kendra Avilés of Guatemala's Incide Joven organization. According to her, *"the pandemic has uncontrolled everything,"* even if the previous situation was nothing flattering. *"The Guatemalan government has had a lot of irresponsibility in the current health situation (spending economic resources on the*

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.animalpolitico.com/blog-invitado/la-pandemia-y-la-guerra/>

*construction of hospitals that were never even opened) and has left the situation to the fate of the citizens: to whom it gives, bad luck, and to whom it is not, it is saved."*

Like many other women, Kendra had to attach himself to remote work from home, with the overhead involved. *"It's overflowing,"* she says, when it comes to the number of virtual meetings he holds. He had to limit his personal and work circulation due to quarantine, like everyone else. *"We had to change everything, we had already organized the strategy, the actions and we had to change the whole budget, the work plan, but not the objectives. It allowed us to think again, in the ways of working. We don't set new priorities, we just change the shapes."* Like other women in other regions, she is afraid of the greatest violence against women: *"The pandemic showed the crises that already existed, brought to light issues that were previously invisible."*

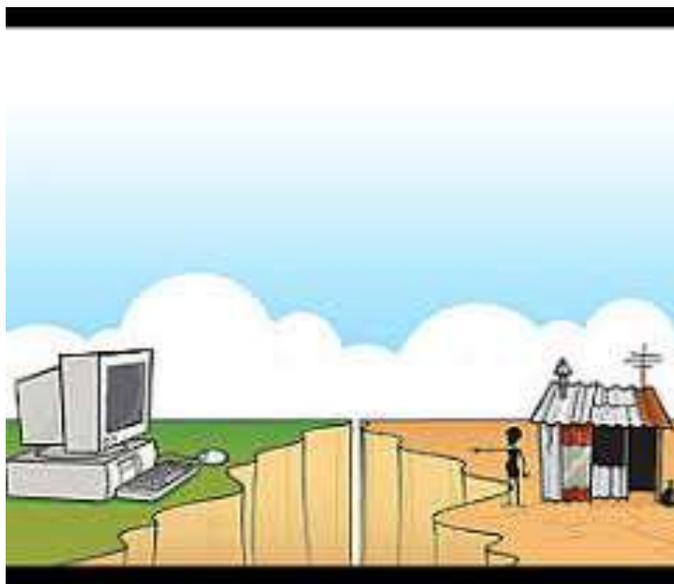
*"For us women's human rights defenders in Nicaragua, the situation has become very complicated. We come from a state repression situation to which the pandemic now adds. So, we have to hide from repression and also from the Covid"* says without ambages Felicita, of FUNDECOM in Nicaragua. *"Here we are swimming against the current. The government said the coronavirus was only for the rich, for wealthy people. People believed it and therefore don't take care of themselves, they don't wear a mask. Hospitals are saturated, so people stay at home and self-medicate with anything, and they're dying... Our situation is much worse than the Covid. We are now working virtually trying to accompany women victims of violence. For them, staying at home has meant more violence. We are accompanying community advocates with food and cleaning kits. We do what we can with what we have. Our motto today is to take care of ourselves, to take care of others."*

In the same sense, Rebeca Thompson Cortese, executive director of the Football for Development Foundation (FUDE) operating in greater Buenos Aires, Argentina: *"For us, it radically changed our practice because our axis of work is in personhood, we are the ode to presence, to be, to accompany, the face to face. The impossibility of physical presence put on the table the fragility of our institution. We have been on an absolute level of precariousness for years trying to improve the quality of life of families. COVID-19 did not create a non-existent situation, but exacerbates the reality of structural precariousness that has no rest. We must reinvent and restore the way we bond and join us. For example, we wanted to make a popular pot, years working so as not to be a dining room, and think beyond. We think: there's water, there's cooking, but how do we communicate with people? Half of people don't access social media, how is contingency supported in that fragility? So we're rethinking from this perspective, from this fragility."*

### **Digital exclusion from communities**

Within that rethinking, it is clear in stating that *"We cannot resolve what is not known, for example, what connectivity do we have? Now we learn that we have seven members of a family with a single phone. Remote educational continuity is impossible. Doing informal work - a "changa" - becomes difficult because you're not on the net, how do you do it? We*

*need to know better the fragility, the weaknesses. We always think about other things, today it is our turn to worry and take care of what conditions we are virtualizing this network of work. Digital inclusion is a very complex process. The mega gap is digital exclusion. In addition, only 30% of people have sewers and 40% mains water and the rest do not. The situation is super-critical, at the housing, health, educational, violence..."*



Indeed, digital exclusion has been one of the issues that has become clearest in recent times. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and its Special Rapporteurship on Freedom of Expression (RELE) expressed through a statement their concern about serious limitations on the lack of internet access in the region of the most vulnerable sectors of the population and the consequent limitation on the exercise of other fundamental rights, particularly affecting indigenous communities, the Afro-descendant population, women, children, children and adolescents and the elderly, among other groups.

As expressed in the statement issued by Washington-based organization of American States (OAS), "*in the current context of health emergency generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, people's access to a quality internet acquires an unavoidable centrality. Based on the isolation and/or social distancing measures imposed by governments at the global level and their extension over time, internet connection appears as the tool par excellence to continue the day-to-day tasks that previously required face-to-face contact, as well as being crucial for the exercise of civil, political, economic and cultural rights.*"<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://ladiaria.com.uy/politica/articulo/2020/9/cidh-manifiesta-su-preocupacion-por-falta-de-acceso-a-internet-de-sectores-vulnerables-en-el-marco-de-la-pandemia-de-coronavirus/>

According to figures from the International Telecommunication Union, in the Americas almost 23% of the population does not have access to the Internet, at different levels by country, subregion and community. In Latin America and the Caribbean, an estimated 300 million people do not have access. The highest disconnect rates are mainly found in countries in Central America, the Caribbean and South America.

