

**URGENT  
ACTION  
FUND**  
Latin America &  
the Caribbean

# **CARE at the CENTER**

our **ethical** and **political** commitment

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# CARING PROTECTS

This series of articles are the result of  
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# Foreword

This document is the product of **collective creation** by the Urgent Action Fund Latin America (**UAF-LAC**) team. It is a reflection of cumulative learning, especially with women defenders, activists, and healers from the Region, and also of our internal learning about care and, in particular, our response to urgencies.

It reflects **nine years** of exchanges, conversations, and processes of organizational strengthening; first, with women defenders from Mesoamerica, Colombia, and Brazil, followed by women defenders of territory, cyber-activists, youth, and others. Accompaniment processes in Colombia and Nicaragua, as well as dialogue with Protection Funds in Colombia, likewise enriched the document.

We believe **CARE to be an ongoing process**, one which we ourselves are still constructing and learning from, especially in our ever-changing, complex reality.

This process has taught us to **pause in the face of an urgency**, to make care our ethical and political stand point, and to support the sustainability of movements and women activists. It has enabled us to change our organizational culture; to commit to the collective construction of, and responsibility for, care; and, in these times of crisis, to accompany women colleagues in their territories.

Last, but not least, it has led us to **look closely at the place of the digital body** within our proposal for feminist protection and care.

It is our pleasure to share these collective reflections with you.

- Urgent Action Fund UAF-LAC

# The Politics of CARE:<sup>1</sup>

## Feminist reflections on protection

Tatiana Cordero Velásquez

In light of the challenging worldwide context of rising violence against people who defend life in its diverse expressions— including territory — it is increasingly relevant to ask ourselves, what makes movements sustainable and who sustains them?

Movements are sustained at their deepest and most vital level by a commitment to never repeat situations of inequality and injustice: this includes the defense of the rights of women, LGBTIQ+ persons, and people with diverse abilities, as well as environmental, financial, and racial justice. It is a commitment to real democracy, not a fictional one enshrined in regulations that are not applied or that favors elites.

This vital commitment is rooted in narratives that question dominant power; it is constructed from everyday practices of individuals who have a history, are part of a specific context, and who have multiple identities they experience in particular ways<sup>2</sup>.

For example, for us, as a feminist Fund located in the Global South, in Latin America, these experiences, for the most part, are those

of women marginalized by a profoundly unequal system of class, gender, and race, and according to Amnesty International<sup>3</sup>, these women activists are defending rights in the most dangerous part of the world. The scenario is exacerbated as well by the participation of fundamentalist, anti-rights groups in formal political structures of countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Costa Rica, as well as in countries with heightened democratic crises, such as El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Guatemala, or in countries where corporations and illegal groups collude. These are the contexts, then, in which women activists carry out their political activity, contexts further delineated by particular conditions, times, and places. In summary, political and economic forces within specific historical and cultural contexts shape their personal experiences.

We recognize that each struggle is an experience felt in the body, thus, a corporeal experience. These bodies are gendered and racialized, penetrated by material conditions, as well as by age, skills, or limitations, among other factors. Therefore, these are bodies configured by the inequalities to which they are subjected- for example, rural, indigenous,



black, or mestiza women, or urban lesbian - trans youth. If we are to protect and care for women activists, it is essential to recognize these differences, because even if the threats are similar, the risks are not.

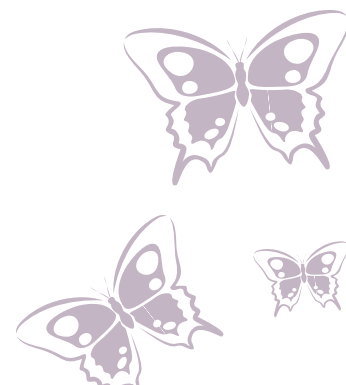
If we affirm that the defense of human dignity, resistance, is an experience that is lived and felt in the body, how then are we to understand sustainability? What is our perspective and its scope?

First, let us be clear that the sustainability of movements is not linked exclusively to the provision of resources since sustainability is not only material. It is closely linked to how we understand protection and to the type of protection we support.

Protection, in a classic sense, refers to providing responses to external threats, to the danger determined by actors who violate rights. Acceptance of this notion of protection does not consider the specific impacts women defenders face, nor address internal factors —both personal and collective— that can increase or reduce risk.

In this regard, comprehensive feminist care and protection contributes new elements: on the one hand, it recognizes that risk is configured by contextual factors such as specific aspects of class, race, skills, age, sexual preference, and the gender identity of those who are affected, as well as by organizational responses. On the other hand, we know that protection must be comprehensive, that is, it must guarantee safety and restitution of women defenders’ emotional, physical, material and spiritual well-being. Lastly, this definition recognizes that protection is based on practices of care, that is, care and protection are indivisible.

