

ALLIANCE FOR LAND,  
INDIGENOUS AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
DEFENDERS

# **BUILDING BRIDGES FOR AT-RISK INDIGENOUS, LAND AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS**

Meeting report: ALLIED In-person event. Bogotá, Colombia  
April 11th to 13th.









# CONTENTS

## **PART I. ALLIED: IMPROVING RECOGNITION, RESPECT, AND SUPPORT FOR THE WORK OF ILEDs**

1

### **1.1. ALLIED AT A GLANCE**

1

### **1.2. EXAMINING ALLIED: GOOD WORK AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**

3

## **PART II. BUILDING TOGETHER: ACTIONABLE STEPS FOR INCREASED PROTECTION**

8

### **2.1. EXISTING SUPPORT STRATEGIES: EFFECTIVE WAYS TO SUPPORT ILEDs**

8

### **2.2. WHAT IS CURRENTLY WORKING WELL?**

11

### **2.3. WHAT COULD WORK BETTER?**

11

### **2.4. PROTECTION STRATEGIES IN FOCUS**

17



# INTRODUCTION

On 11-13 April 2023, ALLIED members; donors; indigenous, environmental and land defenders; and regional and international organizations working to support ILEDs met in Bogota, Colombia, with the overarching objective of identifying pathways and strategies for increased protection for these defenders and ways to accelerate change in the situation currently faced by them.

The meeting had three parts. During the first part of the meeting, participants learned about the work and achievements of ALLIED since 2018, evaluated the alliance's strategy, and discussed opportunities for enhanced impact. Throughout the second part, attendees discussed and analyzed existing support strategies, learned about the work developed by organizations present at the gathering and identified opportunities for increased protection. During the third and final part of the meeting, participants formulated recommendations to ALLIED and other key stakeholders on how to increase support and protection for ILEDs.

This report summarizes the discussions held during the Bogota meeting. It first summarizes the discussions held during the Bogota meeting regarding ALLIED: the alliance's mission and strategy, what it is doing well, and how it could better fulfill its purpose (Part I - ALLIED: Improving recognition, respect, and support for the work of ILEDs) and then outlines discussions on existing protection strategies: what is working well and what could be done better (Part II - BUILDING TOGETHER: Actionable steps for increased protection).

## PART I. ALLIED: IMPROVING RECOGNITION, RESPECT AND SUPPORT FOR THE WORK OF ILEDs

### 1.1. ALLIED at a glance

#### Our History

The Alliance for Land, Indigenous and Environmental Defenders - ALLIED is a network of civil society actors (individuals and groups) that work to protect, celebrate, recognize and support Indigenous, Land, and Environmental Defenders (ILEDs).

ALLIED was founded in 2018 in response to attacks against ILEDs. It was formed as a network that could drive multi-stakeholder action and systemic change in the recognition and protection of ILEDs. Acknowledging that attacks against defenders are a global problem with implications at the individual, community, national, and international levels, ALLIED was created to catalyze a coordinated response to address this situation at the various levels and stages it requires.

As a network, ALLIED connects, coordinates and informs the work of local, regional and international organizations that support ILEDs and fosters increased support for these defenders.

ALLIED comprises 83 member organizations with a global presence, represented by 180 individuals. Since its inception in 2018, ALLIED has collaborated on various global and regional initiatives in countries



such as Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Kenya, Philippines, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Vietnam, as well as regionally in West Africa.

## Our mission

ALLIED works to ensure that governments, civil society and business enterprises recognise, respect, and support the work of ILEDs, hence allowing these defenders to protect the environment (including the climate) free from violence and retaliation. To this end, ALLIED legitimizes and celebrates the work of defenders, raises the political costs of attacks against them, and works to secure stronger protection and prevention frameworks.

ALLIED is designed to serve as a catalyst for protection, facilitating connections between supporters and defenders; the alliance, however, does not directly implement protection strategies.

## Our purpose

ALLIED works to:

- Reduce lethal and non-lethal attacks against ILEDs and increase the political cost of these attacks.
- Expand the reach and effectiveness of protection and support to ILEDs.
- Secure stronger and more meaningful commitments by governments and the private sector and the fulfillment of and respect for ILEDs' human rights.

## Our strategy

To achieve these collective goals, ALLIED:

1. Raises awareness of the nature and scope of attacks against ILEDs.
2. Connects grassroots and local ILEDs and supporters with their peers working at the regional and global levels, and an international movement.
3. Breaks silos between ILEDs, organizations and donors working on environment, human rights, climate, development and security.
4. Co-powers ILEDs to increase their capacity to implement protection strategies and their ability to find and receive support.
5. Informs and coordinates the work of stakeholders to jointly rethink and devise prevention and protection strategies and to encourage holistic and mutually reinforcing action and increased outreach.
6. Builds and strengthens protection and prevention capacities in stakeholders, including donors and ILEDs.
7. Increases the visibility of the work of ILEDs and their contribution to the protection of the environment and battles stigmatization.

8. Supports and strengthens legal and advocacy efforts to secure accountability and fight impunity for attacks against ILEDs.

## a. Data collection and reporting

The Data Collection and Reporting Working Group (DWG) increases the visibility and understanding of the nature and scope of attacks against ILEDs and informs policy and protection frameworks. To achieve this, it works to reduce underreporting and fragmentation of data and to create a global database of lethal and non-lethal attacks against ILEDs.

The DWG has developed two key strategies to fulfill its mission. On one hand, it enhances civil society reporting of lethal and non-lethal attacks against ILEDs. The DWG works and strengthens the reporting capacities of local data collectors in five pilot countries: Colombia, Guatemala, Kenya, Mexico, and the Philippines. Local data collectors and the DWG then work together to compile data in a global database with common, comparable categories. The database aggregates different levels of data to give a global perspective on trends in attacks against ILEDs. The main outputs of this work are the global database of lethal and non-lethal attacks against ILEDs (yet to be published) and the Hidden Iceberg report, which summarizes this information and is hoped to be updated periodically.