### **State absent in the territories**

*"Here the Constitution is dead letter" claims without any doubt Sonia España, founder and director of the Afro-Ecuadorian Progressive Women Group, in Guayaquil, Ecuador, and coordinator of the social enterprise Africa Mía. His work and life take place on the Trinitarian Island, Nigeria sector. From there, she sees that "in Ecuador the latest and worrying novelty is that corruption of those in political office and in hospitals is discovered in the midst of the epidemic. We are naturalizing everyone stealing, including the president."*

*In its Nigeria sector, the situation is alarming: "Kids don't study, education was limited, there are fewer jobs, and they take it as if it were natural. We went from house to house telling them not to go out, we bring you the food, if you don't have to go out, stay home. Not everyone listened, but most of them took care of the same time, washed their hands, used hubs. Control was a success. Now that we're at yellow traffic lights, people stayed, but they ate what they saved and are out of resources to go on living. We have an immense number of unemployed, men and women, and children who do not study because there is no face-to-face class but through technology. But we don't have, so the boys are on the street doing nothing. The consequences will be very serious. Kids have nothing to do. If you don't take a corrective what can happen is for these guys to start delinquenting and the girls get pregnant, they're all on the street with nothing to do, everything recreational is closed."*

The unemployment generated by COVID-19 *"is a very negative effect because you eat what there is, what the situation allows you to achieve, there are homes where you eat once a day, depend on the neighbor. The one who is poorly fed is going to have consequences on his health. Now it's harder for the neighbor to give you because he doesn't have any for him, right now we don't have any,"* Sonia adds.

His criticism is strong: *"Now a new humanitarian law is published, which harms those who have the least, that we pay more tax, it is worrying, because they do not let us organize ourselves so that we can talk as before, we cannot argue or go out and claim our rights, we are limited to understanding. That's not a humanitarian law."*

As serious as the situation of Afro-Ecuadorians is that of sex workers in Argentina. In our conversation with Georgina Orellano, director of the Association of Meretric Women of Argentina in Action for Our Rights (AMMAR) she reveals that<sup>11</sup>*"the state is completely absent to us. We are left out of state policy design, which highlights our labor precarization.*

---

<sup>11</sup> AMMAR is a trade union with 6,500 affiliates across the country and delegations in twelve provinces.

*It is not the same to have a job and social protection, and we do not have rights, we have no house to stay, some can normally pass their quarantine, but we have nothing, nor house, overcrowded companions in precarious conditions, sharing kitchen with 70 families, who cannot download their circulation permit because they have neither cellphone." In the context of social isolation during the pandemic, several sex workers completely turned to virtuality and thus managed to survive. But that's not the case for most: many workers don't have access to the internet and several more, not even cellular. This complicates them not only when generating money, but also when processing documents, subsidies, pensions. This accompaniment is also being done from AMMAR, with a social worker and a lawyer who once a week attend at headquarters.*

Just as blunt is the testimony of Rosa Vilches, social leader and leader of the Organized Women's Union (UFO) of Arica, Chile: *"Women feel lonely and out of work in covid. The bonds provided by the government are not a solution, on the contrary, there are other methods that could have been implemented, without the anguish of not knowing what they are going to pay for their children's food with. Then they started cooking menus out, delivering and helping each other; that one cook, that the other will deliver taking care of the contagion."*

She looks beyond his community and points out loud: *"No government was up to the task, at least here in Chile, of the situation. And we still have more time, what's going to happen, what are these women going to do? The national government delivers bonds of 50 thousand pesos, it reaches you for one person, but not for a family, it is not for everyone but for the very poor, also a box of merchandise for a family and the cost is 50 thousand if I bought it would cost less, and in Arica they have not even arrived. Public policies didn't help families. What do families live on if there is a curfew? I don't think the state should support everyone, but now I do, out of urgency. That they live in misery cannot and should not be done, people are not to blame for the epidemic. Here if you don't pay for the water, they cut it off. We're campaigning to stop paying for water, it's not understood that we have to keep paying for it when people don't have to pay for food. The rulers would have to help and make a change, what is the help that is received? Those who work in the construction in facilities, electricity, continue to work and since it is well paid there are no problems, that is why we were very good as an organization and the meetings we do by zoom and they are very important to support each other, they are catharsis".*

Teresita Cabrera is a social entrepreneur and journalist from Cuenca, Ecuador, and cooperates with other entrepreneurs. For her *"the first two weeks of covid were very difficult for me because I always articulate help, however, now it was super complicated. At first there was a bombardment of information, it was frustrating and then thinking about how to help because I couldn't go out and put together kits and so came up the platform I am Azuay to be able to help and avoid outsourcing them. There are days we are happy and others not so much. We had been told that the credits were frozen during quarantine, but in the end it wasn't, so a complaint is being made to the financial board because banks do what they want. It has greatly limited development support and is pure care. To us, as*

women, this moment is very complicated, there are many layoffs especially for women. First you earn less and then get fired first."

Teresita continues: *"The covid showed the lack of resources in health, in education, the collapse of the medical, educational, prison system, lack of digital access. There was even one issue of discrimination, looking for the other instead of conducting an internal process. The culprits were those of Wuhan and then those of... always looking and aiming, discriminating out. The countries that did best were the ones working on their value systems, such as a country, based on citizens and active participation. There were virtually no public policies, but emergency policies that are determined by governments without the participation of people. We ask that we be quarantined, which came from people to both national and provincial governments. They made a system of traffic lights, green, yellow and red and depending on that you had to stay home. There were no policies or actions for those who didn't work, so people came out and the contagion went up. It's easy to say stay home when you have privileges. They left free will, that the company can fire, so there is no job protection."*

The only exception in the region was perhaps Uruguay. Several sources report that it has been the only country that is managing the pandemic. In Ana's words, *"The Uruguayan Health System allowed to control the epidemic. The government gave unemployment insurance to those most affected, adapted to reality, opened up new figures that were previously associated only with dismissal. That was quick and successful; with the over 65s the same, paid licenses. Agile and robust institutions facilitated the rapid response of the system."*

### **Rural women**

Uruguay perhaps exemplifies the situation of rural women throughout the region. Before the pandemic, rural women were already the least employed sector of the population. In 2019, the employment rate for women living in localities under 5,000 inhabitants was 43.7%, according to data from the Immujeres (Public Institute) based on that year's Continuous Household Survey. This figure was 52.5% for women living in Montevideo and 47.7% for those residing in localities with more than 5,000 inhabitants.

