

Indigenous engagement, research partnerships, and knowledge mobilisation

Final Report – Moving with Risk: Forced Displacement and Vulnerability to Hazards in Colombia

Alejandra López Getial
Universidad de Manizales

Viviana Ramírez Loaiza
Universidad de Manizales

Teresa Armijos Burneo
University of East Anglia

1. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to start by thanking the indigenous women from Caimalito and Las Colonias, Pereira, Colombia, for sharing their life stories with us. We thank them for their laughter, for allowing us to share in the intimate spaces when they exchanged glances and opened up the dialogue in the Embera language. Thank you for teaching us to be in different ways in those circles of intimacy.

We also thank the Kurmadó Indigenous Cabildo for engaging with us and critically challenging this research exercise, the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) and the Lutheran World Federation for inspiring us to strengthen reflections that put the current realities of the indigenous communities at the centre of academic and institutional discussions.

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2. PREFACE

As an attempt to recover orality as a source of analysis, the reader will find a narrative style in the first person. He or she will find permanent dialogues written from the researchers' positionality, which allow questioning of the methodological experience, but also let the researchers be questioned by it. This text is about learning and unlearning along the way about what the methodology itself teaches us. It is about challenging our identity, our history and our subjectivities as researchers. In short, this is a reflection from our experience as researchers who participated in the methodological reflections around working with indigenous communities during the ***Moving with Risk: Forced Displacement and Vulnerability to Hazards in Colombia*** project. We acknowledge that although this text is not written by our indigenous partners it was guided and co-produced by the Embera indigenous women and men of the Kurmadó Cabildo of Pereira¹. The voices cited in these reflections are from the indigenous women with whom we have been working in the past 2 years, from our field diaries and from other indigenous collaborators with whom we have had enriching discussions along the way. In doing so, the reflections presented in this text acknowledge these dialogues and voices, as well as the different pathways of exposure that we went through as researchers

¹ Writing this document with our partners would have required a comprehensive exercise in translation, not only of language but also of ways of knowing and communicating (epistemologies), including oral forms of knowledge exchange for which we did not have the time or resources to undertake.

when we accepted the challenge of entering and leaving transformed from a reflexive experience.

3. PROJECT. 'MOVING WITH RISK: FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND VULNERABILITY TO HAZARDS IN COLOMBIA' (MwR)

MwR was a collaborative research project between the University of East Anglia (PI Roger Few, Co-Is Hazel Marsh and Teresa Armijos), University of Manizales (team led by Lina Andrea Zambrano) and the NGO Taller de Vida. It sought to improve the wellbeing of people who experienced forced displacement as a result of the armed conflict in Colombia, and who, for economic, cultural and political reasons, settled in areas at risk of disasters. This research had three objectives that directly influenced the way we conceived our methodology. The first objective focused on understanding the trajectories of risk, resources and vulnerabilities of the people who experienced forced displacement and who are living in areas at risk of disasters today. The second objective was piloting a methodology based on the arts as a strategy for gathering information, and at the same time, for community empowerment. Finally, the third objective aimed at strengthening individual, community and institutional capacities in disaster risk management.

MwR combined qualitative methodologies from the social sciences with research strategies from the expressive arts within an action research approach. As researchers in the social sciences and humanities, we conceived this methodology not only as part of the design of routes for data collection, but also, as a possibility for the creation of reflexive spaces and dialogues of knowledge(s) that contribute to the empowerment of people who have experienced first-hand the consequences of the armed conflict in Colombia. To fulfil the objectives of the project, several activities were carried out, which included: (1) establishing contact with local leaders and community representatives in order to seek approval of and participation in the project; (2) introductory meetings in each location around the project methodology and disaster risk management using theatre and photography; (3) individual conversations using music as a methodology to elicit conversation; (4) life histories using drawing to elicit conversation; (5) creation of collective stories of risk using different forms of expressive arts; (6) presenting these collective stories in public spaces to the wider public and institutions.

The MwR project was conducted in four case studies: Caimalito and Las Colonias, (Risaralda), Soacha (Cundinamarca) and Manizales (Caldas). We conducted our research project and collaborated directly with more than 150 persons who are mestizo, Afro-descendant and indigenous. They were all forcibly displaced and are currently living in areas at risk from the impact of natural hazards such as landslides, flooding or extreme weather and rain. In this document, we will concentrate on the experiences of working with indigenous communities. These were Caimalito and Las Colonias and are located in the outskirts of the city of Pereira. Both places are in areas prone to disasters, and often affected by flooding and landslides. They have a mestizo and indigenous population and are linked to the Kurmadó Indigenous Cabildo. Like with any other experience, we must first immerse ourselves in the history of these places.