On the other side, the DWG works to encourage States to comply with their commitment under Sustainable Development Goal 16 to report on attacks against ILEDs. To this end, the DWG contrasts State and civil society reporting on attacks against ILEDs and highlights gaps and opportunities for strengthening official data in this area. The results of this work have been published in the report *A Crucial Gap*. The DWG has brought this report to the attention of States in key multilateral fora, including the High-Level Political Forum.

## b. Law and advocacy

The Law and Advocacy Working Group (LAWG) works to secure the adoption of stronger laws for the protection of ILEDs, the implementation of existing norms in this field, and catalyzes effective responses to the criminalization of ILEDs.

To achieve the first objective, the LAWG promotes the sharing of effective advocacy and legal tactics in support of ILEDs. The LAWG convenes learning and exchange spaces in which ALLIED members and key stakeholders share their work and experiences. During 2022, the LAWG organized sessions on the implementation of the Escazu agreement and addressing impunity. The LAWG also supports ALLIED members working to strengthen policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, such as national human rights defenders' frameworks, environmental regional agreements for Africa and Asia, and the European Union directive on corporate due diligence.



To deliver on its second objective, the LAWG raises the visibility of criminalization and Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) and works to identify, highlight, and encourage the implementation of good practices to address these threats. For this purpose, the LAWG convenes periodic spaces of exchange in which defenders and organizations that offer legal support meet to discuss strategies and share knowledge and experiences. In addition, the LAWG supports local organizations that offer legal protection for defenders and connects defenders and lawyers.

## c. Supports and solidarity

The Supports and Solidarity Working Group (SSWG) strives to increase ILEDs' capacity to seek and receive support and to increase the effectiveness and outreach of existing support strategies. The SSWG achieves this by responding to the information and support needs of ILEDs and bringing ILEDs closer to the organizations working to support them.

To address the information needs of ILEDs, the SSWG works closely with defenders in pilot countries Colombia, Kenya, and Mexico. At dialogue spaces convened for this purpose, ILEDs expressed the need for a one-stop-shop resource containing support information. The result of these participatory processes was The Phonebook, a directory of support organizations. This resource lists the organizations that offer support to ILEDs and, for each of the abovementioned countries, it includes a free-to-consult WPA APP, which can be downloaded to any device (computer, tablet, or mobile phone) and afterwards accessed without an internet connection from any part of the world.<sup>1</sup>

To increase the outreach and effectiveness of existing support strategies, the SSWG organizes meetings in which defenders and support organizations meet and discuss strategies to increase access to support and convenes spaces and produces action-oriented resources to encourage support organizations to revise their protection strategies.

## 1.2. Examining ALLIED: good work and opportunities for improvement

During the Bogota meeting, participants discussed how ALLIED can better accomplish its mission to allow ILEDs to protect the environment (including the climate) free from violence and retaliation. The discussions focused on identifying the ways in which ALLIED could most effectively legitimize the work of defenders, raise the political costs of attacks against them, and secure stronger protection and prevention frameworks. This discussion was divided into two parts: what is currently working and what else could be done to achieve ALLIED's *raison d'être*.

## a. What is ALLIED doing well?

Regarding the strategies that have successfully contributed to advancing ALLIED's mission, participants recognized that ALLIED has given important steps to contribute to reducing violence and retaliation against ILEDs by raising awareness of the situation and needs of ILEDs and catalyzing support to these defenders. Specifically, participants highlighted the following as important contributions in this regard:

- Bringing diverse people together to think collectively, share experiences, and fundraise to address shared concerns in a coordinated, holistic, and mutually reinforcing manner.
- Increasing knowledge and raising awareness of the strategies to support defenders and the corresponding opportunities for improvement.
- Raising awareness on the nature and scope of attacks, through data on criminalization and non-lethal attacks against ILEDs.
- Strengthening networks and hence 'not leaving defenders alone.'

Throughout the meeting, participants acknowledged that ALLIED was achieving results thanks to the following efforts of its working groups:

## Data collection and reporting

**a.** Collecting and reporting data beyond lethal attacks. Non-lethal threats are not being documented enough and tracking such threats is essential to secure prompt and efficient protection for defenders. This can inform and help to build early-warning systems and other preventative strategies, as well as to fill existing gaps in protection. It can further help develop understanding of what the most pressing support needs for defenders are in different countries.

**b.** Highlighting States' commitment under SDG16 to report on attacks against defenders. Advocating for this is an important step to encourage States to adopt strategies to protect defenders and a narrative that portrays them as aligned with sustainable development.

**c.** Strengthening the capacities of local data collectors and bringing their work to the international sphere, is essential to raise the visibility of the situation of ILEDs and inform advocacy strategies.

## Law and advocacy

**a.** Catalyzing support for defenders facing criminalization and SLAPPs, including raising awareness of specific cases of criminalization.

<sup>1</sup> The Phonebook has been shared with ILEDs and intermediary organizations in national-level events and workshops, as well as a global online meeting with international support organizations. During these 'dissemination and engagement' meetings, ALLIED received positive feedback on the usefulness of the tools as well as ideas on how to improve them. Both the portal and the APP are continuously undergoing updates and modifications intended to enhance their accessibility and effectiveness. A third comprehensive assessment is expected to take place in the summer of 2023.

b. Promoting peer learning, which is a key strategy to strengthen defenders' resiliency by increasing protection and prevention knowledge and connecting them to other ILEDs and supporters.