To the lack or loss of work by the coronavirus, the factor "fear" is added: to contact, to spread. This fear, for Silvia Páez, vice president of Uruguay's Network of Rural Women's Groups, also had an impact on economic activity. *"The impact of the pandemic on rural women was very important because, in addition to fear, there was a significant shock in terms of their economic autonomy. Women stopped selling their products at neighborhood fairs, commuter markets or places where they used to get together and that was what allowed them to have that much-needed economic independence,"* Páez reflects. In that sense, she thinks there was a setback. *"Economic independence is necessary for anyone, but for women, when they had really started managing all that and having her small or big capital, they have missed a lot."*

It affected not only the women's economy, Páez clarifies, but the autonomy and independence they generally had in their own homes. *"We have seen that fear managed to a jog what we had achieved, because women had been empowered and, today, the fear of contact or to spread has caused them not to comeout,"* Paez assesses. In this line, the overload of care tasks – a phenomenon that was aggravated during the pandemic for women in all sectors – also fell heavily on the shoulders of rural women. *"Let us not forget that women remain the axis,"* Páez says, *"they are the ones in the house with their children, with their grandchildren and sometimes with the children of the pawns."*<sup>12</sup>



**"Washing your hands"** was another of the central messages in front of COVID-19. This, it is known, can decrease the chances of contagion. There is no doubt that, as a sanitary cut, washing your hands is essential as a prevention. What is still a paradox because, as we saw, there is a great lack of access for households to safe drinking water.

As a metaphor, it is an expression that means *"to misunderstand a matter concerning you and that has serious drawbacks, to decline all responsibility in it or to express the grave disgust with which one allows others to act in the matter"*. Thus understood, the women interviewed in no way "washed their hands" but all of them, as far as possible, sought alternatives so that their organizations could continue to function in different ways: adapting their work styles, reviewing the planning of activities, reinventing their main strategies, modifying their programs and even reconsidering the mission of their organizations.

For Saskia, *"it has been exhausting, in times of despair, to have to reinvent ourselves and the foundation. Uncertainty causes me distress, it is the uncertainty that we are all learning,*

---

<sup>12</sup> [https://ladiaria.com.uy/feminismos/articulo/2020/10/las-mujeres-rurales-dan-pelea-por-autonomia-economica-soberania-alimentaria-y-acceso-a-la-salud-frente-al-impacto-de-la-pandemia/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=feminismos](https://ladiaria.com.uy/feminismos/articulo/2020/10/las-mujeres-rurales-dan-pelea-por-autonomia-economica-soberania-alimentaria-y-acceso-a-la-salud-frente-al-impacto-de-la-pandemia/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=feminismos)

*including the government that tells us what to do, where it goes and that it does not go. Permanently I wondered: Be in touch without being in touch, as it is?"*

*Even with all the uncertainties in tow, Saskia didn't get paralyzed. "I founded a project to feed those who are hungry. We put incredible people together to do it collectively and put at least a million dollars together to buy food so no one runs out of food at the table. It was hard to implement because people in Mexico want to take to the streets and help, but now who's going out to hand out? logistics was complicated..."*

*Continuing her reflection, Rebeca notes: "Subsidizing poverty is dangerous. We have to checkmate the state, to the public as it is today, our attempts since civil society are going to be eyedroppers, NGOs are micro. In Argentina they have little impact, we are not considered relevant, we are as outsourced and not as decision-making. Organizations should be considered in territoriality, in their knowledge, and not just convened in emergencies or implementing ideas in other areas. Presence is very important to us."*

*Georgina also talks about the answers they were able to give: "At the national level we receive food aid from the government once a week, but we organize popular pots everyday, we distribute tours on weekends in Buenos Aires, we do cleaning days and distribution of hygiene products. We are articulated with the Latin American and Caribbean Network and Spain and other European countries. They are the ones that first alarmed us at the start of the pandemic, so we were able to get ahead of ourselves with a response and create a National Emergency Fund to support us."*

*The pandemic also prompted us to look inwards. "COVID-19 served to get to know each other more, endure us, and see how we can live among ourselves and whether we are able to succeed. Also for the man to realize that one attends to them, to the children, the kitchen, clean, buy. It was normal for them to see women locked up at home, taking care of everything. Having to lock themselves up, the work we do every day became visible. They saw how women have to take our own initiatives because we don't have state help" Sonia says. Her organization, Africa Mia, also had to rethink its activities and retraining them to the circumstances. They set about cooking and preparing food for the poorest families in their neighbourhood, distributing more than 100 food boxes per day, thanks to the support received from local philanthropy.*



But Africa Mia's reaction wasn't just food aid. Sonia says that *"we have rethought the revival of the women's economy through the community bank that will benefit 300 women; we are overrun with Venezuelan women, also Colombian women and apart from Afro women, we are so many that somewhere we have to start. 300 women, 3 dollars a week, it's 12 a month, at 4 months we're going to have leadership college training, investment plans, at 4 months we want to start giving us credit for our own silver, minimums of 100 onwards and starting to support small ventures that fell for covid. For example, the cakes, today came one and brought the 12 dollars, the whole month, here is the template, all annotated. This partner will have her business plan in September because she has the possibility to pay, for another 3 dollars she finds it difficult, so we are helping each other. For now it is our own investment without external support, we hope others will help us. We want these women to know their rights, be prepared and trained. Let them see that we are able to invest and not just spend as they tell us."*

Rosa tells how they reacted in Arica: *"I have the tools to take care of myself, but the women who are at home feel helpless. Then the family kiosk was formed in Olivia's house: everyone who has something left in her house leaves it at Olivia's and the ones missing something in the house go looking for it and if they have something on them they leave it, they leave the rice and take the sugar. That's how we try to collectively solve individual problems of lack of food or other things."*

Teresita also provides her examples to illustrate how they responded in Ecuador: *"We have organized talks for children, for young people, for adults, spaces of reflection to contain the community for what we are going through, and take the opportunity to talk about issues of*

*care of nature, breaking silence and isolation. Exchanging has been enhanced and everyone who can contribute to others, in that dynamic, we are exchanging services by food, advice of products so that crops are not lost, such as making jams, ferments, it is our turn to get creative and help each other."*

Felicita, from Nicaragua, think of beyond the pandemic. *"We need to think about developing more sustainable processes that prepare us to face everything. We are developing ideas to generate income for domestic workers who have run out of work, from a feminist economy perspective."*

### **Migrant women side by side with local women**

An important point to highlight is how these women also exercised their solidarity with migrant women, in this case Venezuelan and Colombian women in Ecuador, not only distributing food but also generating actions aimed at strengthening their capacities of self-management.



