

Building intercultural communities through solidarity: A Mexican case study

Nadia Alejandra Jiménez Ortiz, José Luis Santillán Sánchez, Israel Molas Narvaez, Jesús Lozano Paredes, Nisaguie Abril Flores Cruz, Lucio Leyva Cruz, and Miguel Mireles Ramírez

Article originally written in Spanish. Translation by Melisa Palferro

Summary At a time when neoliberal capitalism is responsible for intensified exploitation, dispossession, repression, and contempt towards the peoples of the Global South, the expressions of struggle and resistance that emerge from Indigenous peoples have become a reference point for various social groups who share the goal of building a world in which many worlds fit. Within this context, some of us in organised civil society are experimenting with ways to support these emancipatory processes while at the same time seeking to learn how to reimagine our own urban realities and create our own vision of autonomy. With this photo essay, the Centre for Research into Community Communication (CICC by its Spanish initials) aims to share its experiences with readers. CICC is a Mexican non-profit organisation made up of individuals of Indigenous and mestizo backgrounds, who have chosen to practise solidarity in an activist way. Throughout our journey we have found in art and culture a light that, even in the most challenging of moments, illuminates the possibility of another world.

Keywords solidarity, support and accompaniment, Indigenous peoples, art, culture

Resumen En un tiempo donde el capitalismo neoliberal ha intensificado la explotación, el despojo, la represión y el desprecio hacia los pueblos del sur global, las expresiones de lucha y resistencia que emana de los pueblos indígenas se convierte en una referencia para grupos sociales multivalentes que compartimos el objetivo de construir un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos. En este contexto, desde la sociedad civil organizada, experimentamos formas de acompañar estos procesos emancipatorios, buscando aprender para imaginar sobre nuestros territorios urbanos, formas y modos propios de autonomía. Con este foto ensayo, queremos compartir la experiencia del CICC, una organización sin fines de lucro integrada por hombres y mujeres, indígenas y mestizos, que hemos elegido ejercer la solidaridad de forma militante, y que en nuestro andar hemos encontrado en el arte y la cultura, una luz que en los momentos más difíciles, muestra la posibilidad de otro mundo.

Palabras clave solidaridad, acompañamiento, pueblos indígenas, arte y cultura

Copyright This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 license.

How to cite Jiménez Ortiz, Nadia Alejandra, José Luis Santillán Sánchez, Israel Molas Narvaez, Jesús Lozano Paredes, Nisaguie Abril Flores Cruz, Lucio Leyva Cruz, and Miguel Mireles Ramírez. 'Building intercultural communities through solidarity: A Mexican case study'. *Culture Caleidoscoop* 2 (2024). DOI 10.57031/culcal.v2i1.14616

Related article This is a translation of 'Construyendo comunidades interculturales desde la solidaridad', DOI: 10.57031/culcal.v2i1.18152

Intercultural organisational processes

A world in which many worlds fit.

A DECLARATION ... FOR LIFE.¹

– Zapatista Army for National Liberation, Chiapas, Mexico

In September 2014 a group of young Indigenous and mestizo community activists came together to create Radio Zapata 94.1 FM, a grassroots-led community radio station in the low-mountainous region of Guerrero, Mexico. Its aim was to support the Indigenous Mhee Phaa, Tun Savi, Nahua, and Ñomndaa peoples in exercising their right to freedom of expression and safeguarding their identity and culture. This experience also formed part of a broader initiative aimed at autonomy and self-determination in a context of unprecedented violence resulting from a conflict involving organised crime, the private sector, and the Mexican government.² In addition to simply promoting the cultural and linguistic heritage of Indigenous communities, the community radio played a crucial role in enabling the production and dissemination of accurate and up-to-date news, as well as content developed by and for Indigenous peoples.

Radio Zapata is one of 19 Indigenous-run community radios, born out of collaborations with the Centre for Research into Community Communication A.C. (CICC by its Spanish initials), a Mexican NGO established in 2016 by the same young people who in 2014 stood shoulder to shoulder with the Indigenous peoples of Guerrero. Today, those of us who form part of CICC are young men and women – with the latter making up the majority – from Nahua, Amuzgo, and mestizo backgrounds, as well as Central American communities. We are also migrants, students, mothers, activists, and workers with multidisciplinary education and training (anthropologists, sociologists, museologists, communication experts, and engineers). The diverse cultures that make up our identity are intersected by various privileges as well as class, gender, and race-based differences. We are based in the big city, a place where the colonising system unfolds, homogenising different ways of being and backgrounds to the benefit of capital. Amidst this diversity, what unites us is the conviction that another world is possible, a world in which many worlds fit, as the Zapatistas say.