## Supports and Solidarity

a. Advocating and including donors in the conversation on increased support for ILEDs, and helping them to better understand the contexts and support needs of grassroots defenders and local communities. This is an important step to increase the effectiveness of protection strategies, as well as their outreach.

b. Organizing meetings and developing tools and resources to facilitate knowledge and information exchange, to build links and capacities in ILEDs and CSOs.

c. Opening spaces for defenders to speak directly about their support needs and adopting a bottom-up approach to its work on support is essential to overcome top-down and colonial approaches to protection.

## b. What could ALLIED do better?

In parallel to discussions about the good work undertaken by ALLIED in the different areas highlighted above, participants identified opportunities for enhanced impact. Specifically, they mentioned that ALLIED could achieve better results if it implemented the following strategies:

### **Re-think its infrastructure to make it more inclusive, diverse, and grassroots oriented.**

- Clarify that ALLIED is open for grassroots, communities, and individual defenders as well.
- Increase grassroots engagement and representation in ALLIED's leadership, inviting grassroots and other national and regional partners to join ALLIED and nominating grassroots and defenders for ALLIED's leadership positions.

- Develop a strategy to secure ALLIED's presence at the local level, by exploring the opportunity to create national or regional hubs or focal points to facilitate direct connection and learning among defenders, ALLIED members, and support organizations.

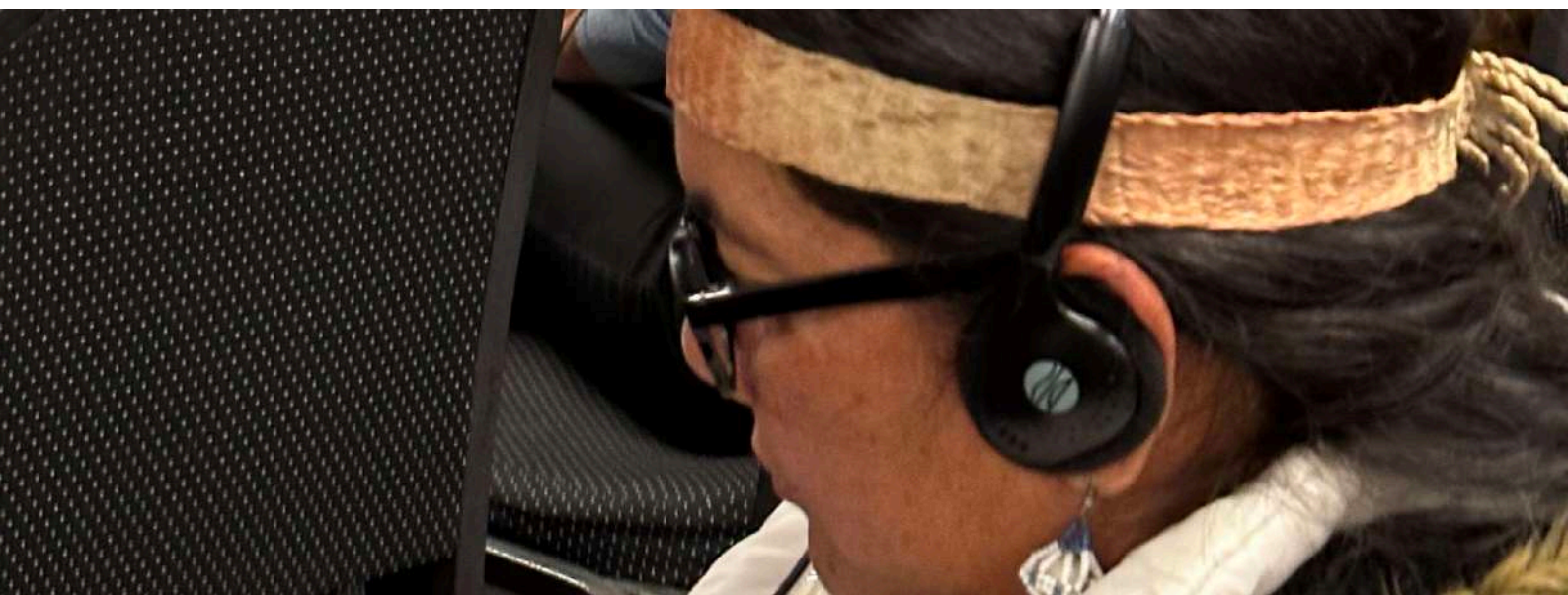
### **Streamline communications between members, ALLIED and external stakeholders.**

- Increase communication within ALLIED, including through periodic global and regional meetings and other information tools.
- Develop materials in indigenous and local languages, similar to the Phonebook's country chapters.
- Map the capacities and resources of ALLIED members at the country and regional levels (recognizing existing coalitions or platforms that could be incorporated) and strengthen information sharing and communication with them.
- Redesign the monthly bulletins and communications strategies to facilitate members' knowledge of the work currently developed by ALLIED, including the working groups, and ALLIED members.
- Convene regular virtual check-in meetings of all members and strive to convene in person more frequently.

### **Strengthen ALLIED's global leadership.**

- Position ALLIED as a network/platform for change and further position ALLIED as the central actor in the protection of ILEDs.
- Further disseminate ALLIED's work, including data collection, at local and grassroots levels.

### **Strengthen advocacy strategies and ALLIED's efforts to legitimize the work of ILEDs.**



- Adopt a more consistent strategy to leverage data to advocate stronger policies and supports and protection frameworks, for instance, matching attacks with the types of support that would help to respond to these attacks.

- Adopt a narrative change to counter smears, red-tagging, and criminalisation of ILEDs and communities.

### **Include new areas in its work plan**

#### **1. Work with donors to devise pathways for increased and flexible support.**

Concrete strategies proposed during the meeting include:

- Coordinating and streamlining communication between donors to re-think existing strategies and increase their impact and outreach.
- Facilitating coordinated work between donors, between donors and support organizations, and between these organizations and defenders.
- Continue advocating with donors for flexible and context-appropriate support, sending the message of increased protection, and raising awareness of the situation of environmental defenders.
- Continue acting as a bridge between grassroots and international donors.
- Strengthening existing efforts to bridge the gaps between climate, environment, human rights and civic space communities.