Another example of interest happened in Buenos Aires. Juana, 51, is a health promoter of the Front of Organizations in Struggle (FOL) and lives in Villa 1-11-14, the most populous in the city of Buenos Aires, since she arrived from Peru 20 years ago. Together with other people, social organizations, residents and staff of the General Hospital of Agudos Parmenio Piñero organized a street cut to report the situation and lack of health resources in the area in the face of the progression of COVID-19. Nothing new. The virus only highlighted the problems that already existed and are daily for those living in the popular neighborhoods of Buenos Aires in terms of housing, work, health. In other words, as to your basic citizens'rights.

*"Quarantine," says Juana, "asks us to resist in our homes. But when these become a place of danger because of lack of water or overcrowded conditions, it is urgent to take the street again as much as possible: concentrating with social distancing to denounce without being denounced."*



Juana belongs to the Berta Cáceres dining room. Since 11.30, neighbors in the neighborhood have set up a row that turns the block. This is the case every day since quarantine began. Some 100 families signed up to receive their food rations from Monday to Friday, another 100 were left on the waiting list. Joan walks the tail, alcohol in hand: hand out information, talk to people, answer questions and try to detect risky situations and potential cases of COVID-19.

At the door is Patricia, 43, responsible for people looking for her rations entering one by one. She arrived in Argentina from Bolivia four years ago. Her sister lives in the neighborhood and participates in the FOL, which is why she joined the organization. Today she even represents her in the "Migrate Is Not Crime" campaign, which defends and fights for the rights and regularization of migrants. Every Tuesday you have to do community hours in the dining room, fulfilling the tasks that are necessary for the solidarity machine to work: cook, receive merchandise, attend, among others. Since COVID-19 entered the neighborhood, Patricia has worked twice or triple to cover her companions who had to isolate themselves or were infected.

An unemployed woman, a young man who asks for some food, a family that approaches to bring something to her children. Patricia says there's always a partner willing to split her personal ration to share. But it's not just about giving, it clarifies, but explaining why that food came to your plate and what the organization does beyond the dining room and that vital delivery; explain that it is not magic or aiming, which is ant struggle and work since long before the pandemic.<sup>13</sup>



### **Indigenous communities**

It is also important to highlight how indigenous communities in the region, where women's prominence is unquestionable, addressed the pandemic. The case of Ecuador is also illustrative. Community organizations of indigenous peoples and local communities recognized as Territories of Life took a number of measures in the face of COVID-19's declaration of health emergency in Ecuador.<sup>14</sup>

Under a community care approach, they propose, decide and respond according to their cultures, their organizational capacities and the different territorial realities to which this emergency confronts them.

---

<sup>13</sup> <https://ladiaria.com.uy/lento/articulo/2020/9/mujeres-migrantes-frente-a-la-pandemia-en-la-villa-1-11-14/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://crespial.org/respuestas-comunitarias-los-territorios-vida-ecuador-la-emergencia/>

Their efforts contrast with the low level of compliance of different state agencies with their human rights and collective rights obligations, which establish efficient measures to protect the health and life of indigenous peoples and local communities and to provide them with culturally acceptable health care, as well as food or other humanitarian aid , where necessary, and without discrimination.



### **Networks of hope**

In the Amazonian peoples, the emergency also led to a revaluation of ancestral and community medicine. PSHA promotes among community authorities that all messages on prevention, hygiene and containment measures be shared with traditional sages and wise people so that they can translate and replicate them in Shuar Chicham and spread them with their wisdom among the representatives of each family.

In Sarayaku they are working to help young people learn with wise people the use of ancient medicine to strengthen defenses and the respiratory system.

In all these indigenous peoples and local communities, the emergency is perceived as a challenge to their own systems of social and territorial organization related to food sovereignty, an issue that has become a priority work axis for these organizations.

The food plan based on each community's own capabilities and the food traditions of Waorani families with managed biocultural orchards and groves is already underway, which are key to raising awareness of the current situation and making decisions in the face of the food crisis that generated the pandemic.

In Sarayaku *"women who are the center of ayllu [community], are concerned about the loss of chakras [crops], and know that we cannot neglect the provision of their own food for*

*community care. With mingas [community work] we are recovering and improving the chakras, exchanging seeds."*

At the same time, the great challenge presented by this emergency to the weakened public health system is the recognition of indigenous peoples and local communities as a principle of interculturality in public policy.

This involves making them visible, recognizing and respecting their territories, recognizing and enhancing their own rules and protocols before COVID-19. Only in this way is it possible to guarantee their collective rights, their fundamental human rights and the rights of nature in this national and global crisis.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Return of Bartering**

In Mexico, the first cases of coronavirus were recorded, according to official data, at the end of February. As of March 23, the "Healthy Distance" programme was launched to maintain "preventive isolation" in the population. However, no specific care plan for indigenous people had been announced until 20 April, although they account for 21.5% of the population, according to INEGI's (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía) 2015 Intercensal Survey.

This health emergency, highlighted by anthropologist Alicia Lemus, shows once again the historical debt that the State has to indigenous peoples, especially in health. *"Everything is designed,"* she stresses, *"for urban Mexico and not for rural and indigenous Mexico. There is abandonment and historical discrimination. And in situations like these, such an epidemic can erase us."*

Due to a lack of tourism and declining people on the streets, street sales have declined in Mexico during the pandemic months. The informal sector has been the most affected in reporting, in the first four months of the year, a 27.2% drop in employment, according to data from the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (Coneval). This hits hundreds of thousands of families and especially indigenous people.

Without government support or economic reserves to survive the pandemic, indigenous women take to the streets for food. ***"I'm afraid of coronavirus, but I have three mouths to feed. I can't stay locked up at home,"*** says Nereida Cruz, an Ottoman woman who lives in Mexico City. Because of the very low sales, women in their community chose to offer their products in exchange for food. Such was their desperation that they made a poster announcing to people the possibility of bartering. "We offer Ar Lele dolls, bottle caps and other food products. When we do well, people give us things without asking for something in return," Cruz says.