**From a feminist perspective, placing a politics of care at the center of protection and safety entails:**



1. When we refer to the politics of care, we understand it to be the ethos of care from a feminist perspective.

2. As stated by Kang et al: "As people occupy particular social locations in terms of race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, and ability, these multiple identities in combination all at the same time shape their social experiences". See Kang et al, Theorizing lived experiences, at: <https://press.rebus.community/introwgs/chapter/chapter-test-under-main-body/>

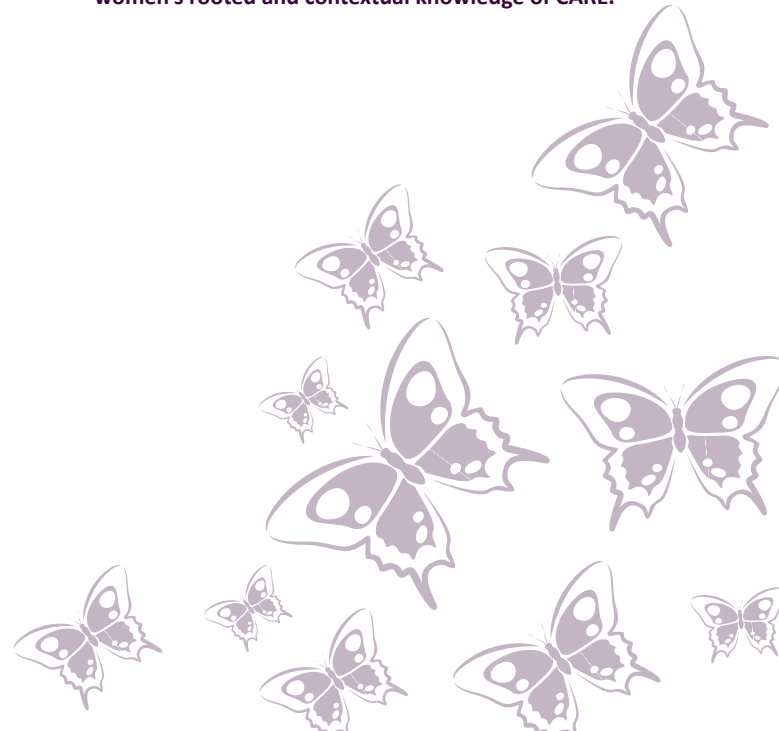
3. Amnesty International. "Defending Human Rights in the Americas: Necessary, legitimate and dangerous". Amnesty International Publications, 2014, United Kingdom. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AMR0100032014ENGLISH.PDF>, December 2014, p. 36.

- Focusing on the personal, that is on each activist's personal experience (how she experiences threats, risk, or vulnerability, and how this affects her relationships and emotions);
- Questioning the division between public and private realms in care practices, revealing who is in charge of care in both spheres, and what this means in terms of emotional burden and workload.
- Reviewing power relationships within organizations and activist practices in order to identify internal risk factors.

In our experience, the care of women defenders is not only individual, nor does it take place in isolation. Care is collective because it involves the individual, her closest emotional, work, and community circles, and is dependent on nurturing provided by networks. Therefore, creating politics of care within organizations implies changes in the organizational culture; it entails reviewing power relationships and individual and collective decision making for both individual and common wellness. It implies, for example, examining if emotional weariness is allowing a response to risk or if it is increasing the risk. It also implies looking at how threats and crises are affecting the health of a woman defender and the organization's response in light of that situation. In other words, is the collective taking charge of this situation? Is it responding in a comprehensive manner, or not, to the pain and fear of one of its members?

Collective care is what makes movements sustainable. Collective practices passed down from ancestral peoples nourish our notion of protection and invite us to take part in intercultural dialogue, realizing this is a process under constant construction emanating from ancestral memory. That is why the Zapatista women, who met in the Lacandon Jungle of Mexico in 2017, came together to continue **CARING for life**. For this reason, care, for us, is an ethical-political focus, sustained in human dignity. Care has been at the heart of networks for life in all ancestral cultures, however, in the dominant western culture, it is difficult to recognize **the central nature of caring for ourselves and among ourselves**, as well as caring for nature.

**Therefore, the challenge is to rethink protection and to support women's rooted and contextual knowledge of CARE.**



# CARE at the center

Luz Stella Ospina Murillo

Care involves inter-relationships, a way of recognizing the interdependence of all that exists: we are and we exist within the vital network of which we are part. We express this through food, shelter, words, silence, and displays of affection, hugs, caresses, and feelings. Moments of crises, physical or emotional impacts, risk, sickness, and grieving help us to be aware of the care of ourselves or the care of others. Situations of risk that render fragile the lives of women activists and which lead to requests for Rapid Response Grants include: threats, exposure to situations which impact their physical, mental, or emotional well-being, an urgent need to relocate due to confrontation with anti-rights groups, criminalization of their activism, and political crisis. Situations such as these have led UAF-LAC to question activist practices, to ask how power relationships foster vulnerability within organizations, and to share their methods for personal and collective care.

