

Magazine

FOKUS women

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Colombia and Guatemala



Chronicle

Peace also
has a woman's face

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and reproductive rights

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for indigenous women

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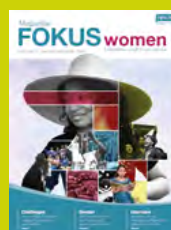


#SemanaFOKUS #FokusApoya

FOKUS WORK LINES



Others editions



EDITORIAL

In its eighth edition, *FOKUS Women* magazine continues to report on the work and reflections of our Latin American partner organisations in Colombia and Guatemala. We would therefore like to thank all the organisations for contributing to this publication, which aims to reflect the ideas and actions that FOKUS supports in the region.

This ongoing effort to publish the magazine regularly since 2020 reflects FOKUS' commitment to supporting the struggles and demands of women and LBT people in the region, despite the current situation in which uncertainties regarding democracy, and consequently human rights, loom over the civilian population and society at large.

We are facing an even more challenging context: the shrinking of civic space in many countries across the region, alongside the scaling back or restructuring of development cooperation.

It would appear that what many governments regard as an achievement – such as gaining membership of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in order to be classified as middle-income countries – has significant implications for civil society organisations that rely on development aid to continue strengthening their organisational processes at a local level, under precarious conditions and with many constraints on their progress, given that such status would imply a reduced need for cooperation support.

Some governments continue to regard militarisation, control over people's lives and the logic of security as key elements of their governance, to the detriment of the rights and social policies that should assist impoverished and marginalised sectors of society.

Women and LBT people fear a rollback of the rights achieved to date, which, whilst not all those they had hoped for, do reflect the constant advocacy work of women's movements, feminists, LGBTIQ+ people, peasant movements, Indigenous movements, Afro-descendant movements, youth movements, environmentalists, etc., to secure these rights. It now seems that the task is to defend what has been achieved.

FOKUS remains committed to supporting these organisations which, from the grassroots and within their local communities, continue to believe that another world is possible and that it is built collectively. 



PEACE ALSO HAS A WOMAN'S FACE



TEXT AND PHOTOS:
**CENTRO DE
PROMOCIÓN Y
CULTURA (CPC)**



From rural woman and victim of violence to grassroots leader, the story of María de Jesús Cárdenas reveals how social organisations transform lives and build peace from the ground up.

María de Jesús was born into a farming family in Boyacá. She grew up amongst the mountains and farm work, in a home marked by machismo and submission. There she learnt the first lessons that would shape her life: that women must obey, care for others and stay put. Decades later, she would come to realise that these were precisely the ideas she had to unlearn.

Fifty years ago, she arrived in Bogotá in search of a better quality of life. She completed her A-levels, started working and started a family. She had a daughter and, years later, two more children. But the relationships with her partners were marked by violence.

The violence wasn't just a single blow. It was the constant control over her life. She couldn't go out alone or attend family gatherings. She would barely go to the market and would rush straight back home. When she got a job, her partner went to the company and managed to get her sacked. He needed to keep her close by, under his watch and dependent on him.

There can be no peace in a country that continues to demand that women endure abuse in silence.

There were also the voices of other women: her mother, her grandmother, the neighbours. They repeated an idea passed down through generations: 'If

you chose to be so-and-so's wife, you'll just have to put up with it.' Put up with the infidelities, the shouting and the abuse. As if women's lives had been designed solely to endure pain.

But something inside María de Jesús resisted.

When she arrived in the El Amparo neighbourhood and managed to build a home with her family, she came across the Centro de Promoción y Cultura (CPC). She attended the women's groups because she needed a place to talk and be listened to.

There she discovered something that the violence had hidden from her for years: she knew how to lead. She could bring people together and stand at the head of a group. She then remembered her father, a well-known leader in the village where she grew

up in Boyacá. Those abilities had never disappeared; they had simply remained buried beneath years of silence and fear.

Little by little, she took on small responsibilities within the organisation. Her partner began to realise that she was changing and that it would no longer be so easy to keep her subjugated.

Women's social organisations are the place where women discover that they are not alone and that it is possible to build alternative ways of life.

Escaping the violence did not happen overnight. There were failed attempts. She left and then returned due to financial difficulties, since she had young children. But the changes had already begun. With the first workshops on rights, and the support of her eldest daughter, she made the final decision to leave.

She then embarked on a new journey of learning: about rights, participation and politics. She completed postgraduate courses at universities, studied human rights and peace, and prepared herself to support other women who, like her, were arriving in Bogotá bearing stories of violence and displacement.

Over time, she became a leader. She has served as an advisory councillor for the Right to a Life Free from Sociopolitical Violence; she has been involved at local and district levels, and remains an active leader in the Kennedy locality.

But the position was never the most important thing. What mattered most was realising that being a woman was not just about cooking, cleaning and looking after others. Being a woman

meant studying, making decisions, getting involved and living with dignity.

That is why she insists that social organisations pave the way for women to recognise one another, support one another and discover new possibilities for their lives. They are the place where women realise, they are not alone, that others have also been mistreated, and that it is possible to build different ways of life.

It was there that María de Jesús came to understand that peace was not a word reserved for national agreements. Peace was also a part of everyday life: living free from violence, reclaiming one's voice and coming together with other women to think collectively about how to live in the neighbourhood, the city and the country.

At the CPC, the defence of women's rights and peace-building are inseparable. Every confidential conversation, every training session and every exercise in participation is a commitment to dismantling the forms of violence learnt at home and in society.

Perhaps that is why María de Jesús speaks of the organisation with the certainty of someone who has seen what happens when people find a place where they are listened to and supported. In these spaces, many women no longer face violence alone. They build bonds with others and, little by little, regain the confidence to participate, organise themselves and make decisions about their own lives.

The woman who once sneaked out of her home to meet other women ended up dedicating her life to opening that very same door for many others. She knows, from her own experience, that peace also has a woman's face and that, very often, it begins in a small community gathering where someone, for the first time, feels free, discovers that she is not alone and realises that her life can also transform the lives of others. That is, perhaps, the deepest power of social organisations: enabling people to reconnect with one another, to believe in community life and to build peace from the ground up. 

Through care and trust, women today are weaving peace.





TECHNOLOGY AND SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS



LA MESA
por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres

TEXT AND
PHOTOS: **LA
MESA POR
LA VIDA Y LA
SALUD DE LAS
MUJERES**



Does technology expand our autonomy, or can it also limit our rights? In this episode, we discuss the relationship between technology and sexual and reproductive rights. We talk about the challenges posed by artificial intelligence, the circulation of information on social media, and the opportunities to guarantee access to rights. Have a listen and join this conversation about our freedoms. 





HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? I DON'T KNOW. UNTIL THE SUN DIES

Yohana Conda's life has been marked by violence and loss. Today, she is a community leader who supports other women and defends their rights.

Yohana Conda Fernández, aged 36, is the coordinator of the Women's Network at Çxhab Wala Kiwe.

She is an indigenous Nasa woman, born in Jambaló, Cauca, and the mother of three children. Whilst her story is marked by violence, it is also characterised by a constant desire to transform pain into resistance and care for people and Mother Earth.

Yohana grew up in a family of ten siblings. Her mother had various jobs to support the household, one of which was a small stall where she sold empanadas and potatoes. When she

was unable to run it, her children took charge of the business.

It was there that an experience began which would shape her life.

"I was about 11 or 12 years old, and this man became obsessed with me. It was a really difficult time because he

"We know that if I'm fighting against the violation of a right, it's because there's someone violating it, and of course that person isn't going to like what I'm doing at all."



TEXT:
CORPORACIÓN
DE APOYO A
COMUNIDADES
POPULARES
(CODACOP)
PHOTO: JULIANA
ECHEVERRY,
CODACOP.



wouldn't even leave me alone at school. "He would send me notes in cigarette packets through the militia right there in the village."