---

<sup>15</sup> Indigenous peoples and COVID-19 in Latin America. A humanitarian approach to <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/PUEBLOS%20INDIGENAS%20Y%20COVID-19.pdf>

## Help between us

From Arica, Rosa highlights education and mutual help as the pillars of development and as a strategy against COVID-19: "*Training is fundamental, pillar of everything, a trained woman is a woman who can face a man and the world. The first thing is the help between us. We have made loans to other members so that they can shovel their debts, as there are some who receive their salaries despite the covid. Solidarity has been shown to the fullest among the members of the organization. This is the fundamental idea of our organization from the beginning, having women that we can support, accompany, comfort us when we are wrong and that is what we have; We come together for a need and have learned to shovel ourselves and complement each other and even share computers for children, and help them teach them and thus build our future. In the organization we have a photocopier that we use to print the jobs they send to the children of the members and one of us is carrying the printed tasks house by house, all well taken care of. That's how we've been supported and happy for that, I feel like women have been up to the problems we had and have.*"



**Covering your mouth** has also become an essential symbol in these times of coronavirus pandemic, along with quarantine, hand washing and social distancing. The mask becomes gradually an externalization of care, a mark of responsibility with oneself and with society. His presence today is like smile or kind gesture in hostile territory; his absence, the opposite.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> <https://elpais.com/sociedad/2020-09-13/america-latina-explora-su-nueva-normalidad.html>

However, the use of the mask carries several other meanings. It is often associated with shutting his mouth, not protesting, if not, not questioning. In this sense, again metaphorical, we can say that the women interviewed have not kept their mouths shut, despite the pandemic. Sonia clearly explains this by pointing out that in the face of media misinformation *"the only defense is to speak and protest through social media. This allows us to make visible discontent with humanitarian law and corruption in hospitals, because the mass media says what the government wants."*

Saskia says that in Mexico they invented the *"Purple mask in stores to reduce domestic violence and that if you enter a trade with the mask, they immediately call the police."* Although as a counterface he regrets that *"We lost our empathy, that is, the ability to relate to each other and build collective thinking."*

In Bolivia, the feminist cry, without mask. On 8 March thousands of women marched in Bolivia, one of the most femicide countries in the region. On the 22nd, the confinement came. The feminist movement Mujeres Creando reacted to the double emergency - and the lack of resources in the face of the closure of its canteens in La Paz and Sucre - with masks and other products.

In the so-called "human masks" they printed messages such as "Stay at home is not the same as shutting up at home", so that the cry for sexist violence does not heat up, says Maria Galindo, a reference of the movement.



## From necessity to opportunity

Filomena Mamani is an indigenous woman of Mollo culture in the province of Muñecas de La Paz, Bolivia. She is one of the embroiderers of Andean masks and says that a need to avoid the contagion of coronavirus became an opportunity to make her culture known.

Filomena Mamani awaits every morning the arrival of her companions who come to her house to embroider the Andean masks. Filomena works with 100 women in the village of Ticamuri and each of them produces five to ten units a day. These unique masks are made of earth bayette, a fabric of the Altiplano made of wool from local animals. Once the embroidery is finished, Filomena sends them to the village of Ayata, where Ana Alicia Layme, an indigenous leader, craftswoman who is in charge of coordinating the work of women and explains that each garment tells a story of what life is like in her community.<sup>17</sup>

*"We seek to promote the work of a woman as it is here, so you will see in the embroidery the breast carrying her guagueita (son) and doing, spinning, and that is the daily life of the woman, is always accompanied with an animal or with some little plants,"* says Ana Alicia Layme. There are 700 women from 15 populations who are in a hurry to embroider the masks. Each has a cost of 15 Bolivians (2 euros). Ana Alicia explains that in 7 days they managed to sell more than 1,700 units and that with their work they are visible to society.

Andean masks are fashionable in the Bolivian capital to prevent contagion with coronavirus. *"It's comfortable, it's warm and good what stands out here most are the designs more than anything, the designs the colors and thus demonstrating our Bolivian culture,"* says local buyer Itai González.

By the pandemic the masks are mandatory in Bolivia and those who use the Andean mask feel that they are supporting to promote their culture. Women's crafts are now trying to export their masks to international markets. *"This is the work of women that is becoming visible in handicrafts and an opportunity to make ourselves known to the world,"* stresses Ana Alicia Layme.



<sup>17</sup> <https://www.dw.com/es/m%C3%A9xico-trueques-para-sobrevivir-en-tiempo-de-covid-19/a-54527550>

## 6. THE "NEW NORMAL": CERTAINTIES AND UNCERTAINTIES

The pandemic, and the political and social measures that emerged from it, have been a mark for Latin American communities, and in particular for their women. Faced with a rowdy, unstable and uneven picture that preceded the Covid-19, the demobilizing effects were important.

Several topics came clearly from our interviews and research for the post-pandemic future that will directly affect community philanthropy initiatives:

- Questioning the idea of "new normality", based on criticism of "old normality": less confidence, doubts about reciprocity, greater solidarity;
- The weakening of participatory democracy in the region;
- The economic consequences of the pandemic on people's quality of life, particularly in terms of employment and work and own income;
- The awareness of the impact of digital divide in inequality;
- The low participation of civil society as a major player in public policies in the face of the impact of covid;
- Solidarity, as a temporary and reactive phenomenon;
- The importance of women's role.