Our learning journey began in March 2017 in the city of Pereira where we began conversations with different community leaders, in order to present the project and invite people to participate in it. We contacted the Governor of the Indigenous Cabildo Kurmadó de Pereira, Conrado Nacavera, who introduced us to the members of the indigenous government represented mostly by women [...] *We felt nervous, because we knew that during this first encounter we were beginning to weave the first relations of trust [...]* (Field notes 2, March 10, 2017). We

explained to them about the project and were emphatic that this work only made sense if we worked together towards achieving the outcomes of the proposed research. In the middle of the conversation, they asked [...] *would the methodology relate to the preservation of uses and customs of the Embera peoples? How would the research benefit the communities? We answered that the use of the arts, gave us the possibility of contributing to the preservation of their culture and generating impact in that way [...]* (Field notes 2, March 10, 2017). The debate opened in Embera language and after some extended discussion, we were informed that the project had been approved and that they wanted us to work with the community of Caimalito. Conrado requested a draft of the minutes of the meeting in order to have an account of the discussion and the agreed points.

The next day we had a meeting in Caimalito with the mestizo leaders to whom we introduced the project and had invited to participate. Conrado Nacavera was also invited. The meeting took place at the school where we had a good discussion around the project objectives and different requests from the community, for example, the possibility of including non-displaced persons in the process. We quickly realised that flexibility in the methodology of the project was going to be crucial for its success. There were mixed responses and while some of the local leaders were positive about the proposal, challenging positions emerged. Despite it, Conrado reaffirmed the approval of the project within the Kurmadó Cabildo and shared his views as to why this was important to the mestizo leaders of Caimalito. Conrado's intervention began to throw some interesting methodological questions on the importance of positioning the legitimization of the indigenous government structures in relation to other ethnic groups. Later that day, we met with a group of indigenous women from Caimalito. *[T]he conditions of vulnerability of their homes, made of wood, and precarious materials caused an impression in us, and, at the same time, we were positively surprised by their ability to organise. In less than ten minutes, they had gathered, without any previous notice [...]* (Field notes 3, March 11, 2017). The community gathering began to give us more methodological clues and pose interesting challenges.

In Caimalito the women of confirmed their interest in participating in the project and emphatically expressed their interest in exploring dance (which is part of their cultural practices) as a means to narrate their risk stories. Conrado then invited us to visit another place close by with indigenous population, Las Colonias. We agreed and travelled for half an hour to get there. When we arrived, we descended by foot through some very steep and slippery alleyways where we found several precarious wooden houses, similar to those of Caimalito. We met with another group of indigenous women and during the conversation, they expressed the same interest in participating and in exploring these themes through dance as the women of Caimalito had done earlier in the day.

Three months later we started the project in Caimalito and Las Colonias. Theatre was the means to explain the methodology to all the participants, indigenous, mestizos and afro-descendants. [...] *Silence and shyness, but also laughter, were present amongst the indigenous women; for mestizos and Afro-descendants, on the contrary, theatre became a space for recognition of their life stories [...]* (Field notes 7, June 17, 2018). The next meetings were at an individual or household level where we invited people to share with us a song or an object that had a special meaning to them. These conversations allowed us to begin to talk with each person about their trajectories of risks, responses, resources and capabilities, from a more intimate and emotional place. The result of these conversations were varied. While with the mestizo population we successfully managed to explore their personal stories of vulnerability and capacity, the silence and estrangement in the women of Caimalito was present from the first conversation. The result was different with the indigenous women from las Colonias, who said they felt comfortable telling their stories during individual conversations.

In response to this, we decided to take different methodological routes for the different case studies. [...] *Fortunately, one of the methodological principles we follow is flexibility, which allows us to make these decisions, collective conversations can be the route for a more fluid conversation with the women of Caimalito. Las Colonias could continue in collective and individual spaces as we are doing with the mestizos for the next meetings [...]* (Field notes 15, August 4, 2018).