The man she's talking about was the commander of an armed group operating in the area. One day, as she was returning from school with some other pupils, he blocked their path.

“He stopped the whole group and said to them: ‘Right, from now on, you carry on your way; she’s staying here.’ That day was a nightmare for me because I thought: ‘Here, either I’ll lose my life or my freedom.’”

Her classmates alerted the community and that very night Yohana was rescued. Shortly afterwards, she was sent to Popayán under the protection of her brother Milcíades Trochez.

From then on, her life was marked by displacement and fear.

“My brother would take me to school, and I’d have to leave straight away and go home. I was never able to sit on a pavement or say, ‘I’m going to the park for an ice cream.’”

Years later, following the signing of the peace agreements, she returned to Jambaló. There she met the father of her second son. But when her baby was just fifteen days old, her brother Milcíades – who by then was the coordinator of the Indigenous Guard – was murdered.

“It was a really difficult time, because my dad had also been murdered by these same armed groups and now, they’d killed him [...]. I always remembered that one of my sisters wanted to avenge my dad’s death and joined an armed group. There, she was sexually abused [...] and, of course, that wasn’t the life I wanted.”

Faced with this grief, Yohana made a different choice: to carry on her brother’s legacy of leadership and work for her community.

Along the way, she discovered that defending women’s rights was not just a political task, but also a cause deeply linked to her own personal history.

“I experienced sexual violence, not only at the hands of armed groups, but also at the hands of people very close to the family. So that means I simply cannot turn a blind eye to any situation experienced by a fellow woman who comes to me for help.”

Over the years, Yohana has strengthened her community leadership. She served as a councillor for the municipality of Jambaló and today she coordinates the Tejido Mujer network within Cxhab Wala Kiwe. There she supports initiatives to prevent violence and defend women’s rights.

This commitment entails many risks for her.

“We know that if I am fighting against the violation of a right, it is because there is someone violating it, and of course that person is not going to like what I am doing at all.”

Even so, she carries on.

“I’m aware that I’m a thorn in the side of many people. Many nights, as I’m walking home, I find myself in tears because I know my family is also aware of the risk. My mum is one of those who suffers the most because she’s already lost a son for being in a leadership role.

But the path I’ve chosen is one where it’s the community itself that entrusts me with this role.

How long will this go on? I don’t know. Until the sun dies.” 

Link to articles

 <https://codacop.org.co/noticias/hasta-cuando-no-se-hasta-que-se-apague-el-sol/>



CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF SRRS IN COLOMBIA



For women, girls and pregnant people, making decisions about their own bodies depends more on the local context than on the law.



In Colombia, geography dictates the fate of bodies. Whilst the High Courts hand down landmark rulings on sexual and reproductive rights (SRRs), a mighty river, a militarised trail or a village bell tower can completely

override them. By comparing the autonomy of decision-making regarding our bodies across three territories – the tense border region of Arauca, the ‘isolated’ Pacific coast of Chocó and the deeply rooted conservatism of Boyacá – at the Fundación Oriéntame we began to listen to what these territories were crying out. The communities taught us that autonomy is not decreed, it is lived.

In Arauca, a territory fractured by armed conflict and the absence of state authority, talking about one’s own body is an act of survival. There, the institutional barrier was fear. In the workshops, the silence was broken

as women laid bare the stigmas they bore alone. “They told us that if we asked for contraceptives, we were ‘restless girls,’” as one female leader in Arauquita put it. There was also the paralysing terror that making a decision would mean divine condemnation. When we opened up spaces for dialogue, the aim was to reclaim the right to decide for ourselves, about our own bodies. The impact was not confined to a report; it resonated in people’s voices, as a young woman from the Makaguan El Vigía reserve put it: “We learnt that saying NO is also a right.” That ‘no’ drew a sovereign boundary. The fact that the hospital in Tame opened its doors to voluntary termination of pregnancy (VTP) showed that the institution only acts when communities lose their fear of demanding change.

Whilst Arauca defends the body in the midst of conflict, Chocó defends it against state neglect. In municipalities with Afro-Colombian and Indigenous populations such as Bahía Solano or Nuquí, where the state reaches people by boat, the theory of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) collided with an open wound: the commercial sexual exploitation of children linked to tourism. How do you teach autonomy in a place where the market puts a price on childhood? The answer sprang from the Emberá Dobidá women leaders and the community kitchens. The community translated these teachings into a swing with wooden wings in El Valle, carved with the phrase: “Teach me to fly without mistreating my wings”. The process became an emotional refuge. Defying male suspicion, an indigenous woman leader summed it up with devastating clarity: “I don’t want them to become mothers so young because they don’t know how to look after children, and there are other plans.” They realised that the CSE is not just a piece of paper; it is a shield for children, adolescents and young people as they pursue their life plans.

As one ascends the mountains of Boyacá, the nature of the threat changes: it is no longer gunpowder or the tide, but the thick mist of moral imperatives. In municipalities with rural roots and deep religious traditions, such as Chiquinquirá, the barrier is a vague conscientious objection that translates into a labyrinth of polite bureaucratic delays. No one outright denies the right to a safe abortion, but they let time slip by until the woman gives up or travels to another area. To challenge a conservatism entrenched in guilt, a leaflet was not enough; it was necessary to take it to a public space. So, we let the walls speak. We painted murals in the heart of the villages; strokes of vivid colours depicting women in control of their own destinies and rural hands

preventing gender-based violence. The mural acted as an uncomfortable mirror. When rural communities walk through their own territory past a wall that enshrines the freedom to choose, the moral monolith cracks. This cultural upheaval prompted local authorities to sign a public pact in support of the **right to sexual and reproductive health**.

To transform perceptions, we must challenge the moral imperative and promote socio-cultural and territorial shared responsibility.

What unites the female leader from Makaguan, the young woman from the Pacific coast and the peasant woman from Boyacá? The certainty that projects come to an end, but the network remains. When asked what truly transformed this process, they speak of a point of no return in their life stories. “We often grew up thinking that talking about these issues was wrong. Today we understand that supporting

others is also a form of care,” said a female leader from Sogamoso in Boyacá. Therein lies the key comparative insight: faced with a uniform national law that loses its impact at the local level, the women countered it with tailor-made empathy. They became the lifeline that the hospital denied; they are the living resistance of the territories that are pleading for their rights to be guaranteed.

Guided by the knowledge gained over these years, we are now extending our reach to La Guajira. We are certain that autonomy over our bodies

is not a gift sent by post from Bogotá. It is a collective achievement sustained by raising a paintbrush in Boyacá, weaving change in Arauca and spreading our wings and forging new paths in Chocó. As we were told in every region, it is we who will keep the dialogue and the demand for our rights alive. There is much work to be done to ensure that the guarantee of our rights and autonomy becomes a reality. 



CRACKS IN JUSTICE

FOR INDIGENOUS WOMEN



TEXT AND
PHOTO:
**ASOCIACIÓN
POR NOSOTRAS
IXMUKANÉ**



In the village of Xeabaj, San Andrés Sajcabajá, Quiché, the story of Catarina and her daughter Lucía, who live in extreme poverty, exposes the cracks in a judicial system that marginalises indigenous women. Lucía, a young Maya K'ich'ë woman with visual and speech impairments, was the victim of sexual violence and became pregnant – just as her sister had years earlier – at the

hands of the same perpetrator. Although the perpetrator was reported on both occasions, impunity prevailed in the first case and, in Lucía's case, justice seems out of reach. The family faces various forms of violence, including racist, patriarchal, ableist and sexist violence, amongst others, which create barriers to their access to justice. For them, reporting the crime is a path fraught with obstacles, where justice becomes a utopia that crumbles over time. [FM](#)



▲ Ixmukane is an organisation of Indigenous women that supports women who are victims of violence.