### Trust, reciprocity and solidarity

*"Our neighbor has been abolished. It is possible, given the ethical inconsistency of our rulers, that these provisions are dictated by those who have taken them with the same fear that they intend to provoke, but it is hard not to think that the situation they believe is exactly what those who govern us have tried to achieve repeatedly: that universities and schools close once and for all and that lessons are only given online, that we stop meeting and speaking for political or cultural reasons and only exchange digital messages, that as far as possible machines replace all contact – all contagion – between humans."<sup>18</sup>*

The changes and learnings have been many, according to Teresita: *"It changed the way we relate, we are very embraced and a challenge is to maintain social distancing. Another challenge, we must stop thinking about the self and think collectively, this emergency situation has taught us two things, which we are very supportive and others very selfish. I believe that self-care is the vaccine, that I come to my house and do all the protocol; if I don't take care of the other, there are very selfish acts, there is a lot of corruption in the management of drug supplies and it hurts as a citizen, as a person. Another learning, to get*

---

<sup>18</sup>Giorgio Agamen, "Contagion", 11 /3 /2020, <https://ficciondelarazon.org/2020/03/11/giorgio-agamben-contagio/>

*creative. If we follow an earlier logic thinking the same is wrong, process of reflecting on the economic issue of the issue of country, associative and internal to be able to successfully get out of this situation. Getting out of the square, you have to stop doing things as before, you have to reflect on what is coming now, humanity needed this shake to react, the social gaps with this pandemic, it leaves us working on social issues, the vision that we have a long way to go and a lot of fabric to cut. We have a hard time losing the fear of power, but there is an inner fear that does not allow us to move forward any further, there is a sexist system that limits women's space."*

Social distancing, house seclusion and the use of the mask have all been measures that helped weaken ties of trust in communities. Relationships, where possible, became virtual, we stopped looking at each other's faces, meeting places disappeared, fear of kissing, handshake, hugging, families dismembered, and friendships were alienating. Fear settled in everyday life and left sequels and questions of how these can be restored.

Saskia exemplifies her doubts since "*We Latin Americans like physical contact, the human, the smile, people have to hug each other again, as we are going to deal with each other, it is a warning, they are screwing it, with what attitude we are going to come back and what we are going to do from each trench to get this forward.*"

Solidarity, however, had a boom that was expressed in various ways as we have described it in the various testimonies. Catastrophes, such as the Covid-19, often lead to this. Communities react and try to help themselves in the absence of the state. To what extent solidarity, as a temporary and reactive phenomenon, can evolve into more permanent and proactive forms of local philanthropy is now an open question.

### **Militarism, democratic control and weakness**

From the beginning of the pandemic many rulers referred to that we were facing war and our enemy was the virus. The language used accompanied that look: front line, battles won, each a soldier.

President Donald Trump has proclaimed himself "wartime president" and calls the pandemic "the worst attack" in American history. "*We must act like any wartime government,*" Prime Minister Boris Johnson declared, while President Emmanuel Macron stated multiple times in a recent televised speech that "*We are at war.*" Health organizations and the media have also adopted military vocabulary. Doctors and nurses are fighting on the "front" with an "army of volunteers" to help them, and citizens are asked to join in a joint "war effort." With the excuse of war, emergency measures were taken without going through democratic discussion, populations were confined under the penalty of punishment, "curfews" were proclaimed, ideas debate was disabled, communities were frightened to stay home. Latin American societies quickly retreated into their democratic, already weak, quality.

As has already been intelligently pointed out by Hanna Merertoja, *"For political leaders, the rhetoric of war is a convenient way to convey the gravity of the situation and justify emergency legislation and the suspension of certain fundamental rights. If we depart from the narrative of war, we can imagine how a new global consciousness of mutual dependence could lead to a greater sense of solidarity, which could help us build a more socially and environmentally just world for future generations.*

*Instead of telling the pandemic as a war story, we could tell it as an open story at a time in history when humanity faces the opportunity to choose between different paths to different futures. We are at a historic crossroads where political decisions will save or cost millions of lives."*<sup>19</sup>

A general is at the helm of the Ministry of Health in Brazil. It governs the state of emergency in Ecuador, Peru and Chile. The Buenos Aires police are on the rise of wage improvements. The death at the hands of a lawyer's police ignites citizen anger in Bogota. An operative against a clandestine party ends with 13 dead in Lima. In Mexico, the government relies on the Army for almost everything. Extraordinary measures against the spread of COVID-19 have given unexpected prominence to police and military personnel. Faced with the still fresh memory of the dictatorships of the seventies and eighties, security forces are now present the same as guarantors of order and, above all, efficient. The leading role of the uniformed, however, raises many suspicions about the future consequences that may have given them so much power.

Social control needs have empowered weapons. The phenomenon is not homogeneous in the region, but it remains a pattern that uniforms have taken control of the streets. *"In countries where the Armed Forces already had an important role, such as Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Bolivia and Colombia, the coronavirus accentuated that role. In the case of Mexico, for example, they were even given ports and highways,"* says Argentine politician and security expert Fabián Calle. Uniforms have added prominence without noise, as if people considered the new *status quo* a natural and inevitable consequence of the pandemic.<sup>20</sup>

According to Kendra, *"there has been a use of social control to control the people, not only confinement, and the infrastructure of non-mobilization and lack of power to citizens is being set up."*

Felicita Lainez, director of the Foundation for Community Development (FUNDECOM) of Nicaragua, is even more radical and notes *that "in this context, talking about rights in Nicaragua, has become a crime. We have come from a situation of repression against*

---

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.opendemocracy.net/es/dejemos-de-narrar-la-pandemia-como-una-historia-de-guerra/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://elpais.com/internacional/2020-09-12/la-pandemia-empodera-a-las-fuerzas-armadas-en-america-latina.html>

women over the past two years, and the pandemic has made it worse, as it has used the pandemic to continue to crack down. Since the government has not only done nothing, but quite the opposite, they are promoting massive meetings where there is a lot of contagion. Today Nicaragua is sadder and more critical."

Sonia, from Chile, has doubts and fears about the future and the "new normal". *"I don't know how normal it can be, since we're seeing the military with their shotguns in the street, people in masks, it looks like a horror movie, living it is shocking. Social conflicts began, as a country of the struggle for our rights, we came with that and covid took us all to our homes. I hope that when normality comes we will have as a state a tug of ears, they did not know how to carry the epidemic, they did not know how to get people well, an urgent change is needed, I hope they are talking about it, because it is really all very wrong. Of course I expect the mea culpa of the state and have a radical change, for example, a new constitution. I don't know how much change it's going to bring about, can that help the poorest? It's just that we have to help with wage equity, yes, but for whom, for those with a title, nothing else? And for the others, the resources were not necessary for health personnel, that also has to change."*

### **Digital divide**

Confinements have blurred the lines between the physical and the virtual. Activities that until a few months ago were done, in whole or in part, face to face — education, work, shopping — today are 100% online. And this blurring between the two worlds is exacerbating the digital gaps between individuals, businesses and countries: again, the most vulnerable, who have also the worst access to digital channels, lag behind.

