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Methodological note

We are Vitóriaias-Régias

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Around the world, defenders of the environment and human rights are under threat. Although they are numerous, the normative milestones for their protection and the organizations and support networks lack a gender perspective. This means that the protection needs of male and female defenders are different and the protection programs do not always respond to the needs of each group. The Igarapé Institute has proposed to map the risks and vulnerabilities faced by women defenders of human rights and the environment in the Amazon so that these protection networks can be tailored to reality.

Methodologically, the data collection and sampling method known as “respondent-driven sampling” was chosen because women defenders are one of the so-called “hidden populations,” that present specific dilemmas for research. This is a population group that is difficult to reach, small relative to the population, and whose size and members are unknown. In these cases, other research methods end up focusing on the known members of this group and therefore miss valuable information as a significant part of the group is not being consulted.

The respondent-driven sampling method or Respondent-Driven Sampling (RDS) combines the snowball method with a mathematical model that compensates for the fact that the sample is not collected randomly. This model is based on the “six degrees of separation” principle. According to this approach, all members of the group can potentially be

reached in six waves. Thus, from a certain number of known women defenders, others are identified, who in turn identify others, and so on. In the case of women defenders, there is an additional challenge. In addition to being a hidden population, an exploratory survey conducted by the Igarapé Institute in 2021 identified many women who are engaged in the defense and protection of the environment and human rights, but who do not recognize themselves as defenders. For this reason, it was decided to carry out the survey with the active participation of a group of women defenders. As a result, data was collected from the contact network of these women and from the women who were contacted. To ensure representativeness and reduce bias, the defenders recruited by the Igarapé Institute are ethnically and regionally diverse. Therefore, the group of defenders includes quilombolas [descendants of escaped slaves] and indigenous women who are committed to different causes and live in different parts of the Amazon. It is important to note, however, that although the sample is representative, it is not statistically representative.

In Brazil, we focused on specific states in order to deepen our knowledge of the risks and vulnerabilities of women defenders in relation to specific local dynamics. The states represented in this group of defenders who guided the sample for data collection are Acre, Amapá, Amazonas, Maranhão, Pará, and Roraima.

Based on this methodological choice, nine women defenders were recruited and trained to use the forms, taking into account the representativeness of the population of each Amazonian state in Brazil, the number of land conflicts that occur in each municipality of each state, and the ethnic-racial identity of the people most affected by these conflicts. They were also selected based on their access to strategic areas for research and their ethnic-racial identity, trying to relate this identity to those most affected by the conflicts. In the team of consultants, we chose to have more representatives from Pará: three women with different ethnic-racial profiles and residents in different municipalities of the state. This is because Pará, in addition to being very large, has a high number of recorded conflicts and a diversity of women affected, including quilombolas, settlers, and indigenous women.

Another state with a large number of consultants is Roraima, which has a high number of victimized indigenous women. We decided to bring two women from different indigenous tribes to broaden our perspective on how these populations are affected by these conflicts. We also included in the group an indigenous woman from the state of Amazonas, who lives in the most indigenous municipality in the country.

In Maranhão, a quilombola woman was chosen. Maranhão is a state with a large geographical area and a high number of recorded conflicts, like Pará, but the violence there affects a specific population – the quilombola – much more. In both the states of Acre and in the state of Amapá, the choice of settled women was also based on the largest victims of violent conflict in these places. Thus, in two states belonging to the Legal Amazon we did not select anyone: Tocantins and Mato Grosso, because they have fewer conflicts and belong to a different biome, the cerrado.

The result was the collection of 131 responses from women from all states of the Legal Amazon, except Tocantins. The profile of the responses is that of women between 18 and 56 years old, 9 of whom are trans women, and the racial composition was 34% indigenous, 25% mixed race, and 36% black, with only 3% white.

A similar analysis was conducted for Colombia and Peru, although only two local consultants were hired for these countries. The selection of areas was based on the level of violence against human rights defenders, the level of environmental conflict, and the rate of violence against women. Based on these criteria, the departments of Putumayo and Meta in Colombia were identified as areas of interest. Putumayo is associated with environmental conflicts due to infrastructure projects, mining, and illegal crops, which generate high levels of violence. Meta, on the other hand, is the gateway to the northern Amazon, with pressures from extensive cattle ranching. For this reason, the survey was conducted by an indigenous defender from the department of Putumayo and another mixed-race and peasant woman from the department of Meta.

As a result, 72 questionnaires were completed by women from 17 provinces: Antioquia, Arauca, Bogotá, Bolívar, Boyacá, Caldas, Caquetá, Cauca, Chocó, Cundinamarca, Guaviare, Meta, Putumayo, Quindío, Santander, Tolima, Valle del Cauca, and Vaupés. The composition of the questionnaires is 36% indigenous women, 32% white, 24% mixed-race,¹ and 8% black.