In Caimalito we conducted three group meetings with the women. During the first meeting we were more readily able to enquire into some cultural practices around disaster risk and at the same time about their experiences of forced displacement. In the second meeting, we discussed about the meaning that the colourful bead necklaces the women make have for them. During the meeting, more stories and reflections about their cultural practices emerged. From this experience, we understood that for the Embera women, the necklace is not only an adornment, it also narrates stories, it is one of the most culturally recognised symbols for them and it is part of their family heritage, but at the same time, they have become an important means of subsistence for indigenous households. For the last meeting of the year 2017, while making bracelets with beads, we were able to get closer to their relationship with nature and their territories. During all these meetings, most of the women spoke in Embera, which meant that we kept silent and waited for the translation by the junior governor (local indigenous leader), as well as showing respect for their privacy. With the women from Las Colonias, with whom we conducted the conversations using music at the individual level, we only had one group meeting. Although they said they appreciated these individual spaces, silence continued to inhabit their responses. We understood that there were positive outcomes and lessons from the proposed methodology with indigenous women, for example, a powerful emotional link was generated with some of them, however, we also understood that our creativity and understanding needed to broaden.



At the beginning of 2018, we started the second phase of the project where the objective was to build collective stories through traditional dances. At this point, we encountered a new challenge, the senior authority of the local indigenous government (Cabildo) had changed. Nelson Tanigama had been elected as governor of the Kurmadó Cabildo. We met with the new members of the Cabildo, this time, represented mostly by men. The discussions around agreeing to give continuity to the project lasted around two months. The Cabildo presented us with new requests. First, payment to a person from the community to lead the dances and payment to a representative of the Cabildo to accompany the process. We agreed, with the condition that the dance instructor was from one of the territories where we were working.

From June to September 2018 we conducted four follow-up workshops in each community, during which the women prepared the dances that would represent their trajectories of risk. These were then performed in front of a larger audience that included a number of institutions such as the Red Cross, the local Municipality and the National Disaster Risk Unit. Along the way, we managed to weave a relationship of familiarity with the women. [...] *It was notorious how the silence that had characterised the women of Las Colonias began to break little by little and instead rich conversations about their experiences of displacement, of collective resistance to the continuous threats of eviction and their ways of responding to landslides and*

extreme rain took over those spaces. During these conversations, also in Caimalito, dancing interfered frequently, this was new to us. We also noticed that time management and planning the meetings as we had designed them was easier to manage with the mestizos We had a new methodological challenge [...] (Field notes 85, September 27, 2018).

On September 28th, 2018, the indigenous women of Caimalito and Las Colonias presented their dances in the main square of the city of Pereira. As agreed and following their wishes, both communities performed before representatives of the local and national institutions of disaster risk management, who, at the end of the presentations, expressed that they has been emotionally mobilised and had understood and learned a lot from the women.



Shortly after, through the call "Indigenous engagement, research partnerships and knowledge mobilisation" funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), we were presented with the opportunity of producing a reflection on the methodology developed during MwR. This included involving and co-producing knowledge with the indigenous community who participated in the project and building reflections that would allow evaluating and problematizing the methodologies we had applied. The next section reports on that process.

4. METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

In order to carry out the methodological reflection, it was first necessary to return to the experience of working with the women and critically reflect about the moments, places, words and silences that characterised this experience. It was also important to generate meaningful spaces for conversation and co-production of knowledge. This meant designing methodologies that would allow the indigenous women to air their opinions and perceptions regarding the MwR project and its methodology.

When we first approached the leader of the Cabildo, Nelson Tanigama, and told him about the opportunity to carry out a methodological reflection for MwR, he expressed interest in focusing the reflexive conversations around traditional medicine. This topic, he suggested, would help us better comprehend people's positions in relations to disaster risk management from their own cultural practices. Considering this idea, we also thought that preparing food with the indigenous women could provide a different space for conversation. In our view, cooking would allow for spontaneity while also thinking about a central activity around looking after the home. We met with Governor Nelson and with the local governors (leaders) of each territory, Claudia Morales from Las Colonias and Deivi Arce from Caimalito in order to share these ideas and decide on a plan together. We also wanted to decide together with our indigenous partners on how best to use the available budget. They liked the proposed activities and told us that food and traditional medicine reflected their identities, their memories and their culture. While we made the minutes of the conversation, as Conrado Nacavera had taught us, they decided which Jaibaná (shaman or spiritual leader) would accompany the meeting about traditional medicine. This discussion lasted about an hour after which they decided that the Governor, Nelson, should choose the Jaibaná. Following a principle of equality agreed between the indigenous leaders, and since there would only be one meeting with a Jaibaná, they had to choose one that was from outside the two communities.