#### **2. Develop and position positive narratives about ILEDs.**

Concrete strategies proposed during the meeting include:

- Developing strategies to counter stigmatization, including highlighting specific cases and solidarity campaigns.
- Carrying a series of podcasts/resources on defenders' issues and with defenders sharing experiences of their work and challenges faced and the support they may need.

#### **3. Developing a digital security protocol and helping ALLIED members implement it.**

#### **4. Shift the focus from reaction to prevention by raising the cost of attacks against ILEDs.**

Concrete strategies proposed during the meeting include:

- Engaging with finance organizations.
- Advocating stronger prevention frameworks in key international, national and regional fora.

### **Strengthen the strategies of the working groups.**

In addition to the recommendations summarized above, which pertain to the entire alliance, participants mentioned concrete opportunities to enhance the impact of each working group. These are recapitulated below.

### **Data Collection and Reporting.**

- Expand country-specific data sets: produce data for countries where nobody is collecting this information, strengthen the capacities of local data collectors in different countries and make its database truly global.
- Further disseminate the data collection methodology adopted.
- Create and publish a global database and regional databases.
- Strengthen its gender perspective.
- Deepen capacity building and support for ALLIED members and local partners to engage in data collection via training, peer-to-peer exchange, etc.

### **Support and Solidarity.**

- Increase coordination between support organizations and with other support communities/networks/donors connected to defenders.
- Increase engagement with grassroots and national networks to secure coordination and outreach at the national level.
- Expand the Phonebook (including a global chapter and possibly new countries) and build capacities of defenders and support organizations to use and share it.
- Provide assistance to help ILEDs use the Phonebook and reach support organizations, fill out forms and request support.
- Measure support accessed by defenders through ALLIED.
- Develop a more in-depth solidarity support strategy, for example, a solidarity-focused newsletter issue or better promotion of a solidarity box in the ALLIED newsletter.
- Devise pathways to allow defenders to access support offered by ALLIED members.
- Strengthen its focus on collective protection, including how donors can support these strategies.







## Law and advocacy.

- Develop a strategy for joint advocacy to generate advances in relation to ALLIED's mission in multilateral spaces and to create pressure on particular private and institutional actors.

- Increase spaces for legal capacity-building and good practices sharing, including grassroots legal strategies into these.

- Develop a central registry/database for continuous updating of legislation on ILEDs and environmental issues, and litigation strategies.

- Develop a strategy to address corporate accountability.

- Help defenders to raise their voices and visibility.

- Increase capacity-building by organizing learning spaces on the following topics, and where applicable, implementing the resulting actions:

- i. Escazú agreement and work towards other regional agreements (Africa and Asia).
- ii. Impunity.

- Have a stronger presence in key advocacy spaces and increased engagement with international mechanisms (in coordination with Human Rights in Development Campaign and other coalitions). For example:

- i. UNFCCC COPs

- ii. EU due diligence law

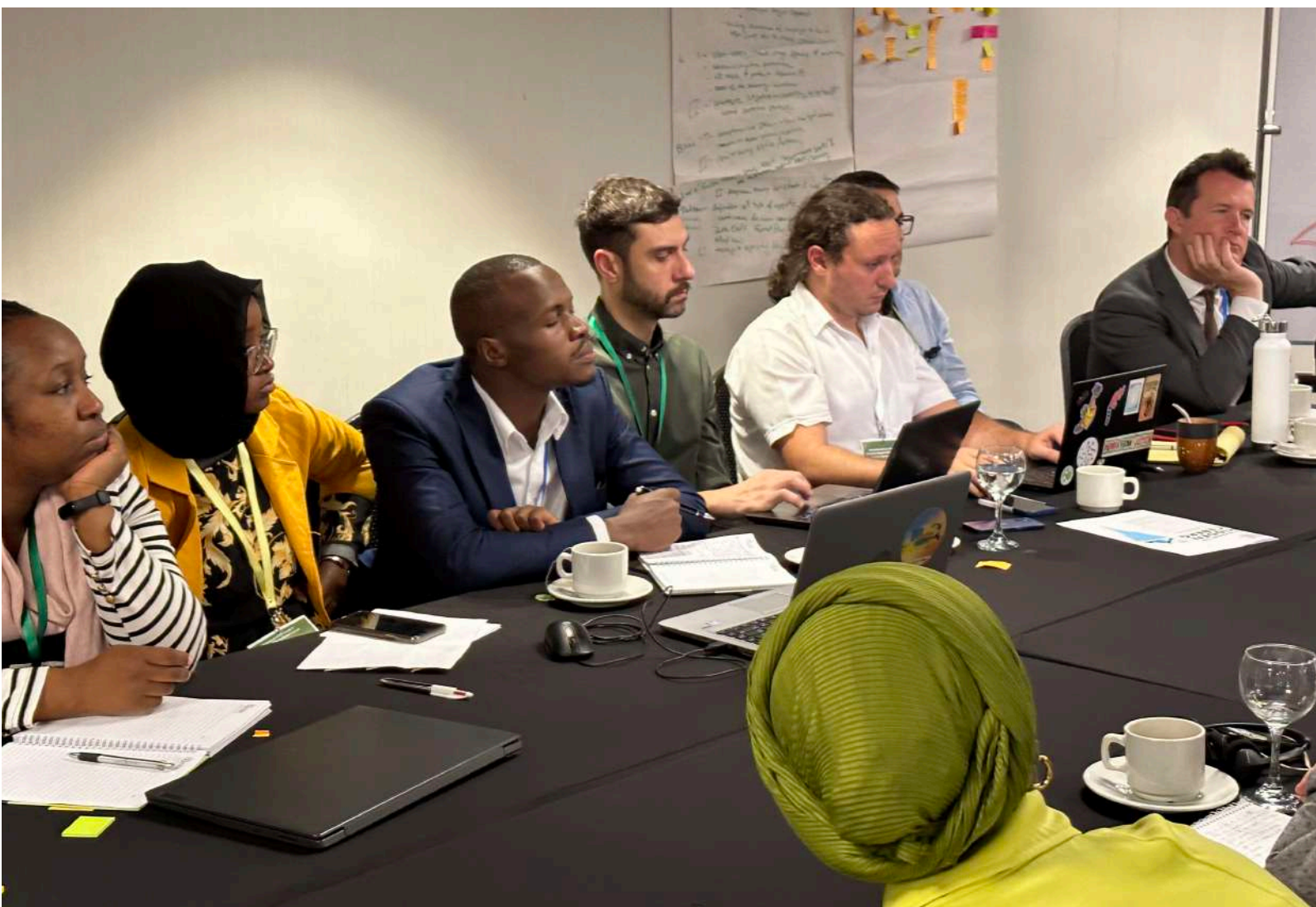
- iii. Missions of foreign states

- iv. United Nations Special Rapporteurs

- v. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

- vi. Universal Periodic Review

- vii. International Financial Institutions





## PART II. BUILDING TOGETHER: ACTIONABLE STEPS FOR INCREASED PROTECTION

### 2.1. Existing support strategies: effective ways to support ILEDs

An important part of the Bogota meeting was the exchange of information about the strategies currently being implemented in support of ILEDs. Organizations present at the meeting shared the different forms of support they offer to defenders, and how they deliver said forms of support. This allowed defenders to meet supporters and permitted support organizations to identify peers and potential collaborators to increase their impact and outreach (see Table 1).

The exchange of information on existing practices also paved the way for a conversation on and analysis of the existing initiatives to support and protect defenders. In breakout groups, participants discussed what works well and what could be improved in this area. The following sections summarize these deliberations.

Table 1. A glance at the different forms of support offered by ALLIED members

Holistic support	Physical security, digital and information security, and psychological and mental health assistance. - Strategies encompassed: assessment planning, capacity building, mentoring, counseling, risk awareness, and holistic risk assessments. - Emergency and non-emergency.
Collective protection	Integral support to groups, with the purpose of securing the protection of their lands or territories, with a gender perspective. - Strategies encompassed: accompaniment, alliances between indigenous peoples, political organizing, protection in cases of criminalization, legal support, ancestral, environmental and scientific knowledge recording, capacity building, political support, and psychosocial support. - emergency and non-emergency.
Digital security	Support for the protection of information and privacy. - Strategies encompassed: Risk assessments and protocols, training, revision and protection of devices, and tailored counseling. - emergency and non-emergency.
Physical security	Prevention and response to threats to life and integrity. - Strategies encompassed: Assistance for relocation, medical services, and tailored advice or action. - emergency and non-emergency.
Legal assistance	Legal representation, legal advice, connections with emergency contacts and lawyers who can respond and provide assistance. Includes assistance to defend or access national courts or judiciary as well as regional and international human rights mechanisms; support to lawyers who offer legal counsel to defenders through training and capacity building and offering critical legal strategy advice; legal empowerment of defenders to know and use the law to assert their rights. - emergency and non-emergency.
Financial assistance	Protection or emergency assistance grants to pay for different forms of support. This does not include direct technical support, but instead, money to find specific forms of support. It includes: - Emergency support, to respond to threats that are recent (i.e., 3 months, although the criteria vary from organization to organization) - Advocacy grants to address opportunities or threats to freedom of association and assembly; - Resiliency grants for mitigating risks, supporting holistic security, exploring ways to deliver protection etc.

**Table 1. A glance at the different forms of support offered by ALLIED members**

Resource portals	Easy access to reports, guidelines and manuals, contact details of support organizations, and other features to make all the information more accessible and allow defenders on the ground to identify allies, resources, and relevant information in an easy and timely manner.
Support and data	Data collection and analysis to inform risk assessments and protection strategies. This includes insights into the types of threats and attacks, the frequency and severity and the groups and individuals responsible for carrying them out.
Other strategies:	
Accompaniment or on-the-ground presence	Volunteers and experts, who act as eyes and ears on the ground to deliver knowledge of context and first-hand expertise, connecting resources to local solutions that promote environmental justice.
Advocacy and public campaigning	Public support and pressure on governments and other powerful entities to take action to protect defenders and prevent further violations. This can involve campaigning through various channels, such as social media, petitions, and public demonstrations.
Research to influence policy change	Research and advocate for policy and legal changes that better protect human rights defenders. This includes documenting and publishing cases of human rights violations and abuses to raise awareness of the need for stronger legal and policy frameworks to protect defenders and promote reforms that address the root causes of these violations.





[illegible]

## 2.2. What is currently working well?

Defenders present at the meeting highlighted the importance of the various types of support offered and summarized in Table 1 and repeatedly highlighted the effectiveness of accompaniment, advocacy, networking spaces, emergency assistance - particularly funding and legal assistance - strategic litigation, and support for collective and self-protection measures.

During the discussions, participants also remarked that strategies to provide support tend to be underpinned by good practices on which their positive impact depends. The list below summarizes these good practices:

- Understanding of and consistency with the local contexts in which support strategies are implemented, and engaging with local stakeholders, including government institutions and the media.
- Complementing strategies to achieve sustained pressure and interest, and to address support from multiple angles. For example, lawsuits and strategic litigation are effective ways to change frameworks but better results are attained when these activities are accompanied by complementary strategies such as advocacy and solidarity campaigns that create pressure on authorities.

Similarly, complementing emergency legal or financial support with strategies to address underlying human rights violations, including by seeking redress and accountability through regional, domestic, and international mechanisms, including the United Nations.