For those of us who form part of CICC, this overarching political commitment is at the heart of all that we do. It shapes the work that we choose to participate in and takes the form of support or accompaniment for those Indigenous com-



Figure 1 An interview conducted live on Radio Zapata 94.1 FM with Cirino Placido Valerio, Founder of the Regional Coordination of Community Authorities – Community Police, Guerrero (CRAC-PC)

munities and organisations in Mexico engaged in struggle, resistance, and the construction of a dignified life. This work is based on three core elements: organised solidarity in an activist sense, long-term support and horizontal relationships between ourselves and *compañeres* ('comrades') in struggle.

When we talk about organised solidarity, we are referring to the conscious commitment at an individual level to willingly collaborate with others in addressing a collective cause. Anyone can be in solidarity, but what we are interested in doing at CICC is organising our solidarity in response to the specific needs and issues that community organisations present to us, as opposed to whatever individual team members might deem important. This form of solidarity is activist in nature; instead of being arbitrarily directed towards social, environmental, or other causes, it explicitly and wholeheartedly aims to strengthen those Indigenous communities involved in creating autonomy and collective life projects, which are an alternative to what is offered by the capitalist system.

Solidarity is furthermore expressed through a long-term support approach with *compañeres* from different grassroots organisations. For CICC to support or



Figure 2 The CICC team works out of either rented or lent community spaces in Mexico City

accompany means that Indigenous communities define which processes, needs, and issues should be prioritised. For its part CICC provides tools, methods, and assistance that can be appropriated and adapted by partner organisations to suit a variety of frameworks that are used to push forward specific struggles and autonomous projects. We use the term *compañeres* (the gender inclusive and plural form of *compañero(m)/compañera(f)* translated into English as ‘companion’, ‘friend’, or ‘comrade’) because in this process we aim to forge alliances and build relationships among equals. In this sense, our approach is not based on providing assistance or helping ‘needy individuals’, but rather collaboration and mutual listening in the pursuit of a common goal.

Each of the regions that we work in requires the development of specific accompaniment strategies. In practice this exercise takes many different forms, including:

- respect of and participation in assembly proceedings (where we assume the role of observer-listeners)
- responding to the specific demands of communities
- undertaking direct actions in solidarity with community struggles
- strengthening bonds and building relationships between diverse Indigenous peoples and movements.

Indigenous communities in resistance

As previously mentioned, collaboration between CICC and grassroots organisations and communities is only made possible through a shared objective: the construction of autonomies.

On 1 January 1994, the EZLN, composed of Indigenous communities from Chiapas, Mexico, declared war on the Mexican state after decades of exploitation, abandonment, and extreme marginalisation imposed on them by regional *cacique*³ rulers with the acquiescence of federal government. The social movement that emerged from the uprising has proven to be one of the most significant and influential in Mexico in the last 30 years, not only because of the demands made – work, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace – but above all because it has become a symbol in many other regions of the world of the transnational Indigenous movement, the alter-globalisation movement, the anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation movement, and the pro-autonomy movement.⁴



Figure 3 14 October 2017: Caracol La Realidad. The National Indigenous Congress and the Governing Indigenous Council tour Zapatista Caracoles ('Snails')

During the same period, autonomous expressions emerged throughout Latin America. These sought to implement the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169, which recognises the collective rights of Indigenous peoples outside of the intervention and regulation of states. As Raúl Zibechi points out, 'in this period of systemic chaos and civilisational crisis, these autonomies offer an alternative way of life and a political reference point across all social sectors'.⁵ It is precisely for this reason that CICC, as a civil society organisation, consciously decided to strengthen real-world autonomous processes, which demonstrate that, far from depending on the acceptance and validation of state institutions, the creation of new worlds is made possible when the autonomous potentials of Indigenous communities are unleashed.⁶ For CICC, the practice of solidarity involves reinforcing these processes, which in turn contribute to the creation of a dignified way of life for all of us who inhabit intercultural spaces.