During that meeting, we also decided that the first space for conversation and reflection on the methodology would be around preparing traditional food. This took place over two separate meetings, first, in Las Colonias and then in Caimalito. The second agreed space for conversation was going to be around traditional medicine with the participation of the Kurmadó Cabildo, the women of Las Colonias and Caimalito, the Jaibaná and the team of researchers from the University of Manizales. Additionally, there were discussions about the final product of this reflexive experience. We had proposed to include a final product or outcome from this exercise that could be of benefit to them. We explored the idea of a book, a painting, a new presentation of the dances or anything else that they felt would reflect risk management from the Embera culture and would be useful for them. The women governors stated that the painting could be an interesting option, however, we did not reach an agreement at that point. Towards the end of the methodological reflection process, which lasted around 2 months, they decided that the final product should be something useful and practical for them. Caimalito opted for bed sheets decorated with a picture of them dancing and Las Colonias for blankets painted by themselves.

Encounters with and through traditional Embera food

As agreed, we began the reflexive process around traditional Embera food. This space was designed with the purpose of talking with the women about the methodology of MwR while conducting one of their daily activities, cooking. In the case of Las Colonias, the plan changed when the women appropriated the conversation agenda and decided to discuss about the project before preparing and having the food (tamal). They cheerfully explained that if an Embera person was given food first, he/she would eat and would not go back to the meeting. With the women in Caimalito the scenario was different, when we arrived, the food was already prepared (tamal and fish). Although we had agreed to cook together, they had already done it, and instead, preferred to start with the conversation and then have the food with other members of the community that were nearby.

The women from Las Colonias began by expressing their displeasure at having had to participate in the initial meeting for MwR with the mestizo community. They let us know the difficulties they encounter with the mestizos and the disputes over the spaces of participation that are opened up when different institutions arrive to work in their community. The message was clear:

[...] For future projects, keep in mind that we like to work as Embera and not with mestizos. Gathered here (refers to the meeting place of the indigenous community) we like to work, but not with them. [...] if we are going to work we prefer it is only between us [... that way] we feel more comfortable when talking, hanging out [...]

[...] because they insult us, they treat us badly and this is ok [...] (Indigenous woman, personal communication, Las Colonias, October 24, 2018).

During the conversation, both groups of women referred to the importance that they place on the researchers' sharing sincere opinions with them. This is something they highlighted as a positive result of the MwR methodology.

[...] we like to be told what what you do not like, what you feel [...] we want you to tell us that you did not like it [...] (Indigenous woman, personal communication, Las Colonias, October 24, 2018)

The women also noted that they enjoyed the exercise of mutual questioning and reciprocity that resulted from the methodology (conversations with music, talking in groups, discussing about the meaning of the necklaces). These methodologies allowed us to weave trust, which led us to undertake deeper and deeper conversations around their stories. This relationship with the women also favoured the methodological reflections, during which they expressed their opinions with sincerity. For example, the women from Las Colonias, told us that they did not want to do more dances, even if they have been of great value for them during these last years. Instead, they expressed their interest in pursuing other activities such as doing handicrafts, an activity that they also considered as a viable livelihood opportunity.



In contrast, during the reflection process the women of Caimalito were explicit in communicating their desire to continue performing their dances. They were clear that through these dances they could represent their life stories, as they did in MwR, and, at the same time, recognise their cultural heritage, which, if not remembered and made visible to the younger generation, could be forgotten.

[...] we liked to dance and we had fun with dancing, but there was also a sad part because we showed how we were forcibly displaced and how we suffered. We have already overcome that but it was very good to dance it because we expressed that in a dance [...] (Young indigenous woman, personal communication, Caimalito, October 25, 2018).

[...] those conversations were very useful to us, because they thought us about our ancestors. They make us keep remembering [...] (Young indigenous woman, personal communication, Caimalito, October 25, 2018).

During the reflection, the women from Caimalito also said that they would like to learn and develop certain skills that could provide them with income. They said they wanted to continue dancing and told us about the economic hardship they continuously experience. Hence, their requests to develop activities that would favour theirs' and their community's economy, including dancing.

[...] I would like to learn how to use a flat knitting machine, make bread, I do not know, that would be good for us. So that women learn to be more independent, because most of the indigenous women have not finished high school. Yes, many know how to make necklaces, that is the first thing we learn [...] (Young indigenous woman, personal communication, Caimalito, 25 October 2018).