This requires connecting with other organizations.

- Leveraging the multilateral system and international human rights mechanisms to catalyze change. For instance, diplomatic pressure in some cases is more effective than mass pressure from civil society. Similarly, engaging with the UN human rights mechanisms can raise the visibility of cases and help to create the political will to respond to certain situations.
- Unmasking and publishing, with some level of detail, the tactics used by States and companies to silence defenders and what works to counter these. This illustrates the different actions that ILEDs and support organizations can take to respond to threats and inform protection strategies.
- Combining stories of specific defenders with data to develop stronger and more successful advocacy campaigns.
- Engaging with private actors, including business and international financial institutions. Corporate advocacy is an essential piece of the puzzle, which can't be neglected.

- Adopting an interdisciplinary approach. This means not only providing holistic support, but also acknowledging the wide range of mechanisms and areas from which defenders are being silenced such as criminal, fiscal, corporate, and even environmental and human rights. Protection and support, particularly legal assistance, are more effective when they encompass these various angles.

- Working with donors to help them understand their duty of care, manage safety and security, and reduce risks to their grantees.

Turning to the processes through which support is delivered, participants remarked that the following are good practices:

- Online forms that are simple, short to fill and in multiple languages.
- Partnering with local organizations that can help speed up referral and application processes.
- Using different channels to receive support requests, including instant messaging.
- Providing support in multiple languages.
- Including local and grassroots organizations as referral partners.

## 2.3. What could work better?

### Increased focus on prevention

In terms of recommendations to increase protection for ILEDs, participants stressed the need to focus on prevention, including addressing complex situations such as corruption and organized crime, accountability and fighting impunity. Increasing the understanding of the roles of organized crime and non-State armed groups in attacks against defenders was also a repeated call. Regarding accountability, participants explained that efforts in this regard do not have to be exclusively in courts: visibility and solidarity campaigns are useful strategies too.

In many countries, laws and frameworks inherited from the colonial era are the cause for the disavow the rights of indigenous, rural, and traditional communities. Challenging these frameworks is essential to prevent violations of the rights of ILEDs.



### **Collective protection and the recognition of the collective nature of the defence of the environment**

In line with the 2022 reports, participants highlighted the importance of shifting from an individual to a collective focus and understanding of protection. In other words, they expressed the need for more support strategies that are consistent with the collective dimension of protection, going beyond assistance to specific individuals. This includes collecting data on attacks against groups.

During the meeting, various participants expressed concern with the fact that it is mostly communities, acting collectively, that protect lands, territories, and resources. In many cases, these groups (and the individuals that belong to them) do not identify themselves as defenders, because protection strategies are part of their livelihoods or in some cases even a way to secure their integrity and survival. Notwithstanding, this collective dimension of environmental defence tends to be overshadowed by the still predominant focus on individual defenders.

Some speakers warned that collective protection strategies must be sensitive to internal divisions that may arise within communities. This requires tailored processes to identify the community members that are defending the environment and therefore require specific types of support, and those who oppose these

conservation and protection activities and are instead linked with the companies or institutions that develop the projects that enter into conflict with the rights of the communities.

Many defenders present at the meeting remarked that collective protection strategies would benefit from networking and the documentation of indigenous and traditional knowledge.

### **Identifying and addressing sources of threats**

Some speakers also reminded that protection must not only respond to the types of threats (i.e., criminalization, evictions, violence) faced by defenders but also to the origin or source of these threats.

The nature and types of responses vary greatly depending on the motivation and nature of the actors behind the threats faced by defenders. For example, it is not the same to respond to an eviction due to an extractive project, than to one arising from a conservation project. Similarly, protection from violence by organized armed actors is different from protection from violence by the State, or members of the same community.











## **Stronger support for and recognition of women indigenous defenders**

In line with the 2022 reports, participants also highlighted the need to recognize and address intersecting patterns of exclusion and discrimination. A concern, which was mentioned on various occasions during the Bogota meeting, was the need to increase support for women indigenous defenders and to highlight their role as ILEDs.

Intersecting patterns of discrimination, including based on ethnicity and sex, put these women in heightened situations of vulnerability. Women defenders face threats and attacks not only from external actors (i.e., companies, governments, armed actors) but also from members of their own communities for, among other things, challenging stereotypes of what the role of women shall be.

Concrete steps to increase support for them include increasing female representation in participatory spaces and highlighting the role that women play as defenders and the ways in which they defend the land and the environment - which are different to those deployed by men. These strategies, however, must incorporate prevention mechanisms to avoid creating a higher risk for these women.

## **Changing narratives about ILEDs**

Effectively addressing the situation of ILEDs also requires changing narratives around their work. This not only includes raising awareness on the need to stop attacks and protect their right to defend human rights. A true narrative change means positioning the role of ILEDs as the motors and key actors in securing the protection of the environment, their centrality in successful efforts for a just transition, and the protagonist role of their solutions and proposals in a truly inclusive and sustainable development.

Most defenders not only defend the environment for themselves or their communities, but they also protect ecosystems for the benefit of entire countries or regions, and for what these mean and can do for the whole world. This must also need to be made more visible.

## **Overcoming procedural obstacles**

During the session on protection against ILEDs, participants reconfirmed that stringent eligibility criteria and other procedural requirements identified by ALLIED and members in the reports launched in 2022 are important obstacles to access protection. In particular, participants reaffirmed that lengthy application and allocation processes, requirements that are not consistent with their contexts, and complex application procedures prevent ILEDs from accessing support, including in cases of emergency.

Consistent with the calls for increased collective protection support, participants highlighted that communities are often not incorporated as legal entities, nor do they have bank accounts or a demonstrated record of their human rights and environmental activities. These, and other requirements, prevent the effective delivery of protection for collective actors.

Defenders and grassroots organizations also stated that information gaps were further exposing defenders to security risks, particularly in remote areas.