These requests were a warning for us, and as we distributed financial support, we identified, along with women activist-defenders, clues for strengthening their capabilities for exercising sustainable activism, activism that protects and places dignified life at the center, not merely survival. We began to understand other factors required for comprehensive protection that takes into account the essence of being a woman, her emotional/sexual, personal, collective, spiritual, community, and organizational relationships, as well as her physical and emotional health and the relationship with her body.

Through this collective exercise of placing care at the **CARE at the center** for a dignified life, we have identified, together with women activists and defenders, crucial aspects such as:

## CARE is a daily practice

Care is present in every action, in each small or large gesture, every hand held out to accompany, embrace, draw in, be present; in erotic, sexual, or emotional relationships with oneself and with others; in relationships with family and friends, and within organizations, communities, and territory.

Care is as vital and necessary as breathing and eating. It is as important as asking, "How are you? How do you feel?", and in this way fostering trust to open up and talk about feelings, going beyond mere formalities. One must show a willingness to listen.

## CARE involves the body

The need for care and protection is inherent to life itself and is located within the body. What happens to us affects us and moves us, and it manifests in our bodies. Words, affection, food, breathing, thoughts,

emotions, our decisions, and those things that harm us or that we require to be well, all find expression in our health and ability to enjoy and feel pleasure.



### Co-responsibility

Protection involves a daily revision of our personal or collective practices, decisions, and actions or omissions, as we recognize that our interactions generate co-responsibility and as we avoid exposing others and ourselves to unnecessary risks.

### Limits and autonomy



An exercise in holistic protection requires understanding boundaries and recognizing that time, resources, and means are limited. With this reality in mind, we must respond in ways that are within the scope of personal and collective possibilities. To relieve, to delegate, know how to say no, and to speak up in a timely manner makes it possible to strengthen autonomy and the exercise of freedom.



### First step toward healing: acknowledging wounds and pain

We have shouldered and exercised power often without acknowledging and working through personal and collective wounds that are part of our history. We have found that enjoying or suffering from what we do stems from having dealt, or not, with guilt and feelings of victimization that mark women’s lives and which have become anchored in everyday life and expressed through sacrificial responses. Activism becomes sustainable when each woman enjoys and feels good about what she does, not when she does it because she “has to” or it is her “duty”.

In order to accompany others, we must first acknowledge our need for internal healing. Each one of us is marked by a personal and family history, by being a woman, by our age, by our ethnic origin, by our sexual preference, by functional diversity, and by skills. By acknowledging the threads of light and shadow that inhabit each of us and by facing our personal and ancestral wounds and pain, we will be able to find other ways of engaging with the collective. This is a process requiring individual accompaniment, collective conversations in safe spaces based on trust, support networks, and in some cases, specialized therapeutic support or spiritual guidance.



### It is a process

The decision to focus on care is the result of a collective, institutional construct at UAF-LAC, both within the team, as well as in our relationships and everyday contact with others, all this reflected in our internal policies. We take advantage of workshops and conversations with activists as an opportunity to come together, exchange, rest, and breathe; making use of movement and awareness of our bodies, of narratives of histories of pain, fatigue, precarious situations, achievements, and celebrations; and encountering within us the knots, reiterations, alternatives, and new questions that each woman can take back with her.

These spaces have been an opportunity, valued by many, to pause and contemplate themselves, their emotions, and their bodies, and to forge new relationships and talk about themselves in a safe and trusting space, because in their everyday lives these spaces and moments are scarce. This is a process. It is a slow march toward awareness, of heeding and honoring all moments in life.

*Some activists resist this invitation due to other interpretations, beliefs, and criticism: “How can I possibly be fine when everyone is in bad shape?”, or “This idea of well-being that was sold to us is linked to a series of activities and/or special moments that require money and*



*are only available to some people in the world of capitalism and consumerism.” Thus, for many women, care is circumscribed to an individual decision and to fulfilling a list of exercises, practices, and special moments that imply both time and money. Care is seen as a task, an additional demand to everything women already have to do in their work as activists.*



### There are no infallible formulas or ideals of perfection

Care is not an ideal or perfect conflict-free state without ups and downs and problems.

Conflict builds and allows for alternatives and the development of creativity if we keep an open mind. How can we face irritation and discomfort? How can we accept imperfection? Crises proffer an opportunity to ask questions that will foster options for our daily growth. Collectivity emanates from the richness arising from the diversity of possibilities brought by each person.