The subject of time also emerged in the conversations. They said that it would have been better to have the meetings more often, and not to leave too much time in between workshops. In addition, the younger women expressed their wish that the institutions help them develop knowledge in specific activities, not necessarily with money.

[...] the institutions also provide us with knowledge and skills. There are institutions that say we are going to train you so that you can go ahead alone with this, with a workshop not only with money, but also with knowledge, because there are many things that we can do and sell [...] (Young indigenous woman, personal communication, Las Colonias, October 24, 2018)

They also spoke about the negative perception they hold in relation to many of the institutions that have arrived to work with them and have not kept their promises:

[...] there are things that we do not like. Once a small group of young people from Risaralda [...] arrived, promised us things, and did not return. They raise hope and do not fulfil their promises [...we would like them to be here] from the beginning to the end, and not only come here to gain a degree or because they want to take a photo [...] (Indigenous woman, personal communication, Las Colonias, October 24, 2018).

In addition, they said they would like to know and learn more about their own culture. During the discussions about traditional food, for example, the younger women were able to learn how to prepare fish and tamales from their mothers and grandmothers. They made it clear that it was important for them to preserve that type of heritage.

[...] one learns how it was done in the past, that my mom knows a lot and those who are older, but it seems very good, because at least we are able help to make the fish and now we know how it is done [...] (Young indigenous woman, personal communication, Caimalito, October 25, 2018).

During the meetings around food, we found out that the MwR methodology had some positive outcomes. Yet we also noted that these were strongly mediated by and depended on the researcher's positionality and actions. A discussion around doing what was agreed and having a clear and realistic communication with the participants brought us much closer to reflecting on the learning about our roles as women and researchers and about the type of interaction that is needed when working with indigenous partners.

Traditional medicine: looking after the body and the territory

The topic of traditional medicine was agreed with Nelson Tanigama, the Governor, as a focus that would allow us to explore practices that aim at protecting and caring for people's lives. This topic could also open up the discussion around myths, rites and healing which could provide interesting methodological routes to learn about disaster risk reduction. For the preparation of the space on traditional medicine, with the exception of the Jaibaná who was chosen by the Gobernador of the Cabildo, Nelson, several aspects and details were agreed in advance with Deivi and Claudia, the local Governors of Caimalito and Las Colonias. Taking into consideration the available funds, we agreed on the choice of place for the meeting, transport to the venue for all the participants and food. During these conversations, we agreed to hold the meeting at a venue in the countryside, in a location in between the two communities. Following the principle of equality between the two participating communities and given that we only had a budget to hold one meeting on traditional medicine, they decided that the activity could not take place in either of the two territories, since that would affect the balance between the two communities.



They chose an alternative place. The Gobernador Mayor, Nelson Tanigama, proposed the activities for the meeting to which we agreed. The day was to be divided into three moments: (1) 'harmonization of the word' (indigenous ritual to help people speak and communicate), (2)

conversation around traditional medicine and (3) the ritual with the Jaibaná. Nelson opened the meeting by addressing everyone in Embera. The conversation opened up and a quickly a discussion around the meeting place emerged. This first activity, which was supposed to be a ritual, had an opposite effect for the women. They said that the rituals with the Jaibaná are done with the purpose of healing the territory, hence the importance of having performed these rituals in their own communities. [...] *in this case the farm and their fruits and plants were healed, but our territory remains ill [...]* (Indigenous woman, traditional medicine meeting, October 27, 2018).

The moments of tension with the women were also learning spaces. We understood that it was important to share and discuss with the whole community what had been agreed with the leaders. We understood that the legitimacy of the decisions also goes through the voices of the community, not only the voices of the governors. Despite the impasse around the venue, we were able to reflect on the MwR methodology and make some important conclusions.

Development of the final product

After some communication difficulties that arose during the traditional medicine meeting, we decided to hold an additional meeting to explain how the available budget had been allocated and spent. The purpose of this meeting was to listen to the women and to learn more about their opinions, positive and negative, in relation to meeting on traditional medicine where criticisms arose. We also wanted to make a final decision in terms of what they wanted for the final product. On November 25, 2018, we first met with the women from Las Colonias and then with the ones from Caimalito. We talked about the last meeting and during the discussions, mainly in Las Colonias, some discomforts and disagreements emerged around how some of the resources had been allocated, specifically the Jaibana's payment. The discussion that arose was important because it allowed us to talk about the significance of building effective communication networks that reach not only the junior/local governors but also the entire community, about the decisions in relation to the workshops and the use of resources for each activity.