There is still a long way to go. Nearly 30 years on from the Zapatista uprising, of the approximately 12 million Indigenous people living in Mexico (10 per cent of the total population), 69.5 per cent, or 8,340,000 people, are still living in poverty.⁷ Furthermore, communities and individuals continue to suffer from discrimina-



Figure 4 17 October 2017: Caracol Roberto Barrios. The National Indigenous Congress and the Governing Indigenous Council tour Zapatista Caracoles ('Snails')



Figure 5 15 October 2017: Caracol Morelia. The National Indigenous Congress and the Governing Indigenous Council tour Zapatista Caracoles ('Snails')

tion, the imposition of mega-projects in their territories, and forced displacement at the hands of both the state and organised crime. Processes of accumulation through dispossession are intensifying across all Mexican territories, which is why we insist now more than ever that the struggle for humanity is global and that the fight is for life.⁸

Solidarity practice in community work

At CICC, we collaborate in a variety of areas:

- technological appropriation for community radios
- community cinema, self-managed economies
- language revitalisation
- revaluation and re-signification of cultural expressions
- documentation of human rights violations.

However, only the areas of technological appropriation, self-managed economies, and revaluation and re-signification of cultural expressions have received grants from foundations and donors. During the seven-year lifespan of the organisation, other areas have operated to varying degrees and at different times through resources contributed by CICC's members. On occasion, these areas have been incorporated into projects that do have funding. At other times, they operate independently, resulting in a need for additional dedicated time and resources.

Similarly, each grassroots organisation sets the guidelines and protocols for collaboration according to their own timelines and schedules. Part of our task at CICC is to adapt grant proposals to these timelines while respecting the deadlines stipulated by foundations and donors. This is why grant proposals often cover only a fraction of the actual time dedicated to supporting the strengthening processes required by organisations and communities. It is in this aspect where the activist and solidarity work that we carry out is most evident. Despite the challenges this approach poses in terms of financial and organisational sustainability, we know that it is the only way to truly contribute to community-led processes in the long-term.

It makes us happy to work with CICC because we see their commitment to us. They don't just provide us with equipment and leave us to figure things out on our own; they advise us patiently, and even after the projects are

completed we can ask them for advice. In other words, it's ongoing consultancy, you could say, and that is very important to enabling us to move forward.

Israel Molas Narváez. Radio Comunitaria Puksi' Ik'Al' Ha', Campeche

In the following section, we present two specific processes with the aim of sharing some of the challenges that come with solidarity work with and amongst sister organisations that exist on the fringes of hegemonic reasoning but, at the same time, are dependent on it in various ways. This external position, called *relative externality* by Armando Bartra, enables an envisioning of a future that is different from that which the system imposes on us.⁹ Similarly, the Zapatistas speak of a wall that divides some from others. It has an upper part and a lower part, and they say that those who are at the top are simply there because they are held up by those below. Furthermore, they say that the wall was not always there and that they know how it was built, how it works, and how to destroy it. The great weight of this wall has also caused a significant crack to emerge.¹⁰ What is important now, they say, is to open it up so we are able to imagine all that could be achieved tomorrow.¹¹

Theorists such as John Holloway, Ana Esther Ceceña, Armando Bartra, and Gustavo Esteva,¹² amongst others, have adopted the Zapatista method of analysis as a guide for understanding how new social struggles,¹³ as movements of negation and the creation of alternative actions, seek to create meaning through a conscious and collective process.¹⁴ CICC responds to this call to action by constantly asking ourselves whether or not our work is opening up cracks in the wall. The answer is far from simple. The problem compels us to continually reflect on the fact that, as a legally established civil society organisation, we are always operating alongside other types of institutions whose goals are very different from ours, and that the path towards institutionalisation must be implemented to enable us to be economically viable. We hope that via the following case studies we can illustrate this reality, at least in part.

Technological appropriation for community radio

For us Zapatistas, the arts are the hope of humanity, not a militant cell. We think that indeed, in the most difficult moments, when disillusionment and impotence are at their peak, the arts are the only thing capable of celebrating humanity.¹⁵

Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés and Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano

From 2014 to the present, CICC has supported the creation of 19 Indigenous-run radio stations and creative community participation projects across 18 Indigenous communities in Mexico. In all cases, the safeguarding, revitalisation, and re-signification of culture and its expressions have played a fundamental role in sustaining these projects. In CICC's experience, it has been evident, as the Zapatistas say, that 'when disillusionment and powerlessness prevail, only the arts are able to celebrate humanity'.¹⁶

An emblematic case is that of Radio Tlanixco: Spring of Freedom.¹⁷ Between 2015 and 2019, we supported the Movement for the Freedom of the Political Prisoners of San Pedro Tlanixco in launching a community radio station. This Nahuatl community, located at the foothills of the Nevado de Toluca in the State of Mexico, had, for more than 15 years, been fighting for the release of one compañera and six compañeros who were falsely accused and imprisoned by the state government of murdering the representative of a multinational flower company, which had been stealing water and privatising springs located in the community of San Pedro Tlanixco. In retaliation against the community, illegal night raids were carried out over a two-year period as part of a terror strategy to force them to abandon their fight for access to water and the release of their comrades. In the tabloid press, San Pedro Tlanixco was publicly accused of being a 'terrorist community', and arrest warrants were issued for all the representatives of the community-led Board for Water.