- ▶ To file the complaint with my daughter, we spent what I earned in 15 days of work in one single day.

My mum says that rather than pursuing the complaint, she'll prioritise buying food for us.





If the justice system worked, we would prevent the person who harmed my daughter from continuing to ruin the lives of other girls.

▼ Three generations share the same space and a story that still awaits justice.





▲ Beyond the justice system, I am hopeful that, with my mother's support, my daughter will have a better future.

▼ Despite the difficulties, the family carries on without giving up hope of seeking justice.

I feel that justice is crumbling and becoming out of reach for us as indigenous people.





TEXT AND
PHOTO:
**INSTANCIA POR
LA SALUD Y EL
DESARROLLO
DE LAS
MUJERES /
OSAR**



Evelyn Texaj is a 31-year-old Kaqchikel Maya woman who, through her community work in Chimaltenango, has seen first-hand how silence, misinformation and violence affect the lives of girls and adolescents. Her work focuses on promoting comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and preventing teenage pregnancies, a problem that continues to shape the lives of girls and adolescents in Guatemala. Drawing on her own experience, she speaks clearly about the challenges and urgent issues facing the country.

OSAR: What motivated you to get involved in preventing pregnancies among girls and adolescents?

Evelyn Texaj: What struck me most was seeing 12- or 13-year-old girls becoming mothers without having had the chance to choose. Often these pregnancies are the result of sexual violence, yet they are treated as normal. When I realised that information could change these stories, I decided to dedicate myself to this cause. It's not just a job; it's a responsibility towards the girls who come after us.

OSAR: How does your identity as a young Maya woman influence your work on sexual and reproductive health?

ET: My identity is part of everything I do. I grew up in a community where talking about sexuality wasn't common, and where we saw the consequences of this silence. Being a Maya woman has taught me to listen, to

THE POWER OF NAMING: PATHS THAT CHANGE LIVES

Evelyn Texaj, a young Kaqchikel Maya woman from Chimaltenango, is championing comprehensive sexuality education and the prevention of teenage pregnancy, whilst confronting silence, stigma and historical inequalities.

work with respect, and to understand that information is a tool for protection. When I enter a community, the girls and their mothers see me as someone close to them, someone who understands their reality. That opens doors.

OSAR: What barriers do you encounter when discussing CSE in communities where the subject remains a sensitive one?

ET: The main barrier is fear: fear that the information might ‘awaken’ something in the girls, fear of breaking with traditions, fear of talking about violence. There is also a great deal of

Comprehensive sexuality education is a protective tool that enables girls to recognise risks and seek support.

mistrust towards institutions. But when we explain that sex and relationship education is not about teaching them how to have sex, but about recognising their bodies, boundaries, consent and risks, families begin to listen. Resistance eases when they realise we’re not there to impose anything, but to support them.

OSAR: What resistance do you face as a young, Indigenous woman leading these processes?

ET: Sometimes our capabilities are doubted simply because we are young or because we are Indigenous. I’ve been told that these issues “aren’t for women in the community” or that “we shouldn’t get ourselves into trouble”. But I’ve also found a great deal of support, especially from older women who want their daughters and granddaughters to live differently. Resistance exists, but so does collective strength.

OSAR: What do you think society still fails to understand about teenage pregnancy in Guatemala?

ET: That it is not a ‘family problem’; it is a violation of rights. A pregnant girl is a girl who has been abused. And as long as we continue to view these cases as something normal or inevitable, we will not make progress. We need to understand that prevention does not begin once a pregnancy has already occurred, but when we ensure access to information, support, services and education.

OSAR: What myths do you come across most often when you talk about sexuality with families and communities?

ET: The most persistent myth is that talking about sexuality ‘encourages’ girls to have sex. Another is that menstruation is something to be ashamed of, or that contraceptive methods are dangerous. There are also misconceptions about girls’ bodies, such as the belief that they ‘mature’ earlier and are therefore ‘ready to be mothers’. Combating these myths requires patience and clarity.

OSAR: What changes have you seen when a community receives clear and respectful information?

ET: You can see it in the growing trust. Girls start asking questions, mothers become more approachable, and teachers get involved. When information is conveyed properly, silences that once seemed impossible to break are shattered. I have seen communities where, following training programmes, girls are no longer afraid to say ‘this isn’t right’ or ‘I need help’. That is a huge change.

OSAR: What changes do you consider urgent to protect girls and adolescents?

ET: We need the CSE to be a real priority, not just empty rhetoric. We also need institutions to respond swiftly and without re-victimising. But, above all, we need girls to be heard. They know what they’re going through; they know what they need. If we don’t put them at the centre, we’ll keep repeating the same mistakes.

OSAR: What message would you give to other young Maya women who want to get involved in defending rights?

ET: That their voice matters. That they don’t need to ask permission to stand up for the girls in their communities. And that they are not alone. Every step we take paves the way for others. Our leadership is essential. 



20.760

births to mothers aged 10–19, from January to April 2026.

691

births to mothers aged 10–14, from January to April 2026.



Evelyn Texaj, human rights advocate in Chimaltenango



THE DECISION WAS MINE, NOT THE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM'S

The girl who once felt afraid because nobody explained to her what menstruation was is now a woman who creates safe spaces so that others can speak out.

The first time she had her period, she didn't understand what was happening. At home, sexuality was hardly ever discussed. No one explained what the bleeding was or why it happened. When she asked, she found no answers either.

She had grown up in a rural community in Jocotán, Chiquimula, about half an hour's journey from the district capital. She was the eldest of ten sisters and brothers. Her mother was illiterate and her father was studying to become a teacher, whilst supporting the family. From a very young age, she realised that, for many women around her, life seemed to have a predetermined path: staying at home, looking after their siblings, getting married and having children.

But Ana decided to take a different path. She left home whilst still in lower secondary school to continue her studies and work. The decision drew criticism. Many questioned why a woman would leave the community to seek independence.

Even so, she pressed on.

Whilst studying to become a teacher, she received an invitation from Tierra Viva to take part in training programmes aimed at young people. Those talks enabled her, for the first time, to learn about her sexual and reproductive rights and to understand aspects of her body that nobody had ever explained to her.

"That's where we started. That's when I began to learn more in depth about women's rights and sexuality, to explore menstruation and to get to know my own body."



TEXT AND PHOTO: **GRUPO MULTIDISCIPLINARIO POR LOS DERECHOS SEXUALES Y REPRODUCTIVOS**



This learning came whilst she was going through an experience that brought her face to face with reality. After graduating, she decided to move in with her partner at the time. They lived together for barely six months. "It really was a very violent relationship."

What she was learning on the training courses stood in stark contrast to the violence, control and pressure she experienced every day. Little by little, she gathered the strength to set a boundary. "I managed to stand my ground and put a stop to it."

Sometime later, she found herself facing an unwanted pregnancy. She was around 19 years old and already knew she didn't

want to be a mother. She sought support from the women who had accompanied her through her training and made a decision about her body and her future.

Her partner did not agree. Neither did her family.

When she told them what had happened, the rejection was immediate. Her grandfather was upset, and other relatives felt she had ended a relationship which, in their view, was the best thing for her. “I didn’t feel guilty about the decision, but I felt sad; I felt alone because I didn’t have my family’s support.”

Whilst going through that time, she found support in her female peers. “They were always there for me with words of encouragement and motivation.”

Over time, the tension within the family eased, although differences remained. Her family still held the view that women should get married, have children and put up with violence. “If you’ve gotten married, you’ve gotten married – you just have to put up with it.”

Ana decided to respond differently. She also decided to share the knowledge that had changed her life with other women– first with her sisters, then with her neighbours.

Today she works at Tierra Viva, an organisation where she began years ago as a young agent of change. She is currently a community leader and a facilitator of awareness-raising and training programmes on sexual and reproductive rights. Her work has led her to support women not only in her own community, but also in various municipalities across the department of Izabal.