Once we had overcome this tension, and explained in detail how we had used the available funds (showing receipts of expenditures), we moved on to discuss the final product. In both communities, the women agreed that the final product should represent the dances and that at the same time it should be a reminder of the MwR project. The women of Las Colonias decided to paint on blankets the image of a female Jaibaná (traditional doctor) in the middle of a "dreamcatcher". Each blanket would be painted collectively. In Caimalito, the women decided to get a print of their dance performance on bed sheets.



Dreamcatcher, Las Colonias

Eight days later, we returned to Las Colonias to produce, together with the women and their families, the final product. The women had high expectations for this activity, something they had communicated to us when we were planning it. During the actual event, we found out that painting invited the whole family to join in the activity, not just the women dancers who had

directly participated in the MwR project. This space brought together the families and at the same time allowed us to understand a little more about their daily lives.

Painting, as a reproduction technique, created an interest both in the women and in the men of the community. The possibility of relating to a new technique, distinct to handicrafts and dances, and to a methodology that invited everyone to participate, managed to get everyone involved and to take ownership of the activity. Working on a concrete object that holds meaning, significance and that has a material and symbolic value for them, was the greatest methodological learning.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Organization, health and territory from and for collective spaces

In order to work with the Embera women it was necessary to understand how they inhabit their territories, individually and collectively. With the women of Caimalito, the individual meetings were not effective because they conceived meeting spaces as spaces of the community. On the other hand, the observation of the women from Las Colonias: “[...] *for future projects please take into account that we like to work with the Embera and not with mestizos [...]*” is a call to recognise their principles of unity, self-preservation and collectivism. However, as Conrado Nacavera showed us at the beginning of the project, meeting spaces between indigenous, mestizo and Afro-descendant leaders are important because they allow them to get to know each other, transform their social imaginaries and recognise themselves as inhabitants of the same places, even if their forms of organisation and legitimisation of the territory are different.

The sense of collectivity for the Embera women also goes through the body. Their mental and physical health is communal and depends on the states of healing and disease of the territory, which are looked after by the Jaibaná. *[The territory] was very affected with disease; children that were fine began to get ill, and so when we saw the traditional doctor he told us, the land is damaged [...]* (Young indigenous woman, personal communication, Caimalito, November 1, 2017). Yeimy Zabaleta, representative of the Lutheran World Federation, with whom we also discussed our project, explained to us that *‘[...] indigenous communities also manage disaster risk through their practices around traditional medicine. Then the subject of their own rituals and their own ways of healing, not only for physical health as we understand it, but spiritual health and health in relation to the territory can’t be separated [...]* (Personal communication, November 7, 2018).

One of the greatest challenges in disaster risk management is to understand the way indigenous communities represent their territory and how this, in turn, influences their daily lives and ethnic identities. If this is not taken into account, we will not know how to define methodological routes with indigenous communities, nor will the co-production of knowledge be possible. In this light, and given the experiences we have had, addressing the intimate relationship between body and territory, invites risk management to problematize some of its theoretical foundations and to read the territory in a different way. If the traditional doctor is the one who has the capacity to understand and take care of this relationship, it becomes essential that he/she accompanies and leads from their knowledge the exercises and activities around risk management that are carried in their territories. **The methodological pathways that we build as researchers have to incorporate the understanding that communities are authorities in their territories. If we enter recognising these spaces of authority, we will be able to guarantee a conduct a reciprocal dialogue.**

The value of reciprocity, time and permanence

A sense of reciprocity, back and forth, of coming and going was developed in the relationships that we established with the Embera women through the MwR project. This was clearly explained when one of them said: *'[...] we like to be told what you do not like [...]*', but also with the expression, *'[...] I am very happy that you came back, why it took you so long to come back? [...]*' and with the request, *'[...] from the beginning to the end, and not only come here to gain a degree or because you want to take a photo'*. **Recognising ourselves in a dialogue of knowledge implies at the same time recognising ourselves in a negotiation field; we are constantly negotiating the wishes that are at play on one side and the other. The women that we have worked with know how to read the codes of the institutions and academia, who often approach them with promises that are not fulfilled. They know these 'times' because they are the 'times' of absence. The lesson that we take as researchers is that the time they request from us is the time "we are there" no matter in which form, time as permanence is therefore time as time spent together, and it is presence and company they request.**

Another important lesson is that 'time' for the indigenous communities can be understood differently, for them time does not pass in a linear way between past, present and future. In risk management, for example, talking about prevention, response and correction corresponds to a continuous and linear time, hence the difficulty of communicating to the women with whom we work this language/logic. Yeimy of the Lutheran Federation explains that *'[...] with the particular theme of risk management, approaching the indigenous community with this topic is a challenge, in what sense? The readings, the perceptions of risk are totally different, what for us can be an emergency for them is not [...]* (Personal communication, November 7, 2018).

