

SUCCESS STORY

The impacts of the pandemic from the lens of conflict resolution.

By: Partners Global


* Photographs: Proyecto Tejiendo Paz



PROYECTO Tejiendo Paz

OBSTÁCULOS PSICOLÓGICOS Y EMOCIONALES PARA LA COLABORACIÓN

Entrevista con Jaidivi Nuñez para el curso *Gestión de crisis y conflictividad en el Altiplano Occidental*

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Salir del modo de pantalla completa (f)

Lockdowns, quarantines, the closure of schools and workplaces, and the rapid increase in coronavirus infections and deaths were the first visible consequences of the pandemic. However, in a short time, the pandemic crisis affected various sectors and exacerbated existing problems, exposing the limitations of government to manage the crisis. Faced with this new pandemic context, the conflict dynamics became more complex and -in many cases- were transformed, forcing us to imagine new ways to manage, resolve and transform them.

The online course "Crisis and Conflict Management" —which so far has two editions— represents a commitment from the Tejiendo Paz project to provide governmental and non-governmental institutions with tools to respond to the emerging needs of the Covid-19 from the perspective of positive conflict transformation and with a “do no harm” approach. According to Rosario Espinosa, facilitator of the training process, "with the arrival of something as new and unknown as a pandemic, we had to propose an approach that would adjust to the new context and provide the tools to navigate it”.

The second edition of the online course was designed based on the lessons learned from the first, and it counted with the participation of representatives from civil society organizations as well as government. Likewise, the time intensity of the weekly sessions was shortened to reduce the screen fatigue and a more intuitive virtual platform was employed in order to increase the effectiveness and accessibility of the course.





THE PANDEMIC AND ITS EFFECTS.

A focus on analyzing the impacts of the pandemic was what primarily motivated Juana Tax, the regional manager of the indigenous women's ombudsman's office in Tonicapán, to register for the second edition of the course. "Of course, I was interested in having new tools for conflict resolution, but above, I needed an analysis framework to understand how the pandemic was going to affect us and how to manage its effects," she explained.

Similarly, Carlos Rios, a member of the departmental Commission for security and attention to social conflict in the department of Quiché, stated that once he found out that there would be a second edition of the course, he asked to be enrolled because, despite having years of experience attending social conflicts in Guatemala, his department was facing new situations generated by the pandemic that required a new approach. "We no longer had roadblocks, but we had to work on an immediate response in, for example, bringing food to the communities. But what was the best way to do it? " He asked.

"With the arrival of something as new and unknown as a pandemic, we had to propose an approach that will adjust to the new context and provide tools to navigate it," explained Rosario Espinosa, an expert in mediation and resolution of conflicts and facilitator of the training process of the Tejiendo Paz project.

The general framework of guidelines for the two editions of the "Crisis and Conflict Management" course was the Pedagogy for Peace, in which respect for diversity of points of view and active listening prevail. "As a facilitator, my role is to build a safe space for the participants for them to share their expertise, their knowledge and question their own beliefs," explained Rosario. Components of the course included exercises to analyze the differentiated impacts of the pandemic on the population and tools for negotiation, collaboration, and positive conflict transformation.

An Ixil lawyer who attended the course, Miguel de León, said that these dynamics allowed him to question his biases and gain a broader and clearer vision of how the pandemic affected different populations. For example, he explained that "with the interviews exercise I was able to know the reality that women are experiencing in their homes, the overload of work and the domestic violence of which they are victims. This made me more empathetic and aware." Likewise, Miguel stressed that the 'ladder of inference' had made him reflect on how prejudices are triggered by beliefs and how it affects relationships and hinders conflict resolution.

"With the interviews exercise, I was able to know the reality that women are experiencing in their homes, the overload of work, and the domestic violence of which they are victims. This made me be more empathetic and aware," explained Miguel de León, member of the Inter-Institutional Commission Ixil and the Departmental Commission for Security and Attention to Conflict of the Department of Quiché.