The journey has not been without its share of criticism. For years she heard comments labelling her as “the odd one out”. Some people claimed she was encouraging women to leave their

‘If you got married, you just have to put up with it,’ they told her. She decided to leave.

husbands. Others questioned why she remained single and childless.

“I’m not going to have children in this life.”

For Ana, choosing not to become a biological mother does not represent a loss. It is a decision based on information that was denied her for years.

That is why she continues to share her story. In the workshops, she hears stories similar to her own. Women seeking guidance, who need reliable information and who, for the first time, find a space to speak without fear. “The women are also breaking the silence and starting to ask questions.”

She is also aware of the obstacles they face. She talks about the difficulties in accessing contraception, the lack of privacy in health services and the cultural barriers that persist in rural communities.

But she also talks about small changes. About conversations that didn’t exist before. About women who are beginning to recognise that they have rights.

The girl who once felt afraid because nobody explained to her what menstruation was is now a woman who creates safe spaces so that others can speak out.

And after years of soul-searching and difficult decisions, there is one certainty that underpins her story: “I feel very at peace with myself because I believe it was the best decision I could have made for my life – it’s my body and no one else decides for me.” 

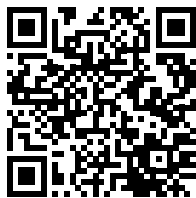
Link to article

 <https://www.grupomulti.com.gt/>





WOMEN RESIST OBLIVION



TEXT AND
PHOTO:
**CORPORACIÓN
JURÍDICA YIRA
CASTRO**





The land bears the marks of dispossession, but also of resistance. Listen to the podcast *'Women Resist Oblivion'*, a journey through Cesar, Magdalena and Nariño, where four women recount the struggles

of rural communities who have been victims of displacement, dispossession and crimes against humanity. Their voices remind us that reparation, a dignified return and guarantees of non-repetition remain a debt owed to those who continue to sow memory, truth and dignity. [FM](#)

INTERTWINED STORIES ON THE PATH TO HEALING

Three generations of Maya women — Nicolasa, Jacinta and Lidia — faced violence and trauma. Through the Kaqla processes, they found holistic healing, regaining their strength, memory and collective hope.



TEXT AND
PHOTOS:
MUJERES
MAYAS KAQLA



Mrs. Nicolasa Raymundo is now 68 years old. She was born in 1956, amidst the cold and mist of the Ak'ul village of Nebaj, in Quiché. The eldest of five sisters, she grew up amongst rivers, trees and animals, in a family devoted to farming. During the 1980s, the harshest period of Guatemala's internal armed conflict—particularly in the Mayan communities of Quiché—her life changed forever. She was forced to flee and take refuge in the mountains, enduring seven years of persecution, hunger and fear. Her family was torn apart. She lost her home, land and livestock. During those years, she experienced moments of grief, loneliness and profound physical trauma. Her story remained buried in silence until she found a safe space to speak out. Decades later, as part of a healing process, she was able to say



for the first time: “Ever since the army raped me, my body has been numb.”

In 1987, 31 years later, in San Pedro La Laguna, on the shores of the most beautiful lake in the world, Mrs. Jacinta Quiacain was born. She lost her mother at a young age and her father turned to alcohol. At the age of 15, in 2002,

she moved to the capital to work as a domestic worker. In the home of an upper-middle-class family, she was forced to take off her Tzutujil dress and wear a maid's uniform. It was there that she experienced one of the most painful episodes of her life: her employer attempted to sexually abuse her until he succeeded. She fled. Later,

at the age of 20 and pregnant, she returned to her village seeking support to raise her daughter. She raised her child as a single mother, with the help of some of her aunts, but felt that “her body was empty”.

Her daughter Lidia grew up with her mother and aunts. Thanks to Jacinta’s efforts, she was able to access formal education. When she reached puberty and began menstruating, she started suffering severe pain and went to a health centre. There, the doctor who attended to her tried to abuse her. He did not succeed, but he left deep scars: fear, insomnia and an absolute dependence on her mother. Lidia never left Jacinta’s side. For her, her mother was her only safe place.

In 2024, Kaqla Maya Women began a collective healing process with a group of women aged between 16 and 75: some were already grandmothers, others mothers, and others daughters. Mrs. Nicolasa, Jacinta and Lidia joined this process. At the start, they worked through emotions such as fear, sadness, pain and hatred. In the third workshop, Nicolasa managed to speak clearly and openly about the rape she had suffered: “Ever since the army raped me, my body has been numb.” Other women also shared their experiences during the war: hunger, persecution, bombings and isolation. The trauma of hunger was reawakened during the pandemic and also during the roadblocks of 2023, when the isolation reminded them of the fear of not having access to food. Little by little, they delved deeper until they reached the root of the trauma.

Jacinta shared that, although she did not consciously experience the internal armed conflict, she too was a victim of sexual violence, and her daughter faced an attempted assault. Lidia took part in two workshops but did not continue



Reconnecting
Dimensions

Pain can be transformed into collective strength, and when memory is healed, it becomes the seed of a dignified life.

because she found a job; after these workshops, she no longer needed her mother’s constant company. “I felt I had the ability and strength to be on my own and I was no longer afraid.” Three generations, three stories intertwined by sexual violence, but also by healing. Mrs. Nicolasa, Jacinta and Lidia show that pain does not remain confined to a single life: it is passed on, it is inherited, but it can also be transformed.

How many women have been through the same thing! Those who take part in these processes bring the issue to light and pave the way for our communities to continue healing the historical fabric of sexual violence. Kaqla is committed to healing because “when we heal, we do not forget, but when we recall the event, we no longer experience the emotions we felt at the time of the

trauma. As well as healing the emotions that affect us, we also heal our beliefs”.

Kaqla’s healing processes address the four dimensions of the human being: spiritual, emotional, physical and mental.

This achieves holistic healing, which not only addresses current emotions but also reaches the root of the trauma. “It is necessary to get to the root trauma that lies behind those emotions.”

Healing is energy; it vibrates and travels. It does not remain confined to them alone; it expands to their families, to future generations, to the country and to the planet. Mrs. Nicolasa, Jacinta and Lidia are examples of how pain can be transformed into collective strength, and of how memory, when healed, becomes a seed of a dignified life for communities. 

Links to article

 <https://www.facebook.com/reel/1713375969520734>

FOKUS IN PICTURES

In this photo gallery, we present an overview of some of the support provided to partners and events organised by FOKUS in Guatemala and Colombia. We also highlight the participation in national and international meetings aimed at strengthening the rights of women, young people and girls.



FOKUS at CSW70. The delegation was led by Sylvi Bratten (Executive Director), Ana Milena González (Director of the Regional Office in Latin America) and Ximena Correal (Programme Officer in Colombia).

Also in attendance were partners from Guatemala: Asoremi and Hermelinda Magzul (Kaqla). And from Colombia: Rosa Manuela Montero (Mujeres Kankuamas/ Kankuama Women) and Lina Marcela Tobón (Akubadaura). The team took part in meetings and discussions with other NGOs working for women's rights.



Presentation of FOKUS Women magazine #7.

The event was attended by the Executive Director of FOKUS, representatives from the offices in Oslo, Guatemala, Africa and Colombia, as well as by the Regional Office's partner organisations in Latin America.



Meeting with partner organisations in Colombia.

Annual meeting of partners, during which a contextual analysis was carried out and actions to be developed were coordinated across the following areas: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights; Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence; Sexual Health and Rights, Reproductive Rights; and Women, Peace and Security.



Meeting with partner organisations in Guatemala.

A contextual analysis was carried out together with the partners. The event was attended by Ana López, Guatemala's Presidential Secretary for Women. During the session, we heard an assessment of government policies aimed at women, young people and girls – issues of the utmost importance for the programmes we are implementing in the country. Tools were also shared to help maximise the impact of the programmes: Prevention of Gender-Based Violence and Promotion of Sexual and Reproductive Rights.