Arranging times for meetings was also challenging. Often the start and end times of the activities were not possible to plan. We hardly ever started or finished an activity at the time or day we had planned. For example, this report does not include the final product meeting with the women from Caimalito as at the time of writing it, they were still deciding when to meet with us and had changed the date in two occasions. These experiences have invited us to think that the methodologies we design need to recreate other times, perhaps more plural. In the spaces of planning, time awareness is fundamental, when meeting the women, flexibility allows the work rhythms to be different, but also provides space and willingness to participate, empathy, curiosity and pleasure for the activity. For instance, during the activity to create the final product around painting in Las Colonias, the women and men began to move through the space, to interact with the objects and to relate to what was happening. They did this while they decided what to paint on the blankets and later when they were painting them, At that point, they appropriated the methodology, the co-design of the workshop was occurring *in situ*. The participants painted and placed themselves in different places and spaces and did not have to wait for an instruction or suggestion to do it. They took control of the situation.

This conclusion invites us to reflect about a co-design and co-production of knowledge in different ways, while time is lived, while activities are performed and not only and necessarily during planning. The time spent with the communities, or what we have called time of permanence, translates into important research challenges: How do we manage to carry out a set plan under this time frame? How to include methodological flexibility in processes of co-design and co-production of knowledge with indigenous communities for research agendas?

Relationship between culture preservation, urban context and livelihoods

In the urban context, an almost inseparable relationship is created between activities related to the indigenous culture and tradition, and the income for their families and community. For example, for the Embera women with whom we worked, there is a need to recover traditional dances, the necklaces made with beads, the food, the rituals as a way to preserve the cultural heritage that has been passed down through generations but also as a way to guarantee their livelihoods. In the new places or settlements that they have come to inhabit, as a result of forced displacement, they don't have access to land and have, for the most part, abandoned their agricultural practices as their main source of livelihood and income. In this context, arts and crafts begin to replace other activities and become the principal source of financial support for these households. Necklaces made with beads or 'chaquiras', for example, become the main source of economic income for many Embara families in Pereira and other cities.

Recognising the relationship between cultural practices and livelihoods in the city, allows us to focus on one of the greatest challenges in working with indigenous communities: idealisation. Researchers can often feel a sort of nostalgia, of times lost, of practices being 'corrupted' which translates into idealisation and romanticism. However, if we are prepared to reflect on this issue, we might conclude that idealisation is also a form of prejudice. *'They are not supportive of each other, they are taking advantage of the situation, they are selling their culture'*. These statements are judgements. We are therefore invited to understand that changing livelihood practices is the result of the conditions of poverty and marginality that affect many indigenous communities and that, mainly, they constitute responses, wishes and aspirations of any individual regardless of their ethnic identity and of what daily life in the city entails. **The relationship that we, as researchers, built with our indigenous partners must be challenged and transformed. This represented one of the greatest learnings in working with the Embera women, because it implied questioning ideals, recognising prejudices and building a different relationship with them. We understood that the women of Las Colonias and Caimalito, despite the conditions of vulnerability in which they live, by organising themselves in local urban *cabildos* and conducting a series of activities around their cultural practices, support themselves and, at the same time, are embodying resistance.**

Gender and cultural practices

For both groups of women with whom we collaborated, many of their daily cultural practices have a direct relationship with gender roles. Women are the authority in the home and are responsible for transmitting the knowledge of crafts and dances. At the same time, their level of participation in local organisations tends to be low, compared to that of men, who are used to fulfilling roles as leaders, teachers and counsellors in the community, in addition to being traditional doctors or Jaibanás.