In 2016 Radio Tlanixco was created with the aim of, firstly, informing the local population about the situation of the imprisoned compañeras and, secondly, encouraging people to overcome their fear of the authorities and take to the streets once again to protest. The community's acceptance of the radio was immediate, and the participation of the people in public events increased, with national and international solidarity growing too. One year after its launch, an art and music festival was held to celebrate the radio's anniversary. Collectives from various Mexican regions and countries attended to share their experiences of struggle, as well as to demand the release of the imprisoned compañeras and to listen to the words of the Movement for the Freedom of Political Prisoners and others from the community. During the festival, music, dance, poetry, and graphic arts were shared in a celebration of life and the fight for freedom.

The media attention generated both by the radio and the organisations that supported it alongside the wider campaign to release the political prisoners led the United Nations to become aware of the case, which in 2019 resulted in the issuing of a recommendation to the Mexican Government for the release of the imprisoned compañeras.¹⁸



Figure 6 ‘Tension in Tlanixco’: An article in the tabloid press about the conflict in San Pedro Tlanixco during the period of repression (2003)

CICC’s contribution to this case began with participation in dialogues with the grassroots movement to understand and assess the issue, and with sharing the experience of other community radios being used as tools for various ends such as the defence of Indigenous territories, the revitalisation of culture, and, as in this case, demanding the release of political prisoners. Once the movement decided to create their own radio, we were involved in the purchase and installation of broadcasting and radio production equipment, as well as providing training in broadcasting, production, programming, audio editing, community research



Figure 7 Festivals held to celebrate Radio Tlanixco 96.2 FM's anniversary (2017–2019)



Figure 8 A live radio programme under way in the radio booth (2016)

methods, and equipment maintenance. Furthermore, we encouraged the community to appropriate these tools and to continue to strengthen the pre-existing means to do so.

Due to our strongly held commitment to the community and a heartfelt need to free the wrongly accused compañeres, we also became involved in the planning and development of the radio's anniversary festivals and fundraising campaigns to cover the community's legal expenses. Additionally, we participated in direct actions such as marches outside the Santiaguito Prison in the State of Mexico, where the compañeres were being detained. In terms of building alliances through international solidarity networks, we facilitated meetings between compañeres from the movement and organisations from other geographies, such as the Latin American Group (LAG)¹⁹ from Norway, who played a fundamental role in spreading information about the compañeres' struggle across Europe.

Each radio has its own history of struggle, resistance, and cultural reaffirmation, and it becomes a tool not because CICC *determines* that it should, but because the organisations themselves see that it can. In this way, CICC comes together with pre-existing resistance movements and communities in struggle, contributing our abilities to help them take ownership of their radios and build the confidence needed to use them.



Figure 9 A mural in the radio booth of Radio Tlanixco (2017)



Figure 10 A visit from Norway's LAG (2016)



Figure 11 A celebratory meal with some of the released compañeres political prisoners, members of CICC, members of the Movement for Freedom of Political Prisoners, and the United Nations (2019)

The Movement for the Freedom of the Prisoners of San Pedro Tlanixco achieved its objective. However, to this day, we continue to work with those who were part of it, as well as other groups and individuals located in the same territory because issues of land dispossession and violence have increased. Following the release of the compañeres, the state attempted to appropriate the movement and its campaign, thereby rendering invisible the fundamental role played by local people over their 10 years of resistance. In response to this, and in agreement with the organisation and at the request of the community, CICC embarked on the production of a documentary that aims to tell the story of the struggle from the movement's perspective as well as all of the injustices and human rights violations committed against the community of San Pedro Tlanixco, its political prisoners, and those who were part of the Movement for Freedom.

This is just one example, although it is one that demonstrates details repeated in each of the territories where we work. The value of funding provided for these activities is minimal when compared to the value of the national, international, organisational, and individual solidarity that is woven into the cause CICC has joined.