FOKUS' Global Meeting

with the teams from East Africa, Latin America and Norway, analysing changes in development cooperation and challenges within the global political context.



Photos: ONU Mujeres Esteban Servin



International Cooperation Gender Work Group

Ana Milena González, director of FOKUS' Regional Office for Latin America, is taking part in the International Cooperation Gender Work Group (MGCI), which aims to advocate for the protection of women's rights.



Regional Office Team Meeting.

During this meeting, we analysed the current situation in Latin America, with a particular focus on Guatemala and Colombia. The main objective was to outline courses of action to continue contributing to the protection of the rights of women, young people and girls.



Programme Monitoring and Support.

As a part of the efforts to strengthen our partner organisations in Colombia, programme monitoring and administrative support were provided.



CALI: MEMORIES, DISPUTES AND RE-EXISTENCES

As a result of the collaborative mapping project ‘Cartografía para la re-existencia’ (Cartography for the re-existence) of the city of Cali, a new counter-map reveals the territorial reconfiguration five years after the social outburst.

Convinced of the power of storytelling and collective construction through maps, a new purpose brought us together in the city of Cali: to develop a collaborative cartography to interpret the current realities and disputes coexisting within the territory. In 2021, Cali experienced a process of mass mobilisation in protest against the country’s social, economic and political inequalities, which came to be known as the ‘social outburst’. Since then, the city has been recognised as the capital of resistance, where the historical struggles of the diverse peoples and communities inhabiting south-western Colombia converge. Against

this backdrop, memories, inequalities and organisational processes converge, continuing to challenge the present and imagine other possible ways of life.

Cali, the city of the seven rivers, consists of 70% rural territory, organised into 15 administrative districts, some of which form part of the Farallones de Cali

We, as women, continue to create spaces for dialogue, care and advocacy through a variety of organisational processes.



TEXT AND
PHOTO:
**CARTOGRAFÍA
SUR**



National Natural Park. This territory boasts a great diversity of flora and fauna, including some 561 species of birds – almost 30% of the country’s total birdlife. This is one of the key features that this new map sought to highlight. Paradoxically, the rural area has been one of the hardest hit in recent decades. It’s facing environmental issues such as water pollution caused by gold mining and high concentrations of mercury and lead, particularly in the districts of Pichindé, Felidia and Los Andes. Meanwhile, the districts of Golondrinas, Montebello and La Buitrera are being affected by mining for construction materials and coal, as well as the extraction of dragged materials such as sand and stone in Pance.

Added to this reality is the rapid process of gentrification currently taking place in rural Cali, driven by the expansion of high-cost property developments. This phenomenon has led to the gradual displacement of rural communities, rising land prices, taxes and utility bills, as well as to the increasing pressure on community water systems and other common goods that sustain life in the area. In this context, land—its tenure, use and significance—continues to be a source





scale drug trafficking, recruitment, the presence of gangs and armed groups, and human trafficking converge. Against this backdrop, Cali has also been the scene of a worrying escalation of violence, reflected in explosions and attacks targeting the public forces, using car bombs, motorbikes laden with explosives and gas cylinders launched from makeshift ramps – incidents in which the civilian population has been among the main victims.

We are collaboratively building a map that seeks to create a narrative of the territory, enabling an understanding of what is happening in its many dimensions: in the places themselves, in those who inhabit them, and in those who continue, day by day, to build a city for everyone. In this exercise, the processes of re-existence driven by social movements and organisations are fundamental to understanding territorial disputes and the struggles that seek to counteract and transform the deep-rooted inequalities and injustices affecting the city.

In rural areas, organisational efforts have focused on defending rivers, nature reserves and the species that inhabit them, as well as on promoting responsible land use and fair land tenure. At the same time, cultural expressions such as dance, theatre, hip-hop, painting, film and mural art are gaining momentum in rural areas, on the hillsides and in the eastern part of Cali as tools for peace-building, resistance and social transformation.

We women, through a wide range of organisational initiatives, continue to create spaces for dialogue, care and advocacy, demonstrating that where the map reveals areas of conflict, multiple forms of organisation and re-existence are also flourishing, sustaining life in the region. [FM](#)

of contention, not only in rural Cali but also in the city centre, where different actors are pitted against one another over opposing models of the city, development and ways of inhabiting the territory. Evidence of this can be seen in mega-projects such as Ciudad Paraíso and Plan Jarillón, which have led to the eviction of communities through the excessive use of the public forces and to relocations that continue to widen the vast gaps of inequality.

This new map has also highlighted the intensification of the conflict and the rise in hostile actions by various armed groups in the region. This is now affecting Cali as the economic, political and social hub of south-western Colombia, and as a strategic territory for drug and arms trafficking routes. The areas identified as being most affected by conflict are in the east of Cali and on its hillsides, where phenomena such as extortion, murders, ‘invisible borders’, small-

A DECALOGUE FOR PEACEBUILDING



TEXT AND
PHOTO:
**CORPORACIÓN
ENSAYOS PARA
LA PROMOCIÓN
DE LA CULTURA
POLÍTICA**



In Cauca, violence and armed conflict continue. That is why women and LGBTI people have decided not to wait any longer for peace to come from the negotiating tables set up far from their territories.

For the past four years, Conspirando Por la Paz (Conspiring for Peace)— a coalition of women, LGBTI people, signatories to the Peace Agreement, indigenous people, Black women and

rural women — has been developing a roadmap to end the war through dialogue and collective care.

Their aim is clear: the militarisation of life is not the answer. “We have already experienced war; now is the time to experience peace.” This ten-point guide brings together the lessons learnt by women leaders who have built bridges where others see chasms, and who have shown that peace is woven by feminist and diverse hands. [FM](#)



◀ **Dialogue.**
Conspiring for Peace sent letters to armed groups demanding immediate humanitarian commitments.



◀ **Active advocacy.** Marta Castro from Conspiring for Peace, at the Cauca Regional Space for Peace (ERPAZ).

▼ **Healing alliances.** Doris Tejada from the Mothers of Soacha, shares knowledge and memories in Medellín.



Demanding real gestures of peace, such as an end to conscription, and the demilitarisation of the territory.

▶ **Community care.** Diana Lomelín leads reconciliation projects through safe spaces.



{ Photo report }

- **Training to make a difference.**
Diana Granados teaches classes on the history of the conflict in Colombia.



- **Setting up humanitarian search committees.**
Conspiring for Peace collaborated with the Mothers of Medellín.



- ▼ **Being visible and persistent.**
A minga (voluntary community work meeting) for peace on the Pan-American Highway in response to the Cajibío attack.

- ▲ **Transforming public spaces through art and memory.** A mural was woven in Quilichao during 8M-2025.



Considering the protection of life from a perspective of human security and feminism.



NEPONO: THE LEADER WHO INSPIRES HER HOMELAND

Nepono Carupia, a young Emberá woman who overcame her shyness to become a workshop leader, now brings joy to her community by teaching that women's worth knows no limits or boundaries.



TEXT AND
PHOTOS:
**COMUNIDAD
DE JURISTAS
AKUBADAURA**



Nepono Carupia
leads a workshop in
Acandí, Chocó.

At Akubadaura, we spoke with Nepono Carupia Domicó, a 25-year-old Emberá Eyábida woman. Although the conflict displaced her as a child, her voice remains deeply rooted in her native Chidima Tolo reserve (Acandí, Chocó). After training with Akubadaura – and with the support of FOKUS – in human rights and communication, she overcame her shyness and has been leading workshops in her own language since 2021. She discovered her ability to guide others, and today it fills her with joy to see how young women want to learn more and speak out for their rights.

Comunidad de Juristas Akubadaura:
What was your level of confidence

like before this process, and how much did you know about the training topics?

