METHODOLOGICAL GUIDE

Context Analysis

Solidaridad, Resistencia, Esperanza



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WHAT DOES THIS GUIDE WANT TO BE?

This methodological guide is conceived as an accessible and practical learning tool to help social movements and organizations to carry out one or more context analyses, that is, to clarify, organize and document their knowledge of the local, national or international situation or context related to a given topic. This methodology, which aims to be accessible and structured, hopes to provide our organizations with the keys to analyze and document a specific context.

Why is it important to perform context analysis on a regular basis?

As SoliREsp organizations, we have identified as a common problem the criminalization and repression of our social movements and organizations, as well as their militants and activists. The context analysis allows us to identify the structural causes behind these actions of repression and criminalization, and to better understand how the devices used in them work, in order to find answers that allow us to take effective actions. In other words, context analysis is an exercise in interpreting reality in order to act on it. It is not a merely theoretical exercise, but a political practice that guides us to respond to the context in which we find ourselves.

What is the purpose/objective of a context analysis?

1. To know what is happening with our organizations in the field of criminalization.
2. Understand the roots of criminalization.
3. Reveal who the main antagonists are and the correlation of forces .*
4. Know strategies of antagonistic action.
5. To indicate strategic lines of our political field.

*Correlation of forces is an expression that means measuring what forces those who attack us have, and what forces we, our movements/organizations, have. Who has more strength, capacity, at that moment? Who is the correlation of forces favorable to? And we can plan actions, build strategies, to change the correlation of forces when it is not favorable to us.

Context analysis is used to:

1. Prevent or reduce threats
2. Improve security measures
3. Define priorities and establish strategies,
4. Establish monitoring and evaluation frameworks,
5. Identify the causes and drivers of the analyzed element,
6. Understand how to better cope with the situation in which we live.

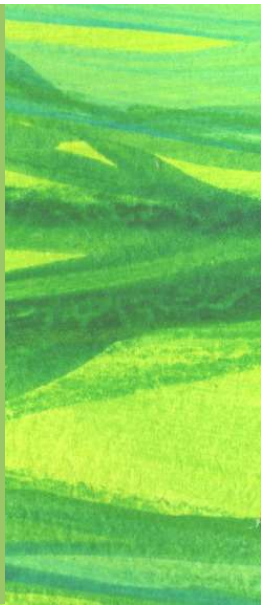
During the political formation we developed in Abidjan, we studied the criminalization of those who defend human rights by militating in social movements. However, context analysis can be used to study a wide range of other topics, such as neocolonialism or the persistence of patriarchy, for example.



Methodological reminder: Context analysis and analysis of the conjuncture

Context analysis is characterized by the definition of a time period (which can be months, years, etc.) over which the categories of analysis are applied, and which allows for «long-range» comparisons with other similar time periods. It also allows comparisons between different places in the same time periods defined for the analysis.

The analysis of the conjuncture takes into consideration the immediate, present events in a given space or place. This analysis of the present, of "short times" is characterized by the reading of the balance of power from a class perspective, and the categories of analysis seek to reach conclusions or answers to questions related to the immediate present.



Conjuncture analysis must include objective elements (economic, political, etc.) and subjective elements (our strength, our lack, our capacity to intervene, etc.). Since we use subjective elements, we must recognize the initial subjective bias. We do not carry out abstract academic analyses, but as political subjects, based on the materiality of our struggles.

In this sense, context analyses are the result of collective processes, in which there is a dialogue of knowledge between the social groups directly affected by criminalization and violence, and other groups, external, that contribute with other perspectives, enriching the analysis. These external groups can be from universities, NGOs, unions, etc. They must be groups of the alliance circles, in which we place trust.

Intersectional perspective: Activists in social movements and organizations whose actions are perceived as challenging patriarchal and heteronormative systems often face threats and attacks because they question the way women understand their identity and their place and role, which are taken for granted, and disrupt gender-based power relations. In the same way, the actions of militants who question their position in castes, tribes, clans, ethnicities or races and nations can also be criminalized for it.

BEFORE THE ANALYSIS PREPARATORY WORK

A. Define your topic/area of interest

During this first phase, the goal is to agree on the topic that is relevant to your context, your organization. What do you want to analyze?

Ex.: the criminalization of people and social movements/organizations that focus on environmental human rights.

B. Define your problem

You should think about the underlying problem of the topic of analysis you have chosen. Think about the problem you are going to analyze and face during your context analysis. What problem do you have at hand?

Ex: Social movements no longer have the possibility of expressing themselves as they wish. Increased repression by states and corporations.

C. Define your goal

It is important to think about why you want to build an analysis, why it is useful in its context and how it can be useful.

Ex: The importance of analysis and making it our reference for our strategies and actions. To know the instruments that assist us. Know our weaknesses and strengths.

During this session, it is also useful to think about what you want to avoid during this analysis, what are the mistakes you usually make.