*It is urgent to make changes  
that will lead us toward a society of care.*





# Feminist Financing: Reflections from the Global South

Laura María Carvajal & Beatriz Puerta Santos

Throughout the last 9 years of support for, and accompaniment of, the diversity of women and the feminist movement in Latin America, at UAF-LAC we have woven –together with women defenders of human rights and territory– a path of collective learning that seeks to understand and exercise protection and care in a broad and comprehensive manner, rooted in a feminist vision situated in the Global South. We have promoted this path using different strategies, one of the most important being the funding of activities in order to impact and transform women’s realities into conditions of safety and well-being. What follows are some thoughts about this trajectory towards feminist financing, originating in the Global South, focused on care.

Conventional ideas regarding protection define it as actions developed to attain safety, guaranteeing social, cultural, emotional, and physical integrity. In recent years, WHRD’s and some feminist organizations in the region, have reflected on the need to take into account other elements that affect the bodies and lives of women human rights defenders, who, because of being women, tend to not be included in conventional perspectives<sup>4</sup>.

These reflections are imperative, not just for those “on the front line” or directly facing risks and attacks, but also for those who accompany

and support their actions and protection strategies with financial resources. How then do we understand risk and protection from a feminist perspective when funding women activists and defenders and their organizations?

We start from a perspective that questions the traditional approach to the notion of risk and redefine it, based on the feminist formulation: the personal is political. This is to say that in order to understand risk, with all its complexities, in the lives of women and activists, we must take into account the emotional, corporal, and spiritual. At the same time, we must take into account the connections between different systems of oppression, when analyzing these risks.

On the other hand, risk arises not only from external parties –state and private–, it can also emerge from within organizational spaces that ought to be safe. A concentration of power and lack of mutual recognition for the work carried out, among other reasons, as well as activism models that replicate sacrifice and heroism, all serve to increase the vulnerability of women and diminish their capacities to respond to risk.

Donors, social justice and human rights philanthropy, and women’s and feminist funds themselves are urged to participate in this reflection and to review how our practices, policies, and perspectives contribute to the comprehensive protection of women defenders and the sustainability and advancement of their movements; or, to the contrary, to increase their vulnerability and risk.

Through dialogue with, and in the accompaniment of, women defenders, we have identified some harmful funding practices. These include: the imposition of time frames and rhythms foreign to their dynamics and contexts, including measures such as demanding biometric clocks be installed in the organizations’ offices<sup>5</sup>; the use of exclusionary or inappropriate language in reference to women defenders; a lack of respect for the autonomy of organizations by imposing agendas, strategies, and perspectives that are not their own; a disproportionate demand for results and funding accountability; and the absence of flexibility and empathy in light of daily challenges, among other issues. These practices not only make relationships between funders and those who receive funding more complex, stressful, and unpleasant, but also reproduce inequalities and systems of privilege, and are detrimental to the integral protection of activists.

## Thoughtful financial support that promotes personal and collective power: our lessons learned

Our main strategy to support the transformative power of women and their movements in Latin America is the provision of flexible, strategic, and timely resources to women defenders of human rights and their organizations.

This funding is realized through our **Rapid Response Grants** that provide resources, in an agile manner, to activists and organizations that need to immediately respond to a situation in which: a) they face a high level of risk or have been attacked because of their work, or b) they want to seize an opportunity to advance or avoid setbacks in women’s rights. These urgent grants are our trademark, and to execute them we have a model shared with our sister funds in Asia, Africa, and the United States.

Given that support for the transformative actions of women defenders of territory is one of our priorities, in 2016 we initiated a specific

grantmaking model called **Strategic Grants**, which focuses on strengthening protection, communications, and advocacy capacities, as well as supporting women’s resistance initiatives for the medium term.

Our organization places care at the center, and for this reason, we take time to think about what it means to mobilize and deliver resources in a careful manner in order to strengthen the feminist movement and of the diversity of women in the region. We would like to share some of the lessons learned during our process of accompanying and financing women human rights defenders, recognizing that this is a work in progress and that we always need to be open to revisit and transform our processes.

## The origin of resources

Firstly, for us, it is of the utmost importance to ensure that the resources we mobilize and deliver to women’s and feminist organizations do not originate with donors or other actors contrary to their interests. This means stakeholders cannot exercise or legitimize policies or practices that violate human rights, specifically those of women, first nations, Afro-descendants, or Raizal<sup>5,1</sup> communities, nor may they benefit from policies of dispossession or exploitation of territories in our region.

## Sustainability of the Movement

Sustainable activism occurs in conditions of well-being, dignity, and enjoyment. This, in addition to the aforementioned aspects, requires that resources permit women human rights defenders - WHRDs to advance with their work. Within the framework of both **Strategic Grants** and **Rapid Response Grants**, we have learned the importance of funding strategic actions that strengthen capacities and generate progressive change in organizations, the goal being, that in the future, they will be able to continue and strengthen their work, without depending on our resources.