Figure 12 Filming by members of CICC for the documentary *Tlanixco: Spring of Freedom* (2022)



Figure 13 Interview with Alejandro Alvarez Zetina during filming for the documentary (2021)

Cultural Nests: Supporting Indigenous cultural start-ups

It is our belief that the possibility of a better world (not a perfect nor a finished one, we'll leave that for religious and political dogmas) is one without the machine, and this possibility rests on a tripod. [...] the arts, the sciences, and Indigenous peoples along with the basements of humanity all over the world. I have used 'the arts' because it is the arts (and not politics) that delve most deeply into the human being and rescue its essence. It is as if the world continued to be the same, but that through art we could find human possibility among the many gears, screws, and springs humourlessly grinding away. In contrast to politics, art doesn't try to readjust or repair the machine. Rather, it does something more subversive and disconcerting: it shows the possibility of another world.²⁰

Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano

One constant need of the communities that we collaborate with is access to employment, to which we would add *dignified* employment. Communities are involved in a wide range of productive activities; however, the economic chains to which these activities are connected result in exploitative, poorly paid, and often dangerous work.

As previously mentioned in this article, art and culture are expressed continuously and in various forms across all of the territories and projects that we are involved in. At the same time, they are intertwined in a way that is bittersweet with the problems and latent needs of each community and place.

In 2021 an opportunity arose to build a project with communities that would combine both of these elements: the creation of dignified work and the promotion and revitalisation of culture. With this in mind, it was proposed that we work with six communities located in three different Mexican states (Oaxaca, Guerrero, and the State of Mexico) to establish cultural cooperatives²¹ based on an incubation model specifically designed to operate within each of those contexts. In total there are six cultural expressions that have taken shape under the umbrella of Cultural Nests:

- two visual arts projects (specifically screen-printing)
- a publishing project
- an audiovisual production project
- a textile design project
- a traditional *amate* painting project.

All the support offered to the communities by CICC has been completely tailored to their particular needs and interests. Each cooperative chose the artistic area they wanted to develop, which in some cases even included areas that were completely unknown to participants prior to their involvement in the project. This was the case with the two screen-printing cooperatives, which also posed a significant challenge for CICC, as we had to meet this knowledge gap by hiring creative specialists from the field of graphic design who could best support the communities. In this regard, the skills-development process has gone above and beyond the original plan for the pedagogical programme, which was designed to impart training relating to self-management, communication, and marketing. As such, a significant proportion of this work has been carried out not by the CICC team but by colleagues from partner organisations, who, in a spirit of solidarity and voluntary cooperation, have contributed their time and shared their knowledge at various stages of the project's implementation.

It is also worth mentioning that all the project activity has taken place in the communities themselves. This has required colleagues to travel to each of the six territories once a month to conduct various training sessions based on the identified needs of each Cultural Nest. On the other hand, it has been important for us to ensure that we create inclusive spaces within the project, leading us, for example, to implement bespoke mechanisms to support women participants (especially those who are mothers) to participate in activities with their children present. As referred to earlier in this text, time is organised differently in the communities, so project workdays must adapt to farming calendars, community festival days, and celebrations and assembly processes. Some of the spaces lent by the community for project workshops and training sessions were also in a poor condition, so CICC has contributed materials, labour, and working groups to help get them into a functional state.

[I think it's important to mention] the effort that the *compañeros* [from CICC] have made and the interest that they show in us, because it's not easy to take an interest in a far-flung community like ours. They are always there for us while here we continue to make an effort to the best of our abilities. Regardless, their help will always be very, very important to us.

Jesús Lozano, Xalitla, Guerrero

To better understand some of the challenging contexts in which we work, we can point to two Cultural Nest cooperatives in Xalitla and Xochistlahuaca located in the

state of Guerrero. The level of violence suffered in these communities is extremely high. In fact, during the first year of project's implementation, we were forced to temporarily suspend activities in Xalitla due to the disappearance and murder of a family member of one of CICC's members, who happened to be living in a neighbouring locality. Faced with such a situation, our approach was to maintain dialogue with the cooperative and continuously assess risk levels for ourselves as well as the compañeres. We never once considered abandoning the group and would only have ceased work if the cooperative itself had requested it. This commitment is based on our sincere belief that by promoting culture and opportunities for dignified employment in these highly vulnerable territories, cracks will appear in the wall that will allow us to envision the construction of alternative realities.