To overcome these obstacles, participants suggested:

- Adopting flexible funding schemes, including in terms of issues and recipients (i.e., non-registered organizations).
- Adopting strategies to make the protection of ILEDs sustainable in the long run including building protection capacities in ILEDs, their communities and families. This includes removing prohibitions of accessing funding or support more than one or two times.
- A commitment from donors to incorporate protection and risk management into all grants and include protection as a budget line in non-protection-related projects, when working with local communities.
- Fostering peer-learning spaces where defenders can share good fundraising and support-seeking practices.
- Increasing coordination by, inter alia, leveraging existing networks and engaging with grassroots organizations. This includes:
- Streamlining communication between the donors, national and local CSOs and defenders at the grassroots level.
- Strengthening and enlarging referral pathways, particularly in areas where there is minimal or no coordination at all, i.e., using ALLIED to refer defenders that require support. Learn from existing processes, replicate, or expand them.
- Identifying countries where no support is being offered and devising ways to fill the gap.
- Developing collaborative approaches for communication and protection.
- Addressing logistical challenges for outreach, such as isolation and lack of communications infrastructure.
- Partnering with local networks to share information in locally appropriate forms.





## Filling protection gaps

During the discussions held, participants also highlighted that supporters and donors could strive to increase the offer of specific types of support that are still missing or are scarce. Concretely, participants mentioned:

- Support for livelihood projects.
- Support for defenders in exile, to help them secure an income and return home.
- Funding that addresses administrative costs and community protection costs.
- Strengthened supports for criminalization, concretely:
  - Strategic litigation.
  - Legal representation, and
  - Information resources, such as a central depository of court cases.
- Strategic litigation and connection to networks as part of holistic protection strategies.
- Long-term support.
- Psychosocial support for ILEDs and their families.
- Funding and capacity-building for community-based support and protection strategies.
- Tailored support for women and Indigenous Peoples.
- Multiyear core (not project-tied) funding.

Participants also remarked on the need of normalizing narrative change, networking and psychological support as integral parts of protection strategies.

## 2.4. Protection strategies in focus

### **a. Strengthening protection through regional environmental agreements: Efforts to implement the Aarhus and Escazú Agreements and to develop similar agreements in Africa and Southeast Asia**

During the parallel session on strengthening protection through regional environmental agreements, participants discussed:

Regarding Escazú

- The years-long process to arrive to the Escazú Agreement, and the necessity of involving other partners such as the UN and civil society.
- The specific conversations around EHRDs during the Escazú negotiations, and how workshops were held around this issue.

- The importance of applying the same strategy to push for similar articles in the eventual African and Asian agreements.
- The necessity of now implementing Escazú and ensuring compliance with the agreement among States parties.

One defender then shared the story of the Escazú process for civil society organizations in Mexico.

1. First, CSOs in Latin America formed a digital platform called Escazú Now to provide information on the movement.
2. The GIC provided assistance to the movement in holding events and workshops.
3. The CSOs also had meetings with environmental government entities on how they were going to implement Escazú, but the events didn't work out and it has been a difficult process to get the government to implement the agreement.
4. The organizations have separated into different working groups based on the rights in the agreement, and they are holding weekly meetings, which allows them to be aware of cases and situations where they can assist in environmental issues and with defenders.
5. One of the questions they want to answer is - what is the reach of Escazú at a national level, especially related to indigenous communities and populations.
  - a. One conclusion is that the agreement forms part of the national legal framework, so they have developed three strategies to demand that the government implement Escazú.

i. They have sat with the Congress to see what legislation will need to be modified so that national law falls in line with Escazú. There are currently meetings being held between civil society and congress to finalize a document detailing which legislation will need to be changed.

ii. They have also been working on how to use Escazú in different lawsuits and legal action, as they don't want to wait until the government is implementing the agreement to begin using it in legal cases, under the logic that as soon as the government ratified the treaty, it has obligations to ratify it. As of now, there have been two Supreme Court cases referencing the agreement.



iii. The third strategy is holding workshops related to Escazú, putting out more information about the agreement and how it can be implemented. The first workshops have been directed towards indigenous communities, and defenders, and this year they will have workshops with state-level authorities so they understand their obligations under Escazú.

- There were, however some complaints from these workshops - indigenous communities remarked that the agreement is very technical and there aren't sufficient references to rights of indigenous populations, and that these populations need to participate in the implementation of the agreement.

Another participant involved in the Escazú process remarked that there could be lessons learned from the Escazú process for the process in Africa, and that the following should be considered:

- The relationship between defenders and governments of each country, because sometimes it is impossible to achieve implementation of such agreements because of division between governments and communities/defenders
- If those working on the process for Africa have begun case studies, then they should revise and work to understand the relationship between the communities and governments, and see which governments are more aligned with the movement.



## **b. Fighting impunity and corruption to stop attacks against defenders: strategies, good practices and how to support initiatives to secure accountability.**

During the parallel session on fighting impunity and corruption to stop attacks against defenders, participants discussed impunity and corruption involving both State and non-State actors.

Regarding State actors, some of the discussion revolved around the fact that most governments want to impress the international community, and therefore the combination of awareness raising and diplomatic work can put pressure on States to provide improved protection to defenders.

Concerning non-State actors, we need to understand the interests of and how to influence non-State actors in order to improve the chances of preventing them from engaging in harmful actions.

In order to raise the political cost of harmful actions, the capacities of civil society need to be strengthened, including investigative and methodological skills.

Increasing the capacities of civil society actors falls in line with the need for increased corporate accountability, for which determining issues such as who owns certain companies is necessary. Therefore, civil society actors need access to databases and the ability to understand sophisticated data sets. Understanding and knowing the companies that are engaging in harmful actions can help defenders carry out their work.