Despite significant progress in the last decade, only 68% of Latin Americans have access to the Internet, compared to 84% on average in rich countries. And while the richest 20% of Latin Americans use the Network in their day-to-day life, only 37% of the poorest 20% do so. This 40 percentage point gap contrasts with less than 25 in the OECD as a whole. *"Coronavirus has made inclusive digital transformation a top priority to mitigate negative effects and accelerate inclusive economic recovery. The need for beneficial digital transformation for all is one of the main lessons learned from this crisis, and it can be an opportunity for countries to give it the prominence it deserves in their digital agendas,"* reads the report published in September by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations, the regional development bank CAF and the European Union.

The bloc as a whole also suffers in international comparison: *"The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have been characterized by a high and growing productivity gap compared to developed economies. And the digital revolution should be the driving force behind increased productivity, especially for micro and small businesses that are falling behind,"* it reads in the study.

## Unemployment

The social impact will be uneven, much greater for 40% of workers who do not have access to any form of support or social protection mechanism, and for micro and small enterprises, "who lack the capacity to cushion the coup" the study's signatories note. According to their figures, up to 2.7 million companies are at risk of closing in the coming months—mostly smaller ones and therefore less financial muscle—resulting in the loss of 8.5 million jobs. *"The new middle classes were vulnerable and the crisis is proving that it was not true that they could not return to poverty,"* says Mario Pezzini, director of the OECD Development Centre.

Yet today's many ills can—and should *"transform into an opportunity to redefine the social pact, making well-being a central element, prioritizing stronger social protection systems, stronger and more inclusive public finances, as well as the need to implement inclusive and sustainable productive strategies"*.

## Sustainability in practice

Amalia Souza, director and founder of the CASA Brazil's Socio-Environmental Fund notes: *"The covid made very clear the leadership of women as always; it became apparent, 60% of the projects we support are led by women and now it was no different. We saw clearly the indigenous demands, extractivists of Amazonia, how quickly women organized themselves to create masks, isolation spaces, food transport, searches for structures and places of health, access to food. We are now going to a second stage to capture resources, take care of the health and food of communities, now very clear in resilience, self-sufficiency, care. We must invest in food sovereignty, small community businesses, connections between traditional food production, recovery from food, herbs, fruits that perhaps for convenience ceased to be used because they are close to urban centers, but now more than ever they have to recover their cultural knowledge, strengthen the regeneration of their territories, be the protagonists, who were always of this planet because they live in the spaces that maintain the life of the planet and this moment is crucial so that the world can see them as what they are, who with their knowledge and potential will be able to guide us for a new moment of the planet"*.

## Women who don't stay home, don't wash their hands or cover their mouths

Several are the reflections that arise from life in the pandemic around the role of women. According to Rebeca, *"The covid crisis is tied to what humanity was up to that point. The role of women in managing the crisis is impressive; I believe that the woman is the mother of all things, the power of the woman is infinite. In both family life and community life, it has an ability to manage emotions, situations, conflicts, adversities and vulnerability and also cooperate with lack of perspectives and uncertainty. This wasn't new to women either. Women are most shocked in the development of their integrality, in a society that is more*

*unequal with regard to gender. The woman learned more, in advance, to sustain, to give us hands, to endure exclusion; we have more resources for these experiences than for living in adversity. There are resources learned... "..."*

Sonia's thinking goes in the same direction: *"Women have an extremely important place. We are the ones who are 24 hours at home and that is why we know the needs of the house and the community, we even stop eating for others. We are the ones who are always reinventing even the food of our children so that we can have some weights. They give us full responsibility for everything, at home and in the women of the community. We take full charge of problems at home and around."* However, she places particular emphasis on black women: *"I am concerned about the reality of Black women. It is different from half-breeds and indigenous ones. The indigenous woman cares about studying and the land, and half-breeds it for politics because it knows that there is power; Afro just for painting her nails, they are future slaves of a country that is constantly advancing."* She adds: *"Everyday we reinvent ourselves so that we can carry out this difficult life. There's a saying: shrimp that falls asleep is carried away by the current. We are strong: we can give birth, we can have a child in the womb, we endure that man leaves the house, we are widows, single mothers, we are brave, warriors. We are everything we want to be. When we realize the power we have, we are the engine of life. When we seize that strength, it doesn't stop us and I'll be the country's first black female president."*

Georgina adds, in reference to sex workers, *"the need to have the same access to labour rights so as not to suffer from what we suffer today if new epidemics and crises come. The importance of women, always in the context of crises, are the most precarious; the reality of men is not the same. The ones we hand out, we clean, we prepare the viands, we're just the women. That's why it's important to be organized and have the support of the same peers"*.

Kendra stresses, beyond the pandemic, *"the historical demand to be subject to law. There is institutionalized violence that allows it. Women are the stones in every government's shoe. The changes have been in reverse. Conjunctural moments of crisis like this are an opportunity for women's social movements. There is a social fed-up to violence with women."*

Teresita is excited to think that *"you have to be disruptive about everything and not be afraid of the shock that exists between today and what needs to be reinvented from the inside and from our association. The new generations - I am in the middle ages between those who fought and the new ones - are much more thoughtful, such as their rights over their bodies, positioning themselves in politics, come more prepared, but with a very heavy burden of mistreatment of disappearances (activist groups). It happened in Mexico, in Argentina, here not yet front, but we have been partners of social organizations. There is a stir for women as long as we can leave them an open path today and those in justice can assert it, the new generations come with great weight and very strong freedoms. I hope they don't get lost along the way."*

For Ana, there is no doubt that the role of women during the pandemic is very important. *"Sublime the role of women, and I use that word because we have abilities and give it a way, an approach, that the majority male does not give it. Increasingly, it is necessary to think, more than women and men, of the anti-patriarcado. I recognize many sublime and important men. I like care better, which is a feminine approach, the importance of the focus of care, that women are geniuses in that and the male is learning."*