D. Define a period of analysis and a geography

Political forces and historical trends imply that what we are studying is part of a time frame. In historical research methodology, it is recommended to analyze a period of 5 years; from there, we can identify a trend.

It is important to understand and take into account the historical background of each situation, but for the analysis to be relevant, it is necessary to focus on a fixed period.

To understand situations that persist, such as racism or colonialism, or to answer questions such as "why is there inequality between English-speaking America and Latin America", a brief historical-geographical tour can be made. This opens up the possibility of making an important formation process for the group, and knowing that all the people present have the same historical information. If the need is perceived, specific formations can be organized on the agrarian struggles in the region, the formation of the state, the colonization process, the feminist struggles in the region, the formation of the people, etc. The more knowledge we have, the better analysis we will make and the better actions we will take as a movement.

What is the approximate study area?
Comparisons and/or correlations with other historical periods and geographical areas can be made possible through quantitative data and information.
The fact that our organizations are regional or international also allows us to identify trends at these levels (for example, in relation to criminalization), as well as to compare the responses given to similar problems.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

1

Starting from the local to the general

Collectively we can identify the problems we have in our daily lives, which lead us to the need for analysis. Our gaze/analysis will make the movement from the particular to the general, we will find the abstractions, and we will return to the particular as the «thought concrete», perceiving in our daily life the generality that impacts an entire group, be it the working class, be it women, be it black people, indigenous people, LGBTI+, be it people with functional diversity, etc.

For example: our community is not finding enough fish, and is being banned from other fishing areas. And when it complained to the competent authorities, it began to be threatened to leave the territory where it has lived for generations.

2

The big picture

Let's think collectively about the big picture. More specifically, this means considering the main political, economic and social events and practices that have shaped the current context.

What are the main economic, environmental, political, security and social dynamics that have influenced the current context? Why have certain issues disproportionately influenced the context (identity, economic crises, political transitions, etc.)?



Taking the example of the local starting point: why is the amount of fishing in that area decreasing? Is there water contamination? Are there fishing boats that destroy fish reproduction? Whose ships are they? Or who is polluting the waters? Are there mining companies in the region? Who are they? Where do they take the minerals they extract from here? Do they have environmental permits?

And those who threaten the community, who are they? Who pays them? Are they threatening other communities? What are the acts of violence against women, people with functional diversity, blacks, LGBTI+, and minorities like?

Which companies are interested in that territory? What means do they have (economic, military, legal, etc.) to appropriate these common goods?

>>Organizations highlight the importance of dialogue of knowledge and experiences in this phase (using, for example, participatory diagnostics as a tool).

>>Search and selection of reliable sources of information; it can be local, national, regional and international.

3

Causes and structural factors

What are the causes and structural factors of criminalization?

Structural causes refer to systemic and rooted causes. Structural causes are often persistent and can be difficult to change.

Ex.: authoritarian political system, corruption, economic inequality, etc.

Factors are specific elements or conditions that contribute to a particular outcome or situation. They can be more immediate or temporary and easier to modify.

Ex. repressive laws, media coverage, etc.

Verify if there is a need to expand formation with elements of Political Economy. This knowledge helps us to understand the movements of capital, of the "market", the needs that large companies have to seek their expansion, the forms of expansion of capital, etc.

intersectional perspective: In this reflection on the causes and structural factors, it is necessary to maintain an intersectional perspective. For example, how do the sexual division of labor and the racial division of labor manifest themselves? What is the majority family model? What values and conceptions do these systems of oppression hold in the context of analysis?

It is also interesting to consider the reasons that lead elites and institutions to criminalize social movements.

Ex.: consolidating the position of the ruling elites, perpetuating a capitalist and racist system, maintaining profit rates, expanding the «market», etc.

>>To go deeper:

What companies, governments and others are involved in it, have an interest in the region?

Which transnational corporations, multilateral bodies, international/regional entities operate in several or all of the countries of the region?

What kind of governments and states are there in the region? Monarchies, republics, dictatorships, extreme right-wing or progressive governments, etc. If we identify the type of government as dictatorship, what concrete elements allow us to reach that conclusion?

What are the riches of the region? Water, biodiversity, minerals, soil productivity, work, etc.

What are the social movements active in the region?

What are the objectives, strategies and actions of social movements in the region?

4

Tools

What are the tools and strategies used by elites and national or international political systems to criminalize social movements, popular organizations and the people who make them up?

In a previous study carried out in SoliREsp, on trends in criminalization, we have identified that criminalization follows patterns that can include (1) accusations: defamation, slander, discrediting; (2) repression and persecution: judicial persecution, attempt to intimidate; and (3) direct assault, harassment, and murder in the most serious cases. A process of criminalization and repression can include all or some of these actions.

Under these different forms of criminalization, different tools are used, are these or others present in the context we are analyzing?

Discrediting, defamation. For example, the construction of the enemy (pointing out those who question the capitalist/patriarchal/colonial-racist system). Especially the defamation of women who fight for the rights of communities (who can be pointed out as whores, for example). The objective is to build public opinion against the organizations and people who make them up.