Nepono Carupia Domicó: Not in depth, just a general idea of what one heard about rights – that was about it.

CJA: Which aspects of the process have had the greatest impact on you?

NCD: Fundamental rights. I'm happy when we're invited to take part in meetings. Learning about our rights – and especially as Indigenous women – knowing that we have the same rights as men when it comes to gender equality. Some of the women we spoke to said that you learn things this way, just like at school, as if you were going to school every day and something is bound to stick in your mind – and Akubadaura did just that.

CJA: Thinking about the community, what has been the greatest benefit of the training and who else has benefited?

NCD: The benefit is that women now have the capacity to support both men and women equally, and to demand their rights from the institutions and the de facto indigenous authorities; and I believe the women have benefited the most. Before I came, I met with a group of women and they said: 'Tell them not to leave us on our own but to keep supporting us, to keep running workshops in the communities and across the territories so that more women can be trained and we can fight together for our cause, for our territory.' Continuing to work on human and territorial rights is absolutely vital for us.

CJA: How did this process affect the work of the Indigenous authorities?

NCD: It was important that the authorities took part in this process, because we believe that men and women complement one another. It was important for the men to be there, because it is no use if only women receive training. If the men attend and hear everything that is happening or come to understand our value, they will recognise us within the community. It is the men who administer justice, and as they were present throughout this process, it reinforced the idea that there must be equality in the administration of justice. I have seen that, in my own community for example, there are more men standing up for women, because previously that was unheard of.

CJA: Do you feel that a path has been paved to prevent violence in the area?

NCD: Very much so. Many of us used to believe that physical and psychological violence was normal, and we normalised it, but not anymore. I can see that these women no longer let themselves be hit. They are now the ones speaking out and demanding that their rights be respected, so they have contributed enormously. I've noticed that men now carry their children – you never used to see that. Now they're the ones walking around with babies in their arms, saying, 'Well, he's my son and I have every right to carry him, to look after him too, and to stay at home with him whilst my wife is on a training course'.

CJA: When did this change in men start to become noticeable?

NCD: I'd say it started when you arrived. I've spoken at community meetings. There people say, 'this is right' or 'this is wrong', and now I feel able to stand up for a woman – for example, when she's suffering some kind of violence – I don't stay silent. Precisely because of that, you know that not everyone

understands this or values women, and so there have been clashes, but as one is now familiar with these issues, one can speak up without hesitation.

CJA: What would it take for a woman from the community to become governor?

NCD: I think she'd need to demonstrate the ability to speak in public, to tackle issues relating to any kind of violence or insecurity. Also, with regard to the armed conflict, for us women to know how to defend ourselves.

CJA: What are you studying and what motivated you to do so?

“Many of us used to think that physical and psychological violence was normal, but not anymore. Those women no longer put up with being hit. Now they're speaking out.”

NCD: Early childhood education. It's about learning how to use strategies for all these things, knowing how to get more women involved in training programmes on human rights, communication, what's appropriate... that's what it's for.

CJA: To conclude, looking back, what has shaped your life and what does this journey mean to you on a personal level?

NCD: Personal and mental growth. I no longer think the same way I used to about the importance of women in indigenous communities. We have value, we have a voice and a say in the community without fear of being told that it's not ok. For me, it's been important because I've gained new knowledge and learnt to share it. I recognise my leadership and teach other women based on what I've learnt. I think there's a sense of empowerment from the role models among indigenous women, and you find yourself thinking: 'I too believe that one day I'll reach that level'. 





Sibelis Villazón,
a Kankuama
leader.

SEEDS OF LEADERSHIP, ROOTS OF PEACE

Sibelis Villazón's journey reflects the progress made by Indigenous women in peacebuilding, from community leadership to regional advocacy in Sierra Nevada de Gonawindúa.

Amidst the mountains of the Sierra Nevada de Gonawindúa, where rivers flow through the ancestral territory like veins, cobbled paths connect communities as one, and the bahareque houses and kankuruas (two types of traditional houses) preserve the memory of generations, the Kankuama people continue to weave their relationship with Mother Earth. It is a sacred territory, for every space holds a spiritual connection, where women strengthen their role as guardians of life, transmitters of culture and upholders of territorial harmony.

For centuries, the leadership of Kankuama women has been deeply rooted in daily life. Their childhoods are spent around the hearth and at the loom, caring for their families' well-being within the community, whilst becoming heirs to ancestral knowledge as they become involved in the organisation of their indigenous people—where being a woman entails a profound connection to the territory and the Mother of Origin. However, these tasks often remain invisible, even though they form the very foundation of the origin and sustenance of life through the system of knowledge and practices

that represent a fundamental basis of Indigenous leadership. For it is from this that the balance of all that exists, both materially and immaterially, is preserved and maintained.

Today, this leadership, which is intrinsically linked to life, is becoming visible and is expressing itself more actively within the structures of their own governments and in arenas of political and social advocacy, serving as a symbol that broadens conceptions of what peace is, beyond the silence of the guns.



TEXT AND PHOTO:
**CABILDO INDÍGENA
DEL RESGUARDO
KANKUAMO**



Kankuama women have woven their way into community processes, taking on roles in representation, coordination and decision-making, and contributing their own vision of the territory, peace and Buen Vivir (Good Living).

One of the voices representing this process is that of Sibelis María Villazón Cáceres, a woman from the community of Guatapurí and coordinator of Women and Family affairs for the Kankuama indigenous organisation. Her journey reflects the path of many women who have strengthened their capacities through participation, training and the recognition of their own knowledge. For her, leadership means continuing an ancestral legacy: recognising the roots left by her elders and putting her voice at the service of the community.

From this perspective, peace for Kankuama women is understood not merely as the absence of conflict, but as the ongoing quest for balance between people, the land and the elements that sustain life. Peace is linked to the protection of Mother Earth, autonomy, unity and the continuity of the principles inherited by Indigenous peoples.

As a part of this journey, 2020 saw the emergence of the Mochilón de cabuya de fique (a big bag woven from succulent plant fiber thread), an intercultural peace agenda developed by the Indigenous women of the Sierra Nevada. This process aims to raise awareness of the role of women in Indigenous territories as key actors in peace-building, drawing on their own perspectives, knowledge and forms of organisation.

El Mochilón, as a tapestry of thought and shared endeavour, serves as a space where women from the Kankuama, Wiwa, Arhuaco and Kogui communities exchange leadership experiences and share their lived experiences, strengthen

their voices and develop collective proposals in response to the realities of their territories. As such, these women have been gaining recognition within the Territorial Council of Cabildos – the highest governing body of the Sierra Nevada – and are exerting an ever-greater influence on social dynamics, community processes and, in particular, the defence of their territory, which is now demarcated by the ‘Black Line’ or System of Sacred Sites.

The Kankuama women have forged leadership through their everyday lives, strengthening participation and territorial peace.

Sibelis is one of the Sierra Nevada commissioners participating in forums such as the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), the Commission for the Clarification of Truth (CEV), institutional forums and inter-jurisdictional dialogues, where they not only highlight the impact of the armed conflict on their people

and on indigenous women, but have also put forward a vision of peace based on memory, justice, autonomy and the defence of their territory.

Through her community leadership, Sibelis acts as a pillar that sustains life in harmony and broadens the understanding of governance through caring, teaching, organising and protecting. She contributes to decision-making forums alongside the men of her community, helping to safeguard Mother Origin and ensure cultural survival.