4.To learn more about the broader panorama of these risks and the types of leadership and activism that affect the well-being of women defenders, please see: “What’s the Point of Revolution If We Can’t Dance?” written by Jane Barry and Jelena Dordevic in 1997. This book is a compilation of testimonies from over 100 activists in various countries, describing their experiences as women human rights defenders. Available at: <https://www.fondoaccionurgente.org.co/publicaciones>

5. This means that they demand that members of organizations “clock in/out” upon their arrival and departure at the offices.

5.1. Raizal is an ethnic identity claimed by Colombian afro-Caribbean, linked in their history to indigenous people of the English speaking Caribbean and of the Antilles.



## Well-being takes precedence over “productivity”

For UAF-LAC it is important that activities implemented with our support be carried out under conditions of safety and well-being. Therefore, we are critical of a productivity-based model that expects quantitative results, with short timelines and scarce funding, without considering the workload and stress this entails for women defenders. Decisions about the number of activities to be carried out should be made autonomously by the organizations themselves, according to their own rhythms, capacities, and contexts.

## Protection and CARE are at the heart of the actions we fund

It is imperative to support actions that promote comprehensive protection and care of women defenders; including personal, collective, and territorial healing processes, in concordance with their own knowledge, worldviews, and possibilities. Such support allows for the construction or strengthening of personal and collective protection practices and strategies, both from the perspective of responding to emergencies (in the case of Rapid Response Grants), as well as from a preventative and internal capacity building approach (in the case of training on integral feminist protection and our Strategic Grants).

Although the development of protection and care strategies or practices is not the main activity carried out with UAF-LAC financial support, they are imperative, crosscutting elements for all types of actions to defend the human rights of the diversity of women and of the territories. Hence, while providing resources to support diverse forms of territorial defense, campaigns on social media and other media outlets, actions to establish legal precedents or to encourage social mobilization, as well as temporary relocation, among other proposals, we must not lose sight of actions supportive of personal

and collective, comprehensive care for women defenders and their organizations.



## CAREful feedback

In our role as a fund that supports and accompanies, we try to ensure that our feedback on proposals and actions undertaken by women defenders is always done in a careful and hands-on manner and that contexts, difficulties, and challenges faced by activists on a daily basis are taken into account. We ensure that their autonomy, decisions, and pace are respected. Thanks to this conscientious respect, we have built horizontal relationships with the women defenders and activists we support.

We believe that feedback should not be unilateral (only by those who provide the support), but that safe spaces must be provided so that women defenders can express their feelings, critiques, and recommendations regarding the funding processes.

## Intercultural perspective

This openness and dialogue between our perspectives and those of the women defenders lead us to an ongoing learning process regarding new and possible strategies, actions, and approaches on protection and care. We are located in the Global South, and in an effort to deconstruct colonial practices, we seek intercultural dialogue, which entails the incorporation of the knowledge and traditional forms of protection, spirituality, and personal, collective, and territorial healing that continue today in the indigenous, Afro-descendant, and Raizal peoples of our continent.



## Coming together for mutual CARE

Each of these modalities of support involves a follow-up and accompaniment process, including encounters, which become spaces for exchanging experiences, practices, and knowledge on specific

issues, and during which the crosscutting ethical-political proposal of **Sustainable Activism** is incorporated. We have seen that these spaces allow women defenders –and our own team – to re-energize, learn new protection strategies, expand our networks of solidarity and *acuerpamiento*<sup>6</sup>, and to construct spaces for personal and collective healing within ourselves.

## Deconstructing power relations

Money is power. When women defenders manage funds freely and directly, their autonomy and capacities are strengthened. At the same time, a power relationship exists between those who give and those who receive money, as in any other social relationship. To provide resources and accompany from the perspective of feminist practice and an ethics of care requires recognizing, making explicit, and working for the transformation of said power relations. In our everyday work we, as women and as a team, question and revise practices that may replicate this type of relationship and/or we question these practices within the philanthropic community.



## Flexibility and empathy

Through the provision of resources to women defenders, both in times of urgency as well as for internal capacity development, we have learned about the importance of flexibility when the situation requires it, due either to urgency or the fragile nature of the context. It is imperative to understand the diverse needs of activists and their organizations at both the personal and collective levels and to think about adapting our responses to be not only more effective but also safe during the process. When facing realities as complex and occasionally as discouraging as those in Latin America, we are called upon, as a feminist fund, to stand in solidarity, to be empathetic, and to understand the adjustments that women defenders must make to initial proposals to respond to the challenges they face.