Espionage, infiltrations, etc. (take into account here the use of technology, for example, the Israeli Pegassus espionage system).

Judicialization. A study by several SoliREsp organizations (Reassembling/Reconfiguring states for rogue capitalism: Mapping of main laws used to repress and criminalize peasants and other people living in rural areas in Colombia, Honduras, India, and the Philippines) also identified 7 trends that may be useful in this part of our analysis (see figure 1).

Direct violence: threats, harassment, enforced disappearances, sexual violence, murder. Women especially can be harassed and persecuted with threats to their minor children.

Intersectional perspective: it is important to think about the specific ways of criminalizing. For example, sexual violence is a strategy used specifically against women and LGTBIQ+ subjects.

Migrants, who are themselves members of popular organizations and social movements, are more vulnerable to criminalization that implies precarious legal situations, discrimination and suspicions.
Black people are more likely to be killed and accused of being part of organized crime or other armed groups, as is the case with «false positives.»

FIGURE 1: TRENDS IN CRIMINALISATION

Trend 1: Changes in criminal codes to curtail different forms of social protest and dissent and to undermine fundamental rights and freedoms

Trend 2: Green militarization: Newly passed environmental laws are misused to persecute rural peoples.

Trend 3: Global Anti-Terrorism as a key building block of repurposing states' security policies.

Trend 4: The revival of colonial-era laws. In India, the government uses laws dating back to British colonial times to censor and silence opposition and dissent.

Trend 5: Increasing military and police powers to protect commercial-corporate actors and interests.

Trend 6: Surveillance laws and other forms of exercising control on society. Highlighted use of media.

Trend 7: Experimenting with neo-colonial enclaves – Furthering corporate rule.

5

Demonstrations

What are the repercussions and manifestations of these strategies of criminalization in our social movements? How do they affect our struggles?

For example: less funds available, greater insecurity, etc.

Intersectional perspective: for subjects who have, a priori, fewer rights, the way in which criminalization manifests itself will be different. For example, migrants, if repression increases, will have even less opportunity to demonstrate, organize, etc. (they risk having their work permits revoked, their asylum applications denied, etc.).

Young students may lose places in schools/universities, scholarships, internships, etc.

6

Actors: antagonistic, differential, synergistic*

The focus here is on the balance of power between different actors, asking how your organization interacts with them. To do this, you can classify actors into three groups: antagonistic actors, synergistic actors, and versatile actors, which fall between the two categories.

It is important that we analyze actors by their behavior and not by what they say they are.

In criminalization, the State (the 3 powers), business/corporate actors (lobbies, think tanks, media, etc.) and parastate actors (private security, militias, paramilitaries, trafficking, etc.) play a leading role.



These three groups are a suggestion for didactically organizing the information. The group that is doing the analysis can include or exclude, or elaborate new categories.

>> To go deeper:

Identification and mapping of actors, processes for and/or against our purposes.

Identification and distinction between antagonistic subjects and different subjects in the face of our proposals and intentions and who act in our context of incidence or in which we want to influence.

7

Role of the State

In context analysis, it is important to retrieve information on the type of state and the type and tendency of government. Information about public officials, about where we have allies, about current public policies, about the judicial system, etc.

It is possible to perceive trends in the country by organizing information on public credit, on environmental concessions and permits, exploitation, etc. If they have been awarded, which companies receive the most public contracts, etc.

The group can check if there is a need to organize specific formation on the State, Theories of the State, Democracy, etc. And debates about how we see and how we want our community organization of the public and the common to be.

8 Generalizations and specificities

In this last phase of the analysis, it would be a matter of identifying general phenomena, causes and consequences of the aspects analyzed in the production of context analysis, aimed at the prevention and reaction to repression and criminalization.

Some questions that can guide us are:

- How do we analyze the behavior of the correlation of forces in the period or conjuncture we are analyzing?
- Does the correlation of forces correspond to our interests, meanings and political-organizational horizons?
- What tools and opportunities can we use to overcome obstacles?

9 Returning to the local, with another perspective

Now that we have a picture that broadens our understanding of the problems we face at the local level, we can perceive more clearly who our enemy is and where it stands. This allows us to avoid fights and attacks between comrades and to establish with more certainty where those who can help us in emergency situations and in the longer-term struggle are. We now know that our problems have their origin in the world system of production, which exploits the working class and needs oppressions to be maintained, be it machismo, racism, etc.

Going back to our example, we know that there is a lack of fish in that river, not because the neighbor has caught too much, but because some large companies are interested in us leaving that territory.

We also have more clarity on how to act in the face of that threat, and in the face of possible aggressions.

In particular, it is easier to understand the need for our articulation with other communities, to organize strong social movements, to go hand in hand with other movements, in other parts of the world, and to have the capacity to offer and receive internationalist solidarity.



Collective elaboration in the framework of the Solidaridad, Resistencia, Esperanza Alliance

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