One important issue in pursuing corporate accountability is being able to name who is backing the projects and initiatives linked to attacks against defenders - examples used included unveiling traders involved in attacks against defenders in Asia and Latin America.

Another example referred to the process of seeking justice for the murder of a Latin American defender - an international group of experts was created to analyse the information held by the government, which exposed corruption and the plot to kill the defender, including with the participation of corporate actors, security forces, and others. While access to justice was increased in this case, it was not completed, and there were still challenges, including: funding, time, willingness of people to be involved, and security risks.

Solutions proposed by participants included:

- Corporate accountability mechanisms - EU corporate accountability legislation was mentioned, as well as the importance of getting more allies to file cases, mobilize voices and demonstrate support for the proposal CSOS presented. This process can be looked at as a means to hold companies accountable throughout the entire supply chain and is a chance to bring attention to cases from the Global South.
- Escazú Agreement: using the landmark agreement as a means to obtain environmental justice, transparency and access to information. While it is not a solution in itself, it provides a path to uphold the role of defenders materialized in policies and other approaches, involving the State infrastructure.

## **c. Responding to criminalization and SLAPPs: Best practices and steps that ALLIED can take to help stop criminalization.**

During the parallel session on criminalization and SLAPPs, participants discussed how, since the formation of ALLIED, this issue has been a major challenge across all regions where ALLIED has members.

One of the main challenges around criminalization of defenders is the fact that it masquerades as a legitimate legal action, making it especially dangerous and effective at silencing defenders.

One specific issue raised was the fact that different legal frameworks have discriminatory components, for example, some environmental regulations or laws can prevent Indigenous Peoples from using resources on their traditional lands. Therefore, the development of standards, including through bringing Indigenous Peoples' language and standards into guidelines such as for the OECD, and this can be done by having consultations with Indigenous Peoples.

One participant remarked that businesses are initiating both civil and criminal cases against defenders, with many in Latin America, but also Africa, Asia, Europe and the US. Effective strategies identified are:

1. Increased visibility of SLAPPs. Even though they still don't have a coalition in Latin America, they are working to create more visibility around the issue.
2. Pushing for anti-SLAPP laws. They are pushing for anti-SLAPP laws in Europe and South Africa.
3. Providing legal aid for defenders, as well as psycho-social aid.





4. Continue discussing the issue of SLAPPs, especially in regions like Latin America and Africa where there is not much knowledge about the issue.

5. Find how to name the businesses and create a political cost for them, push them to drop charges against the defenders - i.e., naming and shaming.

One participant also proposed having opportunities for environmental lawyers and environmental justice organizations to learn from criminal lawyers, and vice versa, in order to better protect defenders.

#### **d. Digital Security 101: Basic digital security steps and how to respond in case of emergency**

During the parallel session on digital security, one organization provided a presentation on a number of issues around digital security.

The presenters discussed the wide variety of digital attacks that defenders face, including attacks against social media accounts, attempts to steal sensitive information from organizations, and harassment campaigns.

They began by stating that digital security should be integrated with physical security, organizational security, etc., to form a more holistic security.

While States may have strong digital intervention tools, there are many ways defenders can protect themselves, including safe messaging applications, encrypting information, using the right tools and technologies, etc.

The presenters discussed phishing attacks, which can be very sophisticated, and that defenders need the right tools and knowledge to know whether a message is safe or not.

Presenters also detailed how there are sophisticated ways to steal defenders' information, such as Pegasus, but also simpler ways such as sending a false login email, then stealing information on a defender's Facebook account.

The presenters discussed various strategies to reduce risk to defenders, including:

- Minimize the information on their digital devices, such as deleting messages, not storing information for many years on devices, etc.
- Switch from email platforms such as Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo, etc., to ProtonMail.
- Switch from messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger to Signal.







#### **e. Data and evidence-based interventions: Leveraging data to achieve stronger policy frameworks and protection mechanisms.**

During the data and evidence-based interventions parallel session, participants heard from four data collectors, and ALLIED's role in this data collection, and how the data has been used. Data collectors from Colombia, Philippines, and a data collection initiative across eight West African countries, and an organization collecting data at an international level presented, as well as technical partners.

In Colombia, the network of databases has been used to help victims of human rights violations present their cases, including for people in hard-to-access areas, in order to provide victims with access to information.

In Asia, the group is collecting data in six countries, with data being collected on land conflicts. Data has been collected in a way that it can be aggregated across countries and at a regional level. In the group's publication, they recommended the following across the six countries:

- 1.** Building security and collective strategies based on small family farming and agrarian reform.
- 2.** There is a need to recognize and protect customary land rights and enact and implement land and resource reforms.
- 3.** Protect ILEDs and support groups.
- 4.** Review pertinent policies.
- 5.** Question the role of the State as brokers for investment.
- 6.** Adopt and implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Across West Africa, data collectors documented the experiences and knowledge of, and the situations that defenders are facing across the region, in addition to profiling defenders on the frontline. In order to understand the situation and to reduce underreporting, a conference on validation of data was organized, working to bring this data into the mainstream. The definition of defender needs to be changed in order to reduce underreporting, as, for example, farmers murdered for protecting their farmlands (i.e., grazing rights, water rights, etc.) were not recorded.

The global level data collectors track 10,000 multi-nationals for their human rights effects across the world, and they have been tracking what businesses have been doing regarding attacks against defenders. They discussed the importance of combining data collection with advocacy in order to have impact.

Participants discussed how data can be used to hold different actors accountable, how it can be taken to high-level political forums to effect change, and how local data collectors can be connected to national statistics offices, as there has been a demand for such data from governments, as well as recognition from commissions for human rights and other human rights bodies, to understand the situations that defenders are facing.

Participants also stated that data collectors should monitor the data that States are collecting, in order to keep pressure on States to collect the data.

ALLIANCE FOR LAND,  
INDIGENOUS AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
DEFENDERS