## Sincere and CAREful communication

Language is a fundamental aspect of our focus on the care and well-being of those we support and, indeed, for ourselves. It is important that communication be nonviolent and display an understanding of the difficult situations women defenders are experiencing, as well as recognizing that, for many women, Spanish is not their native tongue. Moreover, communications must be sincere and exhibit a spirit of acknowledgment of our own limitations, vulnerabilities, and needs.



## The external and the internal

To work from a feminist ethical-political perspective of care, we must not lose sight of self-care and collective care; the two are inseparable and a balance must be struck between our care practices in the external sphere –activists, allies, and others– and internal practices within our team. For this reason, because our work requires us to respond to pressing and urgent situations that are unplanned and often painful, we recognize the importance of making room for calm in our daily lives, rarely an easy task. This has led to a collective process as a team to recognize what affects us, what weighs heavily upon us, what is difficult for us, and to seek to resolve these matters together using the knowledge and practices of each person, and on occasion turning to the accompaniment and help of others.

The sustainability of movements comes from the recognition of spaces, practices, and kinds of relationships that allow us to care for ourselves, as well as for the collective and the community. As a feminist and activist fund in the Global South, we want to continue weaving this path of care, liberation, joy, and healing, with others.

6. We take this notion of *acuerpamiento* from Guatemalan indigenous, feminist communities. *Acuerpamiento* is an ancestral practice of solidarity and collective care, and it means to accompany with your body, to surround, and support one another, especially when a comrade or organization has experienced an attack or a situation that calls for collective care and protection.



# Click on **CARE**

## A call to connect with our digital body<sup>7</sup>

Sara Munarriz Awad

In 2016, the Urgent Action Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean (UAF-LAC) held, together with women defenders from various countries in the region, an inter-generational convening to systematize approved grants related to the strategic use of ICT<sup>8</sup> for the defense of women's rights. Our analyses of the **positive impact and the affectations** brought by the use of **new technologies** in activism originated here, as well as our understanding of how online attacks impact the bodies and emotions of women activists and defenders.

During this encounter, we began to delve more deeply into the virtual world as a space to defend rights and as a space for protection, given the multiple acts of violence experienced by “cyber activists”, or, indeed, by the broad diversity of women who mobilize, via the internet, content regarding their work in the defense of rights. This violence worsens as their life experiences intersect with other factors of vulnerability, further aggravating digital attacks: for example, women of different abilities, non-hegemonic gender and sexual orientation, digital, racialized or impoverished women migrants, all of them experience deep-seated violences, rendered invisible in digital ecosystems.

From here on, at encounters and dialogues facilitated by UAF- LAC, we try to establish spaces of reflection, together with women defenders, advisers, and allied organizations for discussing our digital activism, as a specific methodological proposal. Relying on the daily experiences of activists and our team, we began a discussion regarding anxiety, egos, and self-censure related to digital violence, which is difficult to acknowledge. We also discussed the impacts of permanent

connectivity that multiplies the time devoted to work, blurs the fine line that separates our personal lives from our professional lives, and that even distorts awareness of our own limits. Nevertheless, these dialogues always led us to feel the joy of being able to communicate with others who were geographically distant, to have the opportunity to strengthen networks that transcend borders, to organize our work in different ways, and to go virtual with our ideas and campaigns, thereby expanding support to new audiences.