*"Women play the most important role in the pandemic, the world requires humanization, sensitization,"* Saskia says. *"I think women have a very different way of leading, and the world is crying out for it. We are less wicked before power, we are more supportive, more human, it is more difficult to blind ourselves to a situation of human suffering and social injustice, and those characteristics are not in power today."*

*"The woman is very important always, here it takes a lot of psychological and containment strength and the woman is the ideal one for that work, the one who cares and the affective, which overcomes every obstacle and does not take brute force to overcome the covid",* says Sonia bluntly. *"We have been able to look to the front to solve, the woman was born for this role, we are the ideal ones for this job, the family problems, the children fight, the woman has been able to contain the family as she always did. The new generations are definitely a pride, they are super self-taught, self-sufficient, independent, they have their new vision of man. For example, my daughter, she has been a leader since she was born, super clear, I have to study, I don't want to ask anyone for anything, today's generation gives us hope that tomorrow's women will be what we expect from us. Our generation is in the process of change, the women of our generation are sexist, they are content that man helps and they do not realize that it is their obligation because it is their home or their children, instead the new generations no longer think so. They want change, but they don't dare generate it. They, the new generation are what I would have wanted to be. They have a spectacular future because they are empowering the most. In my community they want their future to be different, they're going to give us lessons with their personal convictions. Chilean women have changed a lot, in Arica women are changing, change will be made by them, women think about community and men think about money. Twenty years ago I was a chick and look with other women who rowed with me what we were able to build; I wouldn't be who I am if it wasn't for everyone's effort. There are more women-led social organizations in Arica than men."*

*"In our communities there has been a very important ideological empowerment of women in terms of their rights; The time has come now for us to develop an economic empowerment that allows us to be more sustainable for life, so that women can lead in their communities, have more strength, but can live too,"* says Felicita.



## 7. CONCLUSIONS: PLAGUE AND THE DAY AFTER

Throughout this work we have shown two outstanding models in terms of the responses to the Covid-19 epidemic that were deployed in Latin America. On the one hand, the response of governments, and on the other hand, the community responses led by women.

Governments installed a predominantly sanitariat, paternalistic and vertical response, thus overshadowing citizens' abilities to understand challenges as information circulated and created real choices for personal, family and community protection and care. The public reaction was also authoritarian, trying to minimize the spaces of freedom of movement, exchange, concentration and word.

Many countries in the region have gone so far in their practices that they have taken the army to the streets and enacted a curfew to prevent displacement. In this reductionist context of public health and care, the state sought to become a single and only savior and avoided articulating with other social sectors. Especially with civil society organizations, which know and are directly related to the real needs of the citizens and the communities where they work. The results are in sight. Thousands of infected and hundreds of dead daily, hospitals saturated, health personnel broken and a society exhausted from seeing their lives reduced by the lack of leadership of their representatives.

On the other hand, the community response. Latin American societies enjoy a social fabric and community ties, mostly consolidated by women, which are being the key factor that is allowing them to face and solve some of the problems that were deepening as a result of the epidemic.

As we said, women who "speak" in this text, and who represent many thousands more, did not stay in their homes because they were unable to do so. Latin America's quarantines were not intended in local ways, but were adopted following international examples and recommendations. Thus, they were designed for people who have houses, internet access and drinking water, a car and credit card. Without these elements, it was not possible to stay home. It's worth the insistence: Internet broadband access doesn't reach 50% in the region, resulting in digital exclusion and fewer opportunities for many. Some time ago we talked about the "digital poor". In times of coronavirus this means that millions of people do not have access to possibilities for remote employment, online education and vocational training, or financial services, among other benefits. For this reason, they referred to work, to take care of others, to shoulder the basic needs that arose with the pandemic: to feed, to access drinking water, to generate some income for their homes. They worried about generating resources where they did not exist, and they did so while strengthening existing capacities in the community of self-help, compassion, solidarity.

They had to set up community banks in Ecuador to resolve the lack of access to economic resources for women in the community; invented ways of exchanging products and services

in Chile so that all women in the community can earn income and bring food to their homes; developed technology courses in Argentina to reduce the giant digital divide that leaves nearly half of the population completely isolated; they created a digital platform to enable Ecuador's artisans that their products can continue to market and secure their economic resources to survive. They invented a food bank in Mexico and make sure members of their community don't go hungry.

These same women also did not wash their hands, did not detach from their neighbors, did not take refuge in their individualities, or intend to save themselves. They create and recover a "communitarian us," as do hundreds of thousands of other women in the region. They continue to co-create comprehensive models of response to the epidemic that allow members of their communities not only to protect themselves but to continue to imagine a possible future. They understand the ecosystem and context in which the epidemic develops in their own communities and have the skills and confidence to create sustainable solutions with other women to sustain members of their communities in these uncertain times. Confidence in their capabilities became their most important resource.

The factor that distinguishes these models of response created by women is the strength and credibility in the community bond and mutuality among the citizens of their collective. This is probably the key aspect of dealing with coronavirus, which is ultimately a new social challenge. What is raised is a common purpose, where taking care of yourself is to take care of others and where generating new resources and opportunities is for the good of all.

The pandemic does not reward the smartest or the strongest, but those with the best power of collective adaptation. That's what women did and managed to minimize levels of contagion in their communities.

They also did not cover their mouths, but despite the mask they went publicly to denounce domestic violence resulting from confinement, to demand the help of the absent state, to weave alliances, to reinvent their lives, their jobs and their communities.

The "communitarian us" led by women who articulate each other and with all civil society organizations seems to be the indispensable condition for strengthening the social fabric, reducing the impacts of Covid-19 and thinking about possible sustainable development that reduces fears associated with death, the anguish associated with uncertainty and highlights knowledge and confidence in achieving coalitions and networks that enable the group's survival.

Faced with the discourse of the "war" against the coronavirus embodied above all in ruling men, women in communities bring to light their greatest degree of empathy, solidarity and instinct for collaboration and protection. The dilemmas of the "day after" and *the possibilities of "build back better"* will depend to a large extent on how the tensions between, on the one hand, fear, disintegration and social anomia and, on the other hand, efforts to integrate,

cooperate and care are resolved. In this game, women-led community philanthropy will play an undisputed starring role.