In October 2022 the *Cultural Nests: Sharing Transformative Knowledge* gathering took place in Mexico City. Thirty-one compañeres participating in the project travelled from their different regions to visit five cooperatives, each of which worked in the same creative fields as the Cultural Nests cooperatives. This gathering would not have been possible without the solidarity of the Mexico City-based cooperatives, who opened their doors with the intention of sharing experiences and knowledge with the compañeres who were only just at the beginning of their journey. The gathering would also not have been possible without the voluntary work of the entire CICC team, who participated at various moments and oversaw a raft of logistical tasks that were necessary to ensuring its success.

This has been really valuable for us [...] they opened many doors for us, and now that we know about these other projects, we can see that a lot can be achieved. [...] We have all brought different experiences, and they [CICC and other Cultural Nests cooperatives] have also learned from us. It's great to get to know each other, exchange experiences, find out what the other nests are doing, and share knowledge and processes.

Lucio Leyva, Santo Domingo Lachavito, Oaxaca

The Cultural Nests project concluded in September 2023, and at the time of writing we have yet to conduct the final round of evaluation with the cooperatives' members. Despite this, at present we can say that the most enriching aspect of the project for us as facilitators and members of CICC has been to witness both the growth in confidence of our compañeres within the areas of production and presentation of their creative products, and the ways in which each group is creating their very own organisational processes.



Figure 14 A compañera from the Xochistlahuaca (Guerrero) Cultural Nest cooperative weaves a traditional huipil garment on a back-strap loom (2022)



Figure 15 A training session with compañeres from the Xalitla (Guerrero) Cultural Nest cooperative (2023)



Figure 16 Experimenting with screen-printing in the San Pedro Tlanixco (State of Mexico) Cultural Nest cooperative (2022)

[This project] plays a part in seeking a dignified life and fighting for it. I think what I have experienced and learned has really strengthened the cooperatives. In my experience, it has been important to think and reflect about how this [project] can move us forward towards the dignified life that we seek as communities.

Nisaguie, Juchitán de Zaragoza, Oaxaca

Working with the group, I have had to make an effort and complete work [...] because time passes very quickly, and before you know it, years can go by and we haven't made much progress. So, all that they have given to me, and the fact that [they] come *here* to see me – it's what motivates me to keep going.

Mireles, Santa Cruz Huitzilapan, State of Mexico

Closing the gap between activism and paid work

The challenges all of us face as members of an organisation like CICC are significant and require a great deal of reflection as well as a collective response. The way we work implies that we have to go beyond the limits established by labour relations as they are constituted within NGOs, which are shaped by a structure determined by legal rules that in turn grant legal status. In this sense, we have concluded that, as a working team, we respond to two intertwined organisational structures that are not so easily distinguishable. On the one hand, there is the political/activist CICC, which is sustained through the activism, volunteer work, and militancy of those who pass through the organisation as well as those who participate for longer periods or who have chosen it as a space of struggle from which to build autonomy and a collective dignified life. On the other hand, there is the CICC that operates with a paid-work structure, which has taken shape since its creation, and the expansion across various collaborative fields within the organisation.

We are on a learning journey and in the process of creating strategies that will allow us to better reconcile both rhythms of interaction. To give the reader a better sense of what this looks like in practice, we can describe the role of CICC's General Coordination, a group of *compañeras* who have openly expressed an interest in political matters and demonstrated a real commitment, beyond just words, to community work. The team are responsible for overseeing the political positioning and direction of the organisation. Although the tasks assigned to them are not



Figure 17 Photos taken at the Cultural Nests: Sharing Transformative Knowledge gathering held in Mexico City in 2022

remunerated, those who participate may receive some financial compensation if they are also involved in the operational activities of other projects that have their own allocated budgets. The coordination plays a fundamental role in conflict resolution. It also interacts with other organisations found in the Indigenous social movement and is responsible for providing political education to staff across the organisation.

A recent increase in workload has also prompted us to create an operational structure for the organisation, headed up by the Management team with contributions from areas managers, project coordinators, and facilitators. Decisions are made hierarchically and are always in line with the objectives of each funded project and CICC's action plan aimed at institutionally strengthening the organisation. In this operational space, guidelines issued by funding bodies are given primary consideration, and in this sense its priorities are very different from those of the General Coordination, which responds to the political pulse of a wider social movement in Mexico and ongoing on-the-ground analysis in collaboration with the organisations that we support.