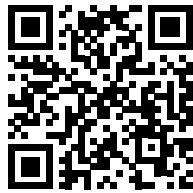
Sibelis’s story, like that of many women in the Sierra Nevada, is one of collective transformation,

resistance and re-existence. Her presence, though often silent, has gained visible and active participation in the decisions that shape the territory’s future. In the Sierra Nevada de Gonawindúa, their voices continue to weave paths of peace through ancestral memory, the spoken word and a commitment to future generations. [FM](#)





VIOLENCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES





TEXT AND
PHOTOS:
**ASOCIACIÓN
DE MUJERES
AQ'AB'AL
(ASDEMUAQ)**



The Aq'ab'al Women's Association is made up of women – including young women, Indigenous women and women of mixed heritage – whose aim is to help create equal conditions for men and women in the exercise of human rights. This material marks a first step for Aq'ab'al and for a woman who has been suffering from violence for 10 years. We invite you to listen to a voice speaking from the experience of speaking out and to break the silence in the face of violence, because speaking out about violence and reporting it is a right. [FM](#)

A VOICE THAT LEADS AND TRANSFORMS

Aura Yuliza Suárez, a Guajira, an Indigenous woman, a migrant and a trainee psychologist, is a young woman whose heart is rooted in transforming the lives of girls and young women in Barranquilla.



TEXT AND
PHOTO: FONDO
LUNARIA



Yuliza Suárez,
youth leader from
Barranquilla.

Yuliza Suárez — or Yuli, as she prefers to be called — is a young Wayú' Indigenous woman based in the city of Barranquilla. She is one of the women leading initiatives within the Atlántico Departmental Network of Young Women. At her age, she has experienced situations that have shaped her and led her to develop the leadership for which she is now recognised nationally.

She was born in Maicao, a border town in the department of La Guajira, into a family belonging to the Wayú Epiayú clan. When she was five years old, her family decided to settle in the state of Yaracuy, Venezuela. She spent her childhood in Venezuela with her sister, mum and dad. She looks back on those

times with fondness. In 2014, when she was about to turn 11, the economic crisis and, subsequently, the migration crisis in Venezuela caught up with her whilst she was visiting her grandmother in Colombia. The borders had been closed and Colombians were not being allowed into the neighbouring country. As a result, Yuliza and her family were unable to return to their home in Yaracuy.

A few months after the borders were closed, they decided to move to Barranquilla and arrived at the family

“Yuli taught me to speak out,” says Osmarly, one of the young promoters.

home of Mrs. Dani, her mother. After spending some time living with their aunts, uncles and cousins, they decided to move to a small house in the south-west of the city. That neighbourhood would shape the lives of not only Yuliza, but also of her family.

The Atlántico Departmental Network of Young Women is an organisation founded over 15 years ago as a space for girls and young women to develop their skills in leadership, political participation and the prevention of gender-based violence. They are based at the Casa de la Mujer (Women's House) Foundation, located in the south-west of the city, in the very same neighbourhood where Yuliza and her family lived. It was through the workshops offered by the Network that

Mrs. Dani began to get involved and take part in the training programmes.

The Foundation and the Network have a strategy for the upkeep and sustainability of their physical premises, which involves the integration of a caretaker family. This entails a family living on the Foundation's premises and ensuring the upkeep of the spaces and plants, as well as providing logistical support for the activities carried out there. Thanks to the close relationship Mrs. Dani built with the people at the Network and the Foundation, combined with the financial situation she was facing, she was offered the role of caretaker family. There, Yuliza, Sailys (her sister), and Mrs. Dani lived for three years.

“What is sown in a young woman is sown for a lifetime,” says María Claudia Herrera, co-founder of the Network, recalling the impact of the processes that have taken place throughout the collective's history. María Claudia has played a vital role in Yuliza's life. When Yuliza and her family arrived at the Foundation as a foster family, María Claudia welcomed them with open arms and encouraged them to become part of the collective's work and, above all, to develop their leadership skills.

“Yuliza began to ask questions, to question things, to take an interest in the issues. From that moment, we knew that something was going to start to change,” recalls María Claudia when speaking of the way in which Yuliza began to form part of that generational handover that has characterised the Network since its creation. First it was María Claudia, from the moment she co-founded the initiative and took on the challenge of driving the collective forward. Then it passed to Stefani, who represented the Network on sexual and reproductive rights and took the lead on initiatives such as the women's advocates programme—in



which Yuliza and Saylis took part. Stefani then taught Yuliza how to manage these initiatives, to handle legal matters and to compile reports. Yuliza saw Stefani as a role model, a possible path for her own life. “When I grow up, I want to be like Stefani,” Yuli said at the age of 13.

The handover from Stefani to Yuliza took just a few days, before Stefani left the country. This handover did not come as a surprise to her, as ever since she and her sister joined the Network, they had been taught that at some point they would lead these initiatives. “I feel that this is my space; I've made it my own since I was very young,” she says with conviction.

The affection she has for the girls is what keeps her so active in the Network. Her favourite part is seeing how the girls grow through these processes, watching

them take part in the workshops and seeing how these have a positive impact on their lives.

Yuliza is currently in her fourth semester of studying psychology. Although her dream was to study sociology, her financial and employment circumstances led her to choose a different degree programme. What she has learnt is reflected in the strengthening of the Network's programmes and in the psychosocial support she provides to girls and young women. She looks forward to her professional future with great enthusiasm.

Yuli dreams of becoming someone great, without realising that she already is, and that through her activism she has transformed the lives of many girls and young women in Barranquilla. 



“MAY THE WORDS AND THE STRUGGLE OF WOMEN NOT BE FORGOTTEN”

In Nebaj, discrimination, structural inequality, gender stereotypes and violence against women are rife, reflected in the prevalence of machismo, which prevents women from participating in decision-making forums.



TEXT AND PHOTO:
ASOCIACIÓN
RED DE
ORGANIZACIONES
DE MUJERES
IXHILES
(ASOREMI)



In Santa María Nebaj (Quiché), official demographic data indicate a total population of 72,686 inhabitants, according to official figures published by the National Institute of Statistics (INE) in 2018. The majority of the population are women, numbering 38,689 (53%), whilst the male population stands at 33,997 (47%). Although women make up the majority of the population,

few hold decision-making positions, due to the prevalence of machismo, which manifests itself in discrimination, structural inequality, gender stereotypes and violence against women.

Human rights encompass the right to live free from violence and discrimination; to enjoy healthcare, education, decent work and political participation; and to ensure equality and dignity in the face of historical inequalities. The *continuum*

of violence against women has existed since the colonisation of this country. The fight against gender-based violence has been one of Asoremi's objectives since its inception.

We reject the fact that women have no say in household decisions, in community roles or in decision-making forums, as their participation has been limited by the persistence of sexist customs that hinder women's involvement in

the various communities within the municipality of Nebaj. Furthermore, there are specific barriers to access justice linked to distance, travel costs, the availability of transport and the limited institutional presence of the government. For this reason, coordination with local leaders and community networks is essential to prevent, detect and support women in their struggle.

Currently, there are two female councillors in the municipal government who have been used politically to give the appearance of women's participation in decision-making bodies, but they are sidelined in other committees. A few months ago, the lead councillor stepped down, and the former deputy councillor was promoted to substitute councillor. She was brought in because she is a well-known woman supported by her community, and for them this guarantees votes in their favour in their next political campaign. However, neither woman has been invited to the monthly meetings. They have been unable to influence decisions or coordinate on women's needs: health, education and the prevention of violence. Within the Comude (Municipal Development Council), they have been restricted in their ability to put forward proposals on violence prevention policies, advocacy policies and coordination with civil society.

The Municipal Directorate for Women (DMM), responsible for promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, has not been granted the autonomy to draw up budgets and coordinate activities with civil society, which has become an obstacle to the development and overall well-being of socially vulnerable women. Through its community roundtables, Asoremi has succeeded in strengthening the capacity of local authorities on issues relating to human rights and 'new masculinities' – practices and attitudes that promote gender equality and the



“Asoremi has successfully raised awareness among victims, who have recognised the type of violence they suffer and have come forward to report it in order to heal.”

rejection of traditional stereotypes. Of the seven community forums in which Asoremi has established a presence, it has managed to influence six. There are now women leaders involved in the prevention of violence against women, who also raise awareness within their communities, thereby strengthening the assertion of human rights that have previously been disregarded.