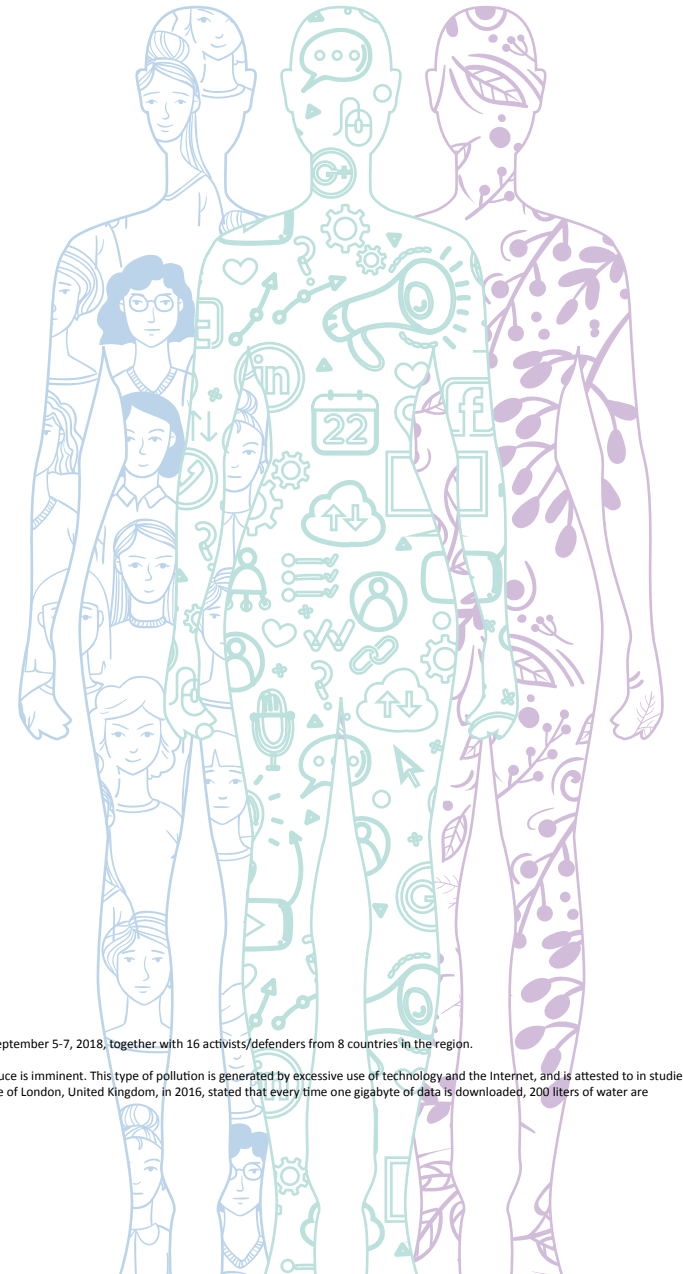
This was how we began to value and give meaning to our relationship with everything we were constructing in the on-line world, resonating, at the same time, with other movements and voices, which in Latin America are making their political mark on the Web. As a result, the concept of **“digital body”**, surfaced, understood as a set of memories and information about ourselves or our collectives, which we create in order to have a presence in the digital world.

At the same time, our mestiza (mixed race) selves coincided with the integrated vision of life embraced by numerous indigenous and black Latin American cultures, and it became impossible to continue developing this notion of **“digital body”** as one that is separate from our physical body, and, separate from the notion of territory-body-land<sup>9</sup>. This more holistic perspective expanded reflection on the different bodies that we inhabit as scenarios for resistance and protection, and on how these bodies interconnect.

The digital world exerts an impact on our physical body, and when we become victims of any type of online abuse, we inevitably feel both physical and emotional pain. During 2018, an advocate<sup>10</sup>told us that because of censure of her collective's Facebook page, her personal profile on this same social media was closed down, and her entire life story, built and stored there from adolescence, was wiped out. She experienced depression, and in her own words, said it felt to her like “virtual murder”. This kind of impact –similar to what we feel when our mobile phone or laptop is stolen, or when large portions of our digital information get deleted– is generally dismissed in public or collective spaces.

Problematising the connection between the virtual body and the territory-body-land concept led us to think, as a team and together with defenders, about universal assets and nature, and that the creation of technology and its development are detrimental to territories that have been historically exploited by colonial systems, mining companies, and capitalists. According to one activist<sup>11</sup>“digital technology is possible because we exploit Mother Earth”. This is why we believe that we cannot speak of digital resistance if we don't grasp the specific impact it exerts on our region, both on the development of electronic devices as well as the use of information technologies<sup>12</sup>.

Because of this connectivity of the “digital body” with these other bodies, we feel it is urgent to enhance the concept of **comprehensive feminist protection** with a reflection about **caring for ourselves and collective care in the digital world**. We are living in times that demand calm and reflection in light of those digital practices that put our lives or our political activism at risk. Even beyond the tools and applications offered by digital security to protect and defend us from online attacks, we must understand that the risk stems not only from the outside but often because of how we ourselves are assuming our “digital habitats”, with no inkling of our limits and how our territories can be



7. FAU-LA's communications team produced the initial version of this text. We thank the lessons learned and major contributions proffered by Alma Ugarte on this journey, as well as the reading and contributions of Laura Carvajal, Alejandra Henríquez, Tatiana Cordero, Beatriz Puerta and especially Luz Stella Ospina, who has brought to life and given voice and dance to the Sustainable Activism Program.

8. Information and Communication Technologies - ICTs.

9. The idea of 'body-land territory' comes from resistance processes exercised by indigenous women of the Maya-Xinca group in Guatemala, and it represents a proposal for knowledge developed by these women that has nourished Latin American feminists and others around the world. They called themselves community feminists working to promote the rights of indigenous women, to counter racism and discrimination, poverty, violence, and in defense of the land in light of mining exploitation. The proposal is to recover our own bodies of land at the same time, they tell us we cannot make progress in the environmental or territorial defense insofar as said territory does not respect the autonomy of women or even violates their autonomy. This political proposal is based on their cosmology that states "(...) the defense and recovery of the body-land territory determines a manner of understanding the body as a living, historical territory." It seeks to make known that harm to Mother Earth is reflected in our bodies and vice-versa. See: Lorena Cabnal, 2015. "Sin ser consultadas: La mercantilización de nuestro territorio cuerpo-tierra," in "Mujeres Defendiendo el Territorio. Experiencias de participación en América Latina," page 46. Fondo de Acción Urgente para América Latina.