Furthermore, although it is not essential for those who form part of the General Coordination to hold a managerial position within the organisation's structure, it is helpful that they do so. The need for professionals in project management and administration has also led us, from time to time, to hire individuals who do not self-identify as activists to coordinate projects. By and large these decisions have not yielded the best results, as discrepancies have quickly appeared between commitment levels required by the support process that we have developed with communities and what would be considered a purely labour-based commitment. We have noticed that relationships that we hold with Indigenous communities are also affected, shifting from a support-based model that aims to strengthen processes amongst equals to charity-type work in which the compañeres are viewed in the role of 'vulnerable populations'.

So far then it seems that we have more questions than answers:

- How can we maintain working and professional relationships without losing the essence and purpose of the organisation?
- How might we integrate activism and paid work into the organisation without creating inequalities in terms of how much time each person works?
- Faced with a spectrum of participatory opportunities in CICC, what do we do with explicit and implicit expectations?
- How do we handle the mixed thoughts and feelings that arise when some col-

leagues receive payment for work that is similar to what others do without compensation?

- Can the two forms of work ever have the same value?

For some of us, solidarity and activism are a way of connecting that knows no boundaries, that does not conform to working hours or professional profiles, and that goes far beyond what any contract might stipulate. Yet we believe that this is the path to building other worlds and therefore we experiment every day, in each project, with ways to make out of this job a livelihood. We have had some successes too. We have identified that, internally, as with our compañeres in communities, a principle strategy lies in organisation and communication, and although we have begun to define and clearly establish spaces of dialogue and decision-making, we still lack a functional space for conflict resolution. In summary, we are making progress in creating an image of ourselves that truly represents what we practice in a way that is clear and understandable not only to team members but also to those who observe us from the outside.

We know that dialogue within the organisation is fundamental not only to finding common ground but also to understanding the worries that all of us who tread this path carry with us. Meanwhile, we must not forget that the compañeres from Mexico's Indigenous communities are the experts and that it is our job to learn from them.



Figure 18 Radio Chilate: appropriating technology workshop. Attended by Mhe Phaa and Na Savii peoples in the Municipality of Ayutla de los Libres, Guerrero (2021)



Figure 19 A textile design workshop as part of the Cultural Nests project in Guerrero (2022)

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the communities of the Global South who struggle and resist with joyful rebellion.

Notes

- 1 See the official website of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), where all statements and communiqués made by the Good Government Councils of Zapatista support-base communities, the National Indigenous Congress (CNI), and the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee-General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (CCRI-CG of the EZLN) are published: <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/>. Throughout the article, we reference quotes from this source as its texts represent the direct voice of the indigenous autonomous movement in Mexico.
- 2 Zósimo Camacho, 'Guerrero: 28 feminicidios sólo en el mes pasado,' *Contralinea*, 1 February 2018, <https://contralinea.com.mx/opinion/guerrero-28-feminicidios-solo-mes-pasado/>.
- 3 Editor's note: In the context of Mexico, the rough translation of this word would be regional 'despotic' rules or 'bosses'. It is a term that implies corrupt, mismanaged, and/or exploitative power.
- 4 María Inclán, 'El movimiento zapatista y la transición democrática en México,' *Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas A.C.*, 4 September 2018, <https://www.cide.edu/blogs/investigaciones/el-movimiento-zapatista-y-la-transicion-democratica-en-mexico/>.
- 5 Raúl Zibechi, 'Las autonomías indígenas se están convirtiendo en alternativas de vida y en referencias políticas,' *Insurgencia Magisterial*, 28 June 2022, <https://www.cua.uam.mx/news/miscelanea/las-autonomias-indigenas-se-estan-convirtiendo-en-alternativas-de-vida-y-en-referencias-politicas>.
- 6 Zibechi, 'Las autonomías indígenas', 2022.
- 7 Érika Ramírez, 'México: 69.5% de la población indígena sobrevive en la pobreza,' *Contralinea*, 9 August 2021, <https://contralinea.com.mx/interno/semana/mexico-69--5-de-la-poblacion-indigena-sobrevive-en-la-pobreza/>.
- 8 EZLN, 'Prima Parte: UNA DECLARACIÓN ... POR LA VIDA', 2021. <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2021/01/01/primera-parte-una-declaracion-por-la-vida/>. An English-language version of the page can be found here: <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2021/01/01/part-one-a-declaration-for-life/>.
- 9 Armando Bartra, 'Crisis civilizatoria', in *Crisis civilizatoria y superación del capitalismo*, ed. R. Ornelas (Mexico City: UNAM, 2013), 25–71.
- 10 Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, 'Durito and one of the cracks ... and graffittis', *Enlace*