Asoremi has succeeded in raising awareness amongst victims who have recognised the type of violence they are suffering and have come forward to report it, in order to heal and bridge the gap that hinders their participation in decision-making. Workshops have been held with various groups of women assessed and identified by the Asoremi system, who

have suffered violence against women at the hands of family members or others. Human rights advocates have been trained and empowered, and they have spoken out at public events to champion women's rights, describing how they have been treated by the justice and health authorities.

We have demanded, and continue to demand, that the government and its various bodies responsible for safeguarding women's political rights implement public policies to ensure that women are aware of their rights, are valued and are taken into account. They must not be violated or subjected to violence when seeking justice, as was the case with our founder, Juana Ramírez Santiago, a leader who was committed to demanding the fulfilment of women's rights in various spheres, even though she encountered the obstacle of structural violence seeking to hinder her work along the way. She, like other women fighting for a place at the decision-making table, found support networks along the way that enabled her to exercise her leadership. 

A GENERATIONAL SHIFT IN WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP



TEXT AND
PHOTO:
**CORPORACIÓN
COLOMBIANA
DE TEATRO**
- ESCUELA
POPULAR DEL
TEATRO LA
MÁSCARA

On the stage of the People's Theatre School: The Mask, the Úrsulas Polifónicas Mujeres Libres y Sabias (Polyphonic Ursulas, Free and Wise Women) have embarked on a journey of collective creation and discovered the traces that have enabled us to recognise the wisdom of our elders and the aspira-

tions that drive younger women to gather the seeds bestowed upon them through the voices of these ancestors of the future.

This photo essay brings this transformation to life: the older women pave the way for generational renewal, strengthening women's culture, identity, leadership, struggles and resistance. 

► **THE BEGINNING OF MOTHER EARTH**, of the drum, of plants, of words and of women's fertile wombs—thus begins life itself and the People's Theatre School: The Mask.





◀ **WOMEN'S HANDS.**

By joining women's hands, by finding the inspiration and the voice of those who meet week after week at the Mask theatre, the exchange of knowledge, the legacy and the generational handover are laid down.



▲ **ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE, MEMORY AND ORAL TRADITION.** The elder women of People's Theatre School: The Mask, as bearers of knowledge, guide the younger women in their journey of learning and growth.



RE-EXISTENCE. The knowledge, legacy and words of Black women remind us of the power of sisterhood and the passing along of ancestral knowledge.



EARNING THE RIGHT OF PRIMOGENITURE.

Although Lucy Gómez Mina is not yet of an age to be an elder, she embodies the power of community action and has a life story marked by struggles and leadership.



▲ HEALING PLANTS.

Recognising the powers of medicinal plants, older women and young people come together to weave and pass on knowledge.

◀ **ROOTS.** Women who weave their stories together and share their words, recalling the indigenous roots that unite them.



► **AN ACTION...** The value of a hug, of affection, and of supporting one another in living well.



THE VALUE OF WORDS.
The youngest pupils at the school putting words into action and sharing their knowledge with all the other pupils.

► **THE POWER OF FELLOWSHIP AND A SMILE.** Bearers of knowledge, experts, wise women – we all have something to teach and something to learn.





“WE WERE WOMEN ASLEEP”

Yusleida Pineda tells us how the process initiated by Humanas with Zenú women has been a key pillar in the emergence of women’s leadership and peacebuilding.



TEXT AND
PHOTOS:
**CORPORACIÓN
HUMANAS**



Luz Piedad: What has it meant to you to be part of the committees monitoring the gender measures of the Peace Agreement?

Yusleida: Well, ever since I started taking part in the peace workshops, I began to learn about the Agreement, because it has to be said that, although I’m an indigenous woman, I didn’t know the Peace Agreement very well, let alone the ethnic chapter.

Once I was able to engage with it, learn about it and read it, I was able, as a Zenú woman, to take ownership of all the rights we have as communities. We were able to explore each of the positive aspects and assess how we could advocate for them.

For me, it was very meaningful to be able to take part in that because it enriched me as a person.

I can say that thanks to the advocacy that took place and that we have continued to carry out, I was able to stand for election to the Women’s Council, because I felt a sense of commitment to myself, to the women of the reserve, and also to the Humanas aid workers who have always trusted in our ability to continue leading and defending women’s causes.

So, I believe that the opportunity to join the council – and my position there today – is down to these processes.

L.P.: How do you think participation in these forums has helped you

to take part in self-government, including at the national level?

Y.: Well, this process has been very important because, apart from being a process of research and monitoring of the peace agreements, it is also a process of reclaiming our identity as indigenous communities.

Studying the ethnic chapter as part of the Zenú committee opened doors for many women.

Thanks to everything we’ve seen, and the fact that it’s we who have to speak out, it’s we who have to influence

change and ensure more women take on leadership roles – indeed, we now have two female councillors who were trained through this process.

Apart from that, we now have women on our own Court of Justice who have a sense of belonging and who know how to defend women's rights.

We also have female captains. In the past, women did not dare to speak out, because men always held the upper hand. Today, women dare to give orders.

L.P.: What are the main challenges facing women?

Y.: Well, I think we need to talk about the first challenge, and the first challenge is that we live in a sexist society. Secondly, there are economic issues for women. A third risk would be the issue of threats from armed groups. A fourth is the lack of institutional response.

L.P.: How have Zenú women leaders contributed to peacebuilding?

Y.: Well, Zenú women leaders have contributed to peacebuilding because, ever since we first learnt about the Peace Agreement – specifically the ethnic chapter – we have been raising awareness amongst the key leaders.

We have held meetings in various communities where we have explained how we can contribute to peace, and

how, through simple actions — such as refraining from criticising others — we are helping to ensure that peace begins with us.

Apart from that, we have also started to talk about solidarity between women and men.

Because the community had been in a state of discord for three years, with no administration and no representation

Understanding the Peace Agreement has enabled us to claim our rights and pave the way for women's leadership.

from the village chief; and thanks to the fact that we, as women, acted as mediators and, drawing on our understanding that we cannot live in conflict, we helped to ease the situation and resolve the conflict.

So, with the little we have, we're helping to foster dialogues based on solidarity, so that we can understand one another and realise that we are one people and that we can move forward if we come together.

L.P.: Yus, what lessons have you learnt from this partnership we've

built between the women of the Zenú people and Humanas?

Y.: Before we were part of Humanas, we were like women who were asleep; because, although we had the abilities, we didn't really dare to act.

Truly, today the experience and expectations we women have are very big and continue to grow.

Since the creation of the coalition, we've grown enormously. We've created major platforms that we hadn't been able to establish before. We've helped elect mayors – something we'd never done before – councillors, and representatives of the Ombudsman's Office.

With the tools we've been given, we've also been able to say: 'Look, this is how it is; so, let's work together so that we can move forward, because it benefits you and it benefits us'.

Today we have reached that point of balance where we know how to make requests, where we can build peace without putting ourselves at risk of being suddenly murdered.

So, I do believe this has been a partnership that is bearing fruit and will continue to bear much fruit through this enduring alliance. 

Link to articles

 <https://www.humanas.org.co/trenzando-caminos-de-paz/>

<https://www.humanas.org.co/boletin-paz-con-mujeres-seguimiento-a-las-medidas-de-genero-del-acuerdo-de-paz/>

<https://www.humanas.org.co/boletin-paz-con-mujeres-mujeres-zenu/>

 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wr_yQ_KRetw&t=5s





FOKUS PHOTO.
Hermelinda Magzul
Patal, director of the
organisation Mujeres
Mayas Kaqla (Kaqla
Maya Women) –
Guatemala.