On the other hand, Juana asserted that before the course she had not been aware of the various impacts of the pandemic on her community. She expressed that “In the spaces for reflection, I was surprised to see that it was not only me who was experiencing this difficult situation. There are many scared people, there are people in economic crisis, many of my neighbors lost their jobs. As a result of this, at the end of every month, I buy food supplies and give them to people.” Carlos Ríos ended up offering small jobs to bricklayers in his sector after learning how the crisis was affecting them. “Without a doubt, the exercises helped me to be more empathetic,” he said.

GOOD INTENTIONS ARE NOT ENOUGH

According to Rosario, " There are no chemically pure interventions, they can be negative or positive, but our mere presence already implies a modification to the context." For this reason, in the resolution of a conflict, it is imperative to start from the premise that no intervention is exempt from doing harm regardless of whether the intention is good. For the participants, one of the most relevant tools of the course was the concept of “do no harm,” This concept, under a conflict-sensitive approach, allows practitioners to recognize the possible impacts of a project or intervention process and generate options to minimize potential damage. Miguel, who has already started to use the tool in the processes that he facilitates, explained that “the ‘do no harm’ tool caught my attention because one would never think that our actions to address a conflict could result in causing more damage. I have already recommended it to the communities and, especially, to the companies”. For Juana, this tool made her see the conflict in a different way. She realized that “we are not going to end conflicts, on the contrary, we must learn to live with them and for this, we must analyze them, understand them, in order to be able to transform them.” Although she says that she has not yet applied the “do no harm” tool, she is sure that it will be useful to plan each action in her projects and constantly self-evaluate her own performance as a conflict mediator and facilitator.



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THE VERSATILITY OF VIRTUALITY

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the transition towards virtual modalities, forcing practitioners to reinvent the methodologies and formats of training processes. For the course “Crisis and Conflict Management,” 2.5-hour synchronous sessions were used to create collective learning spaces and weave networks among the participants. Likewise, asynchronous sessions were used to complement the content with interviews from experts in the field of conflict resolution. “That was precisely what I liked the most, each week we could hear a different expert sharing his experience and perspective on the subject that we were going to see in class,” stressed Carlos. Additionally, as Juana explained, the videos could be downloaded to the participant's mobile phones, facilitating easy access to the content. “I only downloaded the audio and I listened to it on my way to work. Sometimes I didn't have time to do the readings, but it was always very easy for me to listen to the experts,” she added. A WhatsApp group was also enabled to have direct and more personalized communication with the participants. “Having an alternate and direct communication channel allowed the course to be more accessible because, for example, during classwork, we would take a photo of the result, and voila, we would send it to the group. In addition, we did not have to wait a week to clarify doubts, because there we communicated directly with the facilitators,” highlighted Juana. The variety of formats and perspectives, the dynamic methodologies, and the constant communication between the participants and the facilitators were what helped Miguel to overcome the obstacles of virtuality and create an atmosphere of closeness and community within the group.



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ANTICIPATING THE AFTERMATH OF THE PANDEMIC

The participants expressed their desire to continue deepening their training in conflict resolution and in the analysis of the trans-pandemic crisis. "These spaces for reflection are very important in these times of isolation and so much uncertainty. Even though I didn't meet anyone in person, I made good connections," said Juana. And, although the pandemic crisis is just beginning, participants suggested the need to begin to reflect on the consequences that the crisis will leave and anticipate them. Carlos stressed that "it is important to continue deepening our training and to begin to reflect collectively on the post-pandemic and the conflicts that will arise. We need to be prepared to anticipate the possible consequences that this pandemic will leave behind."

"It is important to continue deepening our training and to begin to reflect collectively on the post-pandemic and the conflicts that will arise. We need to be prepared to anticipate the possible consequences that this pandemic will leave behind." Carlos Rios, miembro de la Comisión departamental de seguridad y atención a la conflictividad social del departamento de Quiché.



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