- Zapatista*, 12 April 2003, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2003/04/12/durito-y-una-de-grietas-y-graffitis/>.
- 11 Subcomandante Galeano, 'The Crack in the Wall. First Note on Zapatista Method', *Enlace Zapatista*, 3 May 2015, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2015/05/10/the-crack-in-the-wall-first-note-on-zapatista-method/>.
 - 12 A. Bartra, A. E. Ceceña, G. Esteva, and J. Holloway, *Crisis civilizatoria y superación del capitalismo* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2013).
 - 13 John Holloway, *Agrietar el capitalismo: El hacer contra el trabajo* (Buenos Aires: Herramienta, 2011).
 - 14 John Holloway, '¡Revolución, ahora! Contra y más allá del capital', in *Crisis civilizatoria y superación del capitalismo*, ed. R. Ornelas (Mexico City: UNAM, 2013), 73–89.
 - 15 Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés and Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano, 'The Comparte Festival and Solidarity', *Enlace Zapatista*, 8 July 2016, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2016/07/08/the-comparte-festival-and-solidarity/>.
 - 16 Subcomandante Insurgente Galeano, 'The Arts, the Sciences, the Original Peoples and the Basements of the World', *Enlace Zapatista*, 4 March 2016, <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2016/03/04/the-arts-the-sciences-the-original-peoples-and-the-basements-of-the-world/>.
 - 17 Radio Zapatista, 'Sexto aniversario de Radio Tlanixco, Manantial de Libertad', 10 May 2022, <https://radiozapatista.org/?p=42349>.
 - 18 United Nations, 'La ONU denuncia la criminilización de defensores indígenas en México', 31 October 2018, <https://news.un.org/es/story/2018/10/1444692>.
 - 19 Movimiento por la Libertad de los Defensores del Agua de Tlanixco, 'PRONUNCIAMIENTO CNI', 30 September 2016, <https://radiozapatista.org/?p=16234&lang=en>.
 - 20 Galeano, 'The Arts, the Sciences, the Original Peoples and the Basements of the World'.
 - 21 Author's note: the cooperatives are known as 'Cultural Nests'. The name references the idea of an egg (creative potential or idea) that will become a bird if 'incubated' or supported through the training process. This term was created by CICC especially for this project and is inspired by the methodology of 'language nests' used by diverse countries around the world in linguistic revitalisation projects.

About the contributors

Nadia Alejandra Jiménez Ortiz: Professional environmentalist, economist and sociologist. In 2014, the forced disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa by the Mexican narco state prompted her to join the urban autonomist social movement. Since then, via the CICC A.C., she has been learning from indigenous

peoples about resistance and rebelliousness, trying to apply their knowledge to build a dignified life for everyone.

José Luis Santillán Sánchez: A professional journalist, photographer and designer, since 2006 he has devoted his life to walking alongside the peoples in Mexico fighting for autonomy, lending his knowledge to build and strengthen community-led media and revolutionary practice.

Israel Molas Narváez: Mayan by birth, he has participated in cooperatives for 17 years. Having turned community tourism into his profession, his strongest commitment is defending his peoples' territory through the protection and restoration of natural ecosystems in his native community of Isla Arena.

Jesús Lozano Paredes: A Nahuatl master painter, he has mastered the technique of amate paper painting, a legacy of the pre-Hispanic peoples in the Alto Balsas region. He is determined to maintain the Nahuatl culture alive in his territory and to pass it on to new generations despite the drug cartels' violence in the region.

Nisague Abril Flores Cruz: Master of Science, native Binniza people, and member of the APIIDTT-CNI (Assembly of the Indigenous Peoples of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Defence of the Earth and Territory). In her role as an advocate of indigenous peoples' rights, she participates in different collective spaces with young people in her community to defend their territory, as well as in national and international forums to spread the news about human and collective rights violations resulting from the imposition of the megaproject "Interoceanic Corridor" on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

Lucio Leyva Cruz: Zapotec from Oaxaca's Sierra Norte, he is currently pursuing a degree in Sustainable Rural Processes in the Centro de Estudios Comunitarios Autónomos and is committed to building a dignified life in his community against the marginalisation affecting the region.

Miguel Mireles Ramírez: Guardian of the Otomi Ñathó culture, he maintains the most comprehensive record of Otomi iconography from the Lerma basin. He founded R'ayo Tsibi (new fire), a publishing house specialising in teaching and editorial materials, as a way to preserve and revitalise the endangered Otomi language.