During the project, we mostly worked with the women and therefore we did not establish a direct relationship with the men. During our meetings, to which both men and women were invited, men were generally elsewhere fulfilling work tasks that would allow them to economically support their families and community. However, for the final product workshop, we were surprised by the active participation of the men. It was a Sunday and despite it being their usual rest day for them, they shared and participated in the space as a Sunday activity. This last meeting ended up as a family space that also allowed us to interact with them. It was interesting to note how, during this activity, gender roles blurred under the pretext of the activity, painting. While the women were not at home looking after their children and home, the man was not busy working in the city or nearby fields; both gathered around the same space, sharing and working together



on the blanket that aimed at representing their wish around the final product for this methodological reflexive process. This shows that we should have been more careful with the design of the activities for the MwR project, where mostly women joined the activities, especially when they decided to dance, and, as a result, men did not participate. If we jointly define the work routes and the final products or outcomes in our research projects, we might allow a broader and more effective participation of both indigenous women and men.

In this sense, it is important to carefully consider gender roles while co-designing research methodologies and envisioned outcomes for all participants. Relationships of authority around the family, different forms of participation and organisation within local governments deserve special attention when communicating different project aims and outcomes. It is necessary to reflect on the meaning and use of gender as a category in research and in international policy agendas and further discuss with our indigenous partners research methodologies that are compatible and respond to these often different agendas.

Recognition of the researcher's positionality

Dialogues around different types of knowledge, involve the analysis of both vulnerabilities and capacities, an approach that has been difficult to appropriate in disaster risk management contexts. It becomes even more complex, when in the middle of this dialogue we realise that it is us as researchers who must first learn and reflect more about our own subjectivities before embarking on knowing more about the communities themselves. As we stated earlier, factors such as idealisation influence the methodological flexibility we have been discussing as well as the way we communicate and often impose our wishes on communities.

We believe that preparing and training research teams in a 'capacities' approach, makes it possible for this "realisation" to directly impact the methodological routes traced and facilitate researchers' engagement with indigenous communities as subjects of construction and deconstruction. **We believe that deepening a reflexive position for the researcher, could be a priority in global research agendas. In other words, this is a call to incorporate methodological and reflexive practices in our research projects that enable a clear acknowledgement of the researcher's subjectivities by both the researchers themselves and the communities and institutions with whom we collaborate.**

The researcher's' position from different forms of communication

This report has focussed around the discussion of the researchers' positionality in relation to various issues that arise when working with indigenous communities. We are interested in opening up a dialogue around how as researchers we can find approaches, languages and methodologies that would allow us to collaborate with indigenous women and men with less prejudice. Academia presupposes a technical language and very specific forms of knowledge creation, the challenge therefore is to deconstruct these, understand them, be conscious about them, before entering spaces of collaboration and knowledge co-production.

In our experience with the MWR project, we introduced methodologies from the expressive arts supposing that it would help open spaces of dialogue with different groups of people, irrespective of their ethnic origins. In relation to the indigenous communities that we collaborated with, we realised that meaning was created in relation to their own culture and not to art as a practice or outcome. It was in their own narratives about their traditional practices where they found a meaning for communication. Along the way, we understood that the transmission-communication not only happened through the delivery of information, but also through the senses, signs and meanings that derive from what is shared. In this exercise of comprehension, the phrase that Javier Betancourt, who is an advisor for the ONIC, shared with us resonates clearly with the experience: *[...] we must learn to deconstruct ourselves from the border [...]*. (ONIC, Personal communication, November 7, 2018)

Throughout the project, we reflected about the indigenous practices that make sense in repetition, like songs, dances, rites and myths, and we asked ourselves about the place these practices have in their forms of knowledge communication. During our conversations with Embera women we discovered that there is a strong willingness to continue transmitting their culture through orality and cultural practices. These women also expressed the desire to learn more about their own histories and transfer them to younger generations but also other ethnic groups. We could have done more and better at getting closer to the right form of communication and language, to the narratives that made sense within these practices and incorporate them into our research agenda. This would have allowed us to find a better and more conducive common place for dialogue and co-production. **For future research projects, this experience raises the need, once again, to build work agendas together, where the researchers work starts from a constant search to find the meanings that communities have deposited in their own territories and histories and not the meaning that we as researchers place on them.**

In conclusion, our experiences of working with indigenous communities and the different and challenging spaces of reflection that have opened up in the process, have allowed us to perhaps learn a great deal more about ourselves as researchers, than about our indigenous partners. This process included critically thinking about our positionality, subjectivities and above all, about the epistemologies on which we base our academic practices. If we want to achieve true co-production in research projects, adopting research practices that allow for continuous reflection and questioning of these positionalities is crucial. We must learn more about the meanings and practices of the indigenous communities with whom we collaborate, but also, and equally important, remember to reflect and communicate about our culture, our cultural practices and epistemologies to them and thus generate an exchange based on principles of mutual curiosity and generosity.