10. PParticipant at the 2nd Convening of the Latin American Network for Advisers to the Urgent Action Fund, held in Colombia, September 5-7, 2018, together with 16 activists/defenders from 8 countries in the region.

11. ibid.

12. Quote from information compiled by Alma Ugarte: "(...) When we connect to the Internet, the carbon footprint that we produce is imminent. This type of pollution is generated by excessive use of technology and the Internet, and is attested to in studies that indicate that 2% of global CO2 pollution is generated by IT companies. In addition, a study performed by the Imperial College of London, United Kingdom, in 2016, stated that every time one gigabyte of data is downloaded, 200 liters of water are consumed: <https://www.infobae.com/tecnologia/2016/10/07/cuantos-litros-de-agua-se-consumen-al-usar-la-web/>"

adversely affected by technological industries; or how risk relates to control exercised by companies and governments over information we provide.

Part of sustaining activists and movements requires expanding comprehensive protection and care, in response to the digital era; recognizing, at the same time, the importance of our personal and collective agency in this scenario, one that is undoubtedly enveloped in a dispute over narratives and possibilities. In other words, to take care of ourselves in digital terms means to make individual and collective decisions to take on other types of online activism that respond to our contexts, material realities, our own tools, and to learned, life-affirming lessons<sup>13</sup>. In this regard, it is very important to engage in a dialogue regarding what we understand as *“digital care”* and to learn from the experiences of others, which can be as varied and enriching as the organizations and movements themselves. For example, the need for protection of an Afro-Colombian women’s organization led them to virtually replicate their ancestral practice of “comadreo” (comradely chatting/gossiping) through a chat, which allowed them to accompany each other in their individual resistance processes through texting and voice messaging, and to shorten geographic distance resulting from the forced displacement and internal migration of some of their members.

This text, then, is a door, a pathway, *“a call to the hearts of activists”*<sup>14</sup>, to take charge of our digital bodies, fully aware of the connection to other bodies and everything in our surroundings. We begin with the understanding that the living body is the first territory of protection and care, in order to develop true measures for ourselves and for our collectives that will allow for “cyber-activism” in conditions of well-being and enjoyment.

The challenge thus lies in “hyperlinking” the digital body, as a daily endeavor and as part of a process, to the strategies for personal and collective care that we are already implementing, and in this way

contribute to the sustainability of resistance movements and actions around the world. For example, indigenous women of Central America speak of “acuerparnos” (wrapping our bodies around one another), which is akin to expanding the body to accompany others and which has been a powerful and transforming process for accompaniment among women defenders. How can we replicate this concept of wrapping our bodies, or “acuerpamiento” in the virtual world? Might we say that we wrap our virtual words around the other, or “apalabramos”<sup>15</sup> in a conscientious manner, despite not sharing the same physical space so that we might become stronger in sustaining our resistance in the region?

As an example, for us, collectively, this has become an exercise in making ourselves co-responsible as an organization for what we share online about and with others. We began to reflect on our communications channels, which has led to the development of secure digital spaces to store information received from women’s and feminist movements in the region. *“Digital Care”* has also signified daily, solidarity-based, external communications in order to disseminate campaigns among our networks in the region; sharing and updating information on freeware tools to protect us from repression, in some countries; seeking strategies to deal with the echo chambers or “fences”<sup>16</sup> regarding audiences, imposed by commercial social media networks; and avoiding helping to finance companies that market our data and information.

This reflection makes sense to us, given the experience of the Sustainable Activism Program, which for more than nine years has called out to understand care as a process that begins with the conscious awareness of our own bodies. As part of this ethical and political focus to place **CARE at the center** of our work, we propose embracing our digital body, expanding our understanding of it, and assuming its protection and care as an everyday personal and collective decision.



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13. For example, we know of the need to safely back up our digital information, but only try to do so after accidentally losing years of stored information.  
14. Este ha sido un llamado permanente del programa Activismo Sostenible en América Latina.  
15. Experience on collective care of Young feminist organizations in Latin America to “accompany with words”. The expression was shared by one of the participants at the Meeting for Systematic Order to Support Rapid Response to Resistance in light of Religious Fundamentalism. This meeting was held in Antioquia (Colombia) in July of 2018.  
16. “Fences” refers to those limits or audience bubbles that commercial networks (such as Facebook and Twitter) employ to restrict content according to online user behavior for the purpose of marketing.