In the case of Peru, the regions of Ucayali, Loreto, Madre de Dios, and San Martín were identified as areas of interest. In the case of Ucayali, high rates of victimization of defenders were observed, as well as activities related to drug trafficking. Madre de Dios is the epicenter of illegal mining. The survey was conducted by an indigenous defender from the department

1 In Colombia and Peru, the “mestizo” category corresponds to the “pardo” classification in Portuguese, used by the Brazilian statistics agency IBGE.

of Ucayali, and a black woman living in the capital, Lima, with ties to the department of San Martín. Of the 84 respondents, 99% were indigenous and 1% were black. A total of ten departments covered the reach of the questionnaires in the country: Amazonas, Huánuco, Ica, Junín, Lima, Loreto, Madre de Dios, Pasco, San Martín, and Ucayali.

It is also important to mention that some precautions were taken by the Igarapé team to ensure the safety of the defenders.

1. The defenders collected information that could not put them at risk. Rather, they collected information about their own risks and vulnerabilities with the goal of informing programs and networks to improve their protection.
2. Data collection was carried out by integrating this task into the defenders' usual activities. Our focus was on recruiting women with recognized careers working with other defenders.
3. Most of the data collection was done online and through telephone interviews.
4. The research team from Igarapé Institute conducted two workshops with the defenders to increase their safety. The research workshop covered the data collection methodology, ethical principles of research (including protection), and security protocols. The digital security workshop for activists focused on protecting these women from potential threats in the digital environment.

FORM PROCESSING METHODOLOGY

Following the methodology previously described, the number of forms collected was as follows:

- 77 in Colombia (72 women, excluding 5 male respondents);
- 84 in Peru;
- 132 in Brazil (131 women, excluding 1 male respondent).

These forms were collected through contacts made by the defenders recruited for the project, using at least the following dissemination strategies:

- Sending the link to the form through a Whatsapp message;
- Monitoring of the form through a phone call, being filled directly on the platform (Google Forms) by the hired defenders;
- Personal use of the form during the field visits of the defenders. In this case, they entered the responses directly into the platform when there was sufficient internet connection and, in other cases, the responses were filled out using the printed form to be inserted into the platform later.

Considering the different methods allowed for close follow-up by the defenders who were recruited and trained in the project for each of the women contacted in different areas of the three countries. Secondly, this combination of methods provided flexibility in the face of access problems and low connectivity in the areas of interest, so that the telephone call and the field visit ensured the coverage of the survey.

The application of the forms was closed on 12/31/2022. The surveys were merged into a single database in order to continue with the descriptive analysis of the forms. It should be noted that all respondents agreed to participate in the survey.²

The basic procedures for processing the database included the following elements:

- Standardization of single-choice questions: based on the classification of the responses provided in the original survey, all entries included as “open-ended” in each of the questions were standardized using the “other” option. A question-by-question review was conducted to identify new response options for inclusion in future interactions of the qualitative research;
- Standardization of multiple-choice questions: special attention was given to the process of standardization multiple-choice questions where the respondent had the opportunity to select several multiple answers (e.g., different areas of intervention or different forms of victimization), as well as the ability to include open-ended responses through the “other” option. This follows the same methodology as the standardization of single-choice questions;

- The standardization was carried out in parallel in Spanish and Portuguese, with special attention paid to ensuring the consistency of the questions in the forms in both languages;
- Cleaning of variables such as:
 - Age: standardization of entries in letters or including complements such as “xx years”;
 - Place: a check was made on the geographical location of the questions “In which department/municipality were you born?” and “In which department/municipality do you live?”. The correspondence between the municipality and location in the department was checked. Then, the official code of the municipality was included according to the geographical databases of each country.

The analysis of the surveys is a descriptive exercise of the database. It takes into account the absence of sample expansion factors for a population, since, as indicated in the first section of this methodological document, the sample collected is neither random nor representative of a population. As indicated, this is not possible because the population is “hidden” and is part of an invitation and selection process by the researchers recruited and trained for this project.

² Question: “Do you agree to participate in this survey, providing data that will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Policy of the Igarapé Institute, under the guidelines established by the LGPD - General Personal Data Protection Act (Law No. 13.709, of August 14, 2018) of Brazil. The data will be kept anonymous, as much as possible, and will be used only for the purposes of the survey and the actions resulting from it. The data will not be used for commercial or political purposes.”

The sample of this study reflects the patterns and characteristics of a specific population and care should be taken not to generalize these results to the general population of women environmental and land rights defenders in the selected countries. However, the database analyzed does take into account the characteristics of women who can identify themselves as defenders and, in particular, identifies important regional patterns among the countries analyzed, as well as contrasting elements.

All surveys were included in the descriptive analysis because of the willingness to participate and the use of the data. However, 1 survey in Brazil and 4 in Colombia were excluded because they were answered by men.

The descriptive analysis is based on the tabulation of each of the questions through the standardized responses. The responses were tabulated for a comparative exercise between the three countries, as well as within the states in Brazil. To facilitate the interpretation of the patterns identified, proportions were calculated between the total responses in each country (which always added up to the total of $n= 74$ CO, 84 PE and 131 BR). In the case of multiple responses, the total always exceeds this general n , since each respondent always answered more than one option in